The Comparison between Human Sacrifice in Egypt and that in China

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Abstract: From the paper, we can think why human sacrifice does not appear prior to Aha, nor after the 1st Dynasty of Egypt, and human sacrifice was found a little in Greece and ancient Rome, but it existed massively in China. So I get a conclusion that some Egyptian people came to China and brought the ancient Egyptian culture, and Chinese inherited the Egyptian culture.

Human sacrifice in 1st Dynasty Egypt (c. 2950–2775 BCE) is a hypothesis that during the very early stages of Dynastic Egyptian history, the Pharaohs of the 1st Dynasty practised human sacrifice, having courtiers or high officials kill themselves (or be killed) so that they could be buried in the Royal tomb and thus continue to serve the Pharaoh in the afterlife. There is, however, very little evidence that anything like this actually happened. The discoveries at Abydos are indeed somewhat unusual, but the fact remains that there is no indicators of a cultural preference or tolerance of human sacrifice in Egyptian literature and beliefs, and absolutely no evidence at all at any point from the 2nd Dynasty onwards, nor is there any indication of such a practice occurring in the pre-dynastic cultures that existed immediately prior to the unification of Egypt. Therefore, the evidence claimed for human sacrifice in the 1st Dynasty must be evaluated in the context of an otherwise remarkably consistent culture that otherwise shows no inclination to such acts at any time or place for a period of 3000 years after this find, no trace of such acts in the cultures immediately preceding it, and nothing more than speculative evidence for such practice at a single time and location.

Abydos (from Egyptian: 3bdw, possible translation: "Hill of the symbol/reliquary")(location: 26° 11' 5.5" N, 31° 55' 7.96") is one of the oldest monumental sites of Upper Egypt, in use from the Pre-Dynastic to

the Greco-Roman periods (a span of 3500-4000 years), and is one of the most important archaeological sites in the country. A number of ritual, mortuary and settlement structures have been excavated, most notably, Seti I's well preserved temple containing the famous "King list", along with the infamous Abydos helicopter, and the Osireion, a New Kingdom structure notable for its archaising design elements. However, it is the Early Dynastic Royal Necropolis, with Royal burials and associated structures of the 1st Dynasty that is of significance to this article.

Location of Abydos on the map of Egypt.

The earliest known example of human sacrifice may perhaps be found in Predynastic burials in the south of Egypt, dated to the Naqada II Period. One of the discovered bodies showed marks of the throat having been cut before decapitation took place.

-- Kinnaer, J. 2009, *Human Sacrifice*

The two definitions of human sacrifice that could be applied to the

very early development of ancient Egypt are:

- * The ritual killing of human beings as part of the offerings presented to the gods on a regular basis, or on special occasions.
- * Retainer sacrifice, or the killing of domestic servants to bury them along with their master.

-- Kinnaer, J. 2009, *Human Sacrifice*

The Seventh Hour from the Amduat

Later in Egypt's history, Amenhotep II of the 18th dynasty claimed to have executed seven Syrian princes at the temple of Amen in Karnak, then displayed six of the bodies on the temple walls. Although he did not claim that it was a sacrifice to the gods, it shows that there is enough evidence that prisoners were killed at temples, making the depiction of Predynastic killings in front of deities likely to have actually happened.

Pharaoh sacrificing to God Harmakhis

Pharaoh sacrificing the seven leaders of the conquered peoples to the God Harmakhis, relief from the left wall of the fortified gate of the Temple of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu, Thebes (Unesco World Heritage List, 1979), Egypt. Egyptian civilization, New Kingdom, Dynasty XX. (Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images)

Life in Egypt depended upon the Nile and the river itself demanded a yearly human sacrifice. To satisfy this requirement, on the 12th night of June a virgin girl was dressed as a bride then thrown into the river. Otherwise the river would drop to a trickle.

Sacrifice of a virgin to the Nile god

Not strictly an offering to the gods, the Cannibal Hymn of Unas and Teti talk of cannibalism to gain power from the gods in ancient Egypt. The Pyramid Texts have a section that seems to hint that in Predynastic times, the ruler could gain the magical powers of the gods through human sacrifice.

Utterances 273 - 274 of the Pyramid Texts, known as the Cannibal Hymn, describe the pharaoh as a god who cannibalises the gods:

For they have seen the King appearing in power
 As a god who lives on his fathers
 And feeds on his mothers.
 The King is the Bull of the sky,
 Who conquers(?) at will,
 Who lives on the being of every God,
 Who eats their entrails(?),
 Even of those who come with their bodies full of magic
 From the island of fire.
 The King is one who eats men and lives on the Gods.
 It is the King who eats their magic
 and gulps down their spirits;
 Their big ones are for his morning meal,
 Their middle-sized ones are for his evening meal,

Their little ones are for his night meal.

It is a blood-thirsty text of the power of the pharaoh, talking of death and killing and devouring of body parts. This seems to combine ritual cannibalism with sacrifices to the gods.

Abdel-Latif Al-Baghdadi, a physician/scholar from Baghdad who was in Egypt between 1194 to 1200 AD, tells of people who habitually ate human flesh; parents even ate their own children. Graves were ransacked for food, assassinations and robbery reigned unchecked and noblewomen implored to be bought as slaves. These horrific scenes had been caused by a low Nile flood, two years running.

In the depiction of Seventh Hour from 'The Book of the *Amduat*' (*Imydwat*), are four rectangular shaped frames with a bed or a mound of sand inside, surmounted with two human heads, one at each end. E. A. Wallis Budge calls them the 'Four Tombs of Osiris', saying that the heads were supposed to come forth when they heard the voice of Ra as he travelled through that particular area of the underworld. (It resembles Chinese headhunter custom in Liangzhu Culture (良渚文化) and Erlitou Culture (二里头文化)).

Human-Headed 'Tombs' from a Coffin

It was, no doubt, a custom in Predynastic times to slay slaves at the graves of kings and nobles in order that the souls of the slaughtered might protect them and keep away evil spirits. The human heads on the tombs of Osiris probably

represent a tradition that, when Osiris was buried, human sacrifices were offered at his tomb for this or for some similar purpose.

-- Wallis Budge, E.A. 2003, *The Gods of the Egyptians: Volume 1*, p. 232

E. A. Wallis Budge's translation of the *Amduat* can be found as 'The Book of Am-Tuat'.

Two Human Heads on Tombs

From the Seventh Hour of Amduat

Now let us go back to China. Erlitou 二里头, located in the east of the Luoyang 洛阳 Basin, Henan 河南 Province, is regarded as the capital city of the earliest state in ancient China and even in East Asia during the second quarter of the second millennium BC. This significant site is also one of the most crucial hot spots for investigating the process of social complexity, the origin of state formation, and the beginning of dynastic history in ancient Chinese history and archaeology. According to archaeological evidence, during this period, Erlitou was the largest settlement in East Asia, covering an area of around 300 hectares (Xu Hong et al. 2004) and had a highly dense population of over 20,000 residents (Song Zhenhao 1994; Wang Jianhua 2005; Wang Miaofa 1999). The layout of this huge city was elaborately designed that reflected the strong power of this early polity: a palatial zone with many large-scale

“palaces,” a fortified workshop zone with a bronze workshop and a turquoise workshop, a “sacrificial zone,” and several residential zones for both elites and commoners (Zhongguo 2014). Besides, in this paramount site, archaeologists also discovered the earliest bronze ritual vessels made by piece-mold casting, representing a hallmark of the Bronze Age in ancient China. The Erlitou Culture, which indicates a distinctive group of archaeological remains found at Erlitou, was widely distributed within hundreds of sites in the core region of Central Plains in which the settlement pattern was highly hierarchical (Chen Xingcan et al. 2003; Liu Li et al. 2004; Zhongguo Erlitou 2005a). Moreover, the material culture of Erlitou also influenced not only its contemporary neighboring regions but also later dynasties. Since the temporal and spatial dimension of the Erlitou Culture corresponds to the description of the Xia 夏 Dynasty, the first dynasty in Chinese history, from the received texts, many scholars argue that the Erlitou Culture represented the material remains of, or at least a part of, the Xia Dynasty (e.g., Zhongguo 2003:21-45). Although the identification of Erlitou is still highly controversial, even the conservative scholars also agree that Erlitou was a state-level society and names it as the “Erlitou State,” instead of the Xia Dynasty (e.g., Liu Li and Chen Xingcan 2012; Xu Hong 2006a). Undoubtedly, Erlitou is a crucial case to enrich the anthropological and archaeological theories on early states, social complexity, and other significant topics, such as

interregional interaction.

Site map of Erlitou, 1999 version
(Zhongguo 1999, fig. 7)

Site map of Erlitou, 2014 version, with human sacrifices in it
(redrawn from Zhongguo 2014, p. 1656, fig. 11-2-1-1)

Distribution map of contemporary archaeological cultures in the Erlitou Period
 (Archaeological Cultures: I: Erlitou; II: Doujitai; III: Maqiao; IV: Lower Dianjiangtai; V: Sanxingdui; VI: Qijia;

VII: Zhukaigou; VIII: Guangshe; IX: Xiaqiyan; X: Datuotou; XI: Lower Xiajiadian; XII: Gaotaishan;

XIII: Miaohoushan; XIV: Yueshi. Sites: 1: Erlitou; 2: Dashigu; 3: Wangjinglou; 4: Nanwa; 5: Guchengnanguan;

6: Dongxiafeng; 7: Donglongshan; 8: Mengzhuang; 9: Chengziya; 10: Shijia; 11: Yinjiacheng;

12: Panlongcheng; 13: Sanxingdui)

(Liu Li and Chen Xingcan 2012, p. 257, fig. 8.1)

Circular feature in the “sacrificial zone”
at Erlitou
(Zhongguo 2003, p. 130, fig. 2-16)

97:ZSC8 II T166 M6, Qingniangongyu, Zhengzhou

(1: Bronze li; 2: bronze he; 3: bronze ge; 4: jade handled-shaped object bingxingqi
5: round ceramic flake; 6: bone and shell arrowheads; 7: necklace of seashells and
a turquoise bead)

(Henan Sheng 2003b, p. 9, fig. 14)

Photo of the above

“Cave burial” M528 in Area 5, Dongxiafeng, with human sacrifices in it
 1-2: human skeletons; 3: ox skeleton; 4: dog skeleton
 (redrawn from Zhongguo et al. 1988, p. 112, fig. 114)

“Cave burial” M525 in Area 5, Dongxiafeng , Erlitou Culture, with human sacrifices
 in it

1-4: human skulls; 5-6: mandibular bones for human
 (redrawn from Zhongguo et al. 1988, p. 111, fig. 112)

Now let us go back to the south of China. The Liangzhu culture (/ˈljɑːŋˈdʒuː/; 3400–2250 BC) was the last Neolithic jade culture

in the Yangtze River Delta of China. The culture was highly stratified, as jade, silk, ivory and lacquer artifacts were found exclusively in elite burials, while pottery was more commonly found in the burial plots of poorer individuals. This division of class indicates that the Liangzhu Period was an early state, symbolized by the clear distinction drawn between social classes in funeral structures. A pan-regional urban center had emerged at the Liangzhu city-site and elite groups from this site presided over the local centers. The Liangzhu culture was extremely influential and its sphere of influence reached as far north as Shanxi and as far south as Guangdong. The type site at Liangzhu was discovered in Yuhang County, Zhejiang and initially excavated by Shi Xingeng in 1936.

Area of the Liangzhu culture (3400–2250 BC) in China, based on Liu Li and Chen Xingcan (2012), *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age*, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-521-64310-8, p214.

A 2007 analysis of the DNA recovered from human remains in archeological sites of prehistoric peoples along the Yangtze River shows high frequencies of Haplogroup O1 (Y-DNA) in the Liangzhu culture, linking them to Austronesian and Tai-Kadai peoples. The Liangzhu culture existed in coastal areas around the mouth of the Yangtze. Haplogroup O1 was absent in other archeological sites inland. The authors of the study suggest that this may be evidence of two different human migration routes during the peopling of Eastern Asia, one coastal and the other inland, with little genetic flow between them.

There are also human sacrifices in Liangzhu culture, as the pictures below:

Human Sacrifices of Liangzhu Culture in Fuquan Hill, Qingpu District ,Shanghai (上海青浦福泉山)

Human Sacrifices of Liangzhu Culture in Huating,Xinyi,Jiangsu (江苏新沂花厅)

Human Sacrifices of Liangzhu Culture in Zhaoling Hill, Kunshan (昆山赵陵山)

Now let us back to Egypt. Archaeological evidence for this practice is based almost entirely on subsidiary graves attached to the Royal tombs of the 1st Dynasty from Aha onward. Although burials of courtiers and members of the Royal family are found surrounding Royal tombs of other periods, there is no question of human sacrifice ever having been involved in these cases. Similarly, suggestions of evidence of human sacrifice does not appear prior to Aha, nor after the 1st Dynasty. As such it is suggested that this practice appeared suddenly, shortly after the founding of the Pharaonic state, then promptly died out, regardless of the fact that the custom of burying high officials in satellite tombs surrounding the Royal mortuary complex continued well into the Middle

Kingdom. The table below details all Royal burials that contain sacrificial burials in either the Royal burial itself or associated mortuary enclosure (where identified). All burials are from the 1st Dynasty, and all from Abydos.

Pharaoh	Length of Reign	Tomb Burials	Enclosure Burials	Notes
Aha	32	35	6	First occurrence of sacrificial burials. A label dating from his reign also depict sacrificial scenes.
Djer	41	317	42	Largest number of burials. Also a wooden label from Saqqara, containing Djer's name, has images that interpreted as depicting a sacrifice.
Merneith	Disputed	41	See note	Disputed whether or not she ruled in her own right. May have shared the enclosure of Den, who is likely to be her son.
Djet	23?	174	161	Reign length suggestion based only on Manetho.
Den	32	133	77	Enclosure may be shared with Merneith.
Anedjib	10	64	?	Both Royal and subsidiary tombs of low quality. Troubled reign? Enclosure not located.
Semerket	9	?	?	Possibly usurped the throne. Very high quality burial, however. Enclosure not located.

Qa'a	26	26	?	Last burial having included sacrifice. Enclosure not located. End of 1st Dyn.
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The Cemetery at Umm al-Qa'ab

Image of Abydos

Image of Umm al-Qa'ab

Plan of the Cemetery at Umm al-Qa'ab, with human sacrifices in it

The Cemetery at Umm al-Qa'ab of early dynasty and the first Dynasty, with human sacrifices in it

The sacrificed retainers, servants, slaves or even nobles or family members all had their own burial pits as part of the Abtu (Abydos) tomb complex of each ruler of the 1st Dynasty. These people were thought to carry on their respective positions in the afterlife, for example the slaves and servants were killed so that they could continue to carry out their work for their master.

Tomb of Narmer

In the case of Aha, his tomb was looted in antiquity, but the bones scattered around the burial pits were all of young men and women aged 20-25 years old. This would indicate that they probably did not die from natural causes, but were selected for burial with Aha. The burial pits once held copper tools, stone vessels and ivory carvings, and some even had the name of the occupant inscribed on limestone stela. These stelae referred to servants, dwarfs, women, dogs and even a group of young lions.

The Tomb of King Aha

Subsidiary Graves of the Tomb of Aha, with human sacrifices in them

Djer, on the other hand, probably showed the peak of human sacrifice for burial with the king. He 318 burial pits surrounding his tomb, as well as a number of other burial pits at his funerary enclosure, about two kilometres away, which may have been a mortuary temple. Djer's tomb at Abydos was believed by Egyptians of the latter Middle Kingdom to be the tomb of Osiris himself, and this belief lasted even into the Roman period.

In the tomb of Queen Merytnit, most of the skeletons were found facing the same direction, but no signs of violence were found on the skeletons. This would suggest that they were not buried alive, since the bodies were all placed in the tombs in a specific direction for religious purposes, and that they had died previously to being buried. W B Emery, who unearthed tombs at Abtu, had a theory that suggested the people were killed by poison prior to being buried with the queen.

Human sacrifice was not only performed at Abtu, but in Saqqara as

well. Originally it was believed that the rulers of the 1st Dynasty had two tombs - one at Saqqara and one at Abtu, but research has led to the conclusion that the Saqqara tombs were for nobles of the 1st Dynasty. Tomb S3500, the tomb of a noble during the reign of Qa'a, has the last of the sacrifices found in Saqqara:

Three of the four subsidiary tombs were found intact and the westernmost ones (n. 1 and 2) still had the dead bodies (a middle aged man and an old woman; head to the south facing west) wrapped in linen within the coffin; each one had a foreign flask and a wood cylinder seal (one unscribed and another one with faint painted inscribed).

-- Raffaele, F. 2002, *Saqqara: Early Dynastic Monuments (Dynasties 1-3)*

This practice was abandoned after the last retainer sacrifices by Qa'a, during the Second Dynasty, although it was replaced by representations of sacrificed retainers in the form of *ushabti* figures. These figures were meant to magically turn into servants, to carry out the work of the deceased in the afterlife. A small hint that the Egyptian people in later times reviled human sacrifice can be seen in the story of Khufu and the Magicians –

Khufu then ordered a prisoner brought, thinking to lop off his head and see Djed-djedi's magic. Protesting, the magician said that he could not do so to humans. Instead, they found a goose Djed-djedi could work his magic upon.

-- Seawright, C. 2001, *Heka: Tales of Magic in Ancient Egypt*

The Tomb of King Den

The Tomb of King Den

Subterranean structure of Den, with human sacrifices in it

The Tomb of King Anedjib

The Tomb of King Qa'a

Some rulers of 0 Dynasty, and rulers of the 1st and 2nd Dynasties were buried at Abtu. The local deity of the necropolis was Khentamentiu

(Khontamentiu, Khentamenti, Khontamenti, Khenty Amentiu, Khenti Amentiu), Foremost of Westerners, god of the dead who helped the deceased go to the Land of the West, pilot of the solar barque during its nocturnal travels. The earliest temple found at Abtu was for Khentamentiu. He was later associated with Osiris, as Osiris-Khentamentiu, and with the jackal or wolf god Anubis.

Khentamenti from a Label of Den

Later in the Dynastic Period, there is extensive archaeological evidence of models of workers of various professions included amongst the grave goods of the deceased, and are attested from the Fourth Dynasty onward, and become extremely widespread from the First Intermediate Period onward. It has been suggested that these statuettes or models are the symbolic replacement for the sacrificed retainers of the First Dynasty, yet this raises some important points:

- This hypothesis encounters a significant chronological gap, as evidence for statuettes and models is lacking from the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties, and though it is attested from the 4th, it is not until the First Intermediate Period (7th - 11th Dyn) that these models become widespread. This suggests their development was unrelated to the cessation of any kind of "human sacrifice", which is not attested beyond the end of the 1st Dynasty.
- The statuettes and models featured tend to be that of farmers, bakers, washers, porters etc., not the high officials (retainers) found in the subsidiary burials.

- These statuettes overwhelmingly come from private burials. Whilst there are far more private than Royal burials, and the former are more likely to escape the attentions of robbers, it does not change the fact that whilst subsidiary burials overwhelmingly accompany Royal burials, most of statuettes come from private ones.

Considered together, the evidence against the introduction of models or statuettes of workers being a symbolic development of earlier human sacrifice is worthy of note, and paints a picture much less clear cut and logical than is first suggested.

Models of workers producing food, from a 6th Dynasty private burial.

During the Middle Kingdom, these statuettes/models were complemented by the ushabti (or shabti) figure, which were included, sometimes in their hundreds, and complete with "ushabti overseers" in both private and Royal tombs. Whilst the models/statuettes were of specific workers in specific professions (washer women, porters, farmers,

bakers etc.), the ushabti was generally not identified with any kind of work, and indeed according to the magical inscription generally painted or inscribed upon them, were intended to themselves answer any demands placed upon the deceased to work in the afterlife, on his behalf.

Ushabtis were placed in tombs among the grave goods and were intended to act as servants or minions for the deceased, should they be called upon to do manual labor in the afterlife. The figurines frequently carried a hoe on their shoulder and a basket on their backs, implying they were intended to farm for the deceased. They were usually written on by the use of hieroglyphs typically found on the legs. They carried inscriptions asserting their readiness to answer the gods' summons to work.

Ushabti in the British Museum in London

The practice of using ushabtis originated in the Old Kingdom of Egypt (c. 2600 to 2100 BCE), with the use of life-sized reserve heads made from limestone, which were buried with the mummy. Most ushabtis were of minor size, and many produced in multiples – they sometimes covered the floor around a sarcophagus. Exceptional ushabtis are of larger size, or produced as a one-of-a-kind master work.

Memphis, 500 BC – Troop of funerary servant figures ushabtis in the name of Neferibreheb, Louvre-Lens

Ushabti inscriptions often contain the 6th chapter of the Book of the Dead, translated as:

Illumine the Osiris [name of the deceased], whose word is truth. Hail, Shabti Figure! If the Osiris [name of the deceased] be decreed to do any of the work which is to be done in Khert-Neter, let everything which standeth in the way be removed from him- whether it be to plough the fields, or to fill the channels with water, or to carry sand from the East to the West. The Shabti Figure replieth: *"I will do it, verily I am here when thou callest"*.

(Example: the deceased Akhenaten would have been described as *"Osiris Akhenaten"*).

Mentioned first in spell 472 of the Coffin Texts, they were included in the grave goods of the dead as small figurines since the reign of Mentuhotep II of the 11th Dynasty. Some think that originally they may

have symbolically replaced human sacrificial burials, called retainer sacrifices, a somewhat improbable theory as centuries had passed between the last known sacrificial burials and the appearance of the *ushabtis*. They were generally distinguished from other statuettes by being inscribed with the name of the deceased, his titles, and often with spell 472 of the Coffin Texts or the speech of the ushabti figure found in Chapter Six of the Book of the Dead.

Pottery ushabti (shabti, shawabti) with linen grave clothes of T3y-ms. 19th Dynasty. From Heracleopolis Magna, Egypt. The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London

From the 21st Dynasty on, ushabtis became common and numerous in graves. In some tombs the floor was covered with a great many ushabti figurines; in others the ushabtis were neatly packed into ushabti boxes.

An ushabti box at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Ushabtis were mostly mummiform, but during the Dynasty XVIII reign of Thutmose IV, they began to be fashioned as servants with baskets, sacks, and other agricultural tools.

Feeling tired? Let us back to China. Human sacrifice refers to the practice of ritual killing of human beings as offerings to divine patrons, ancestors, or other superhuman forces. While the phenomenon of ritual human killings have been present in many societies throughout history, the types of human sacrifice that were practiced by ancient Chinese and pre-Colombian Mesoamerican cultures, which were exceptional in terms of the sheer number of people sacrificed, the frequency at which it was done, and the high degree of formalization of their sacrificial rituals. Large-scale, systematic human sacrifice

functioned as important political and religious spectacles in Shang dynasty.

Soldiers captured by the Chinese during ancient wars may have been kept as slaves and tortured before being ritually sacrificed. That's according to a study of the chemical composition of the remains of people found at a burial ground at Yinxu (殷墟), belonging to the Shang dynasty. The findings suggest that the victims killed were not locals but had been put to work in the area for a number of years, existing on a meagre diet. Oracle bone inscriptions from Yinxu had suggested that many sacrificial victims were captives from wars, and this is the direct archaeological evidence to support this.

The map of Yinxu (殷墟), Anyang, China

Map of the royal cemetery showing locations of royal tombs and sacrificial ground. Solid black enclosures are royal tombs, and open rectangles are sacrificial pits.

The royal cemetery in Yinxu, China, contains both royal burials and more than 2,500 sacrificial pits

Researchers from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada, compared the bones of 68 sacrificial victims with those of 39 locals. They examined the presence of carbon, nitrogen, and sulphur isotopes in the bone collagen of each body. The chemicals reveal the kinds of vegetables and proteins eaten by the dead, as well as where they sourced their drinking water. The scientists used this information to build a picture of where and what they ate over a long period. The technique revealed that the dead bodies found in mass graves had not been born in Yinxu. Their diet consisted largely of a type of gruel made from millet and they ate far less meat than even the poorest of the locals. That suggests they were treated as the lowest members of the community. Their skeletal remains were often badly damaged, with missing limbs and other injuries likely inflicted while they were still alive during torture. This lead author Christina Cheung and colleagues said: 'Our results suggest that these sacrificial victims were likely not local, but moved to Yinxu and adopted the local diet for at least a few years before being killed. This discovery has significant implications for understanding the various tactics used by the Shang kings to consolidate power over their subjects, including the display of violence through mass sacrificial rituals.'

The Shang dynasty ruled the Yellow River Valley between the 16th and 11th centuries BC.

The map of Shang Dynasty

In around 1,300 BC the first sizeable city in China was constructed by the Shang, the state capital Yinxu, close to the modern city of Anyang in Henan province. During the final two centuries of the Shang Dynasty (1,600 to 1046 BC), thousands of people were sacrificed at Yinxu, according to reports in Ars Technica.

The Tomb of Fu Hao (妇好墓) is an archaeological site at Yinxu, the ruins of the ancient Shang dynasty capital Yin, within the modern city of Anyang in Henan Province, China. Discovered in 1976 by Zheng Zhenxiang, it was identified as the final resting place of the queen and military general Fu Hao, who died about 1200 BCE and was likely the Lady Hao inscribed on oracle bones by king Wu Ding and one of his many

wives.

It is to date the only Shang royal tomb found intact with its contents and excavated by archaeologists.

Her tomb, one of the smaller tombs, is one of the best-preserved Shang dynasty royal tombs and the only one not to have been looted before excavation. Inside the pit was evidence of a wooden chamber 5 meters long, 3.5 m wide and 1.3 m high containing a lacquered wooden coffin that has since completely rotted away.

The floor level housed the royal corpse and most of the utensils and implements buried with her. Below the corpse was a small pit holding the remains of six sacrificial dogs, and along the edge lay the skeletons of 16 human slaves, evidence of human sacrifice.

Human Sacrifices at Tomb of Lady Fu Hao

Boiling Human Sacrifices in a cauldron, unearthed in Yinxu, Anyang

图一 安阳武官殷代大墓墓形的模型

图二 安阳武官殷代大墓附近杀殉奴隶的排葬坑

Human Sacrifices of Shang Dynasty in Wuguan,Anyang (安阳武官)

图三 安阳后冈殷代杀殉奴隶的圆坑墓

Human Sacrifices of Shang Dynasty in Hougang,Anyang (安阳后冈)

图四 安阳侯家庄西北冈殷代 1001 号大墓南墓道 6 个殉葬奴隶的无头肢体

图七 安阳小屯殷代乙二十建筑基址安门时祭用奴隶的跪葬坑

图五 安阳小屯殷代乙七建筑基址落成时 10 个砍头奴隶的人祭坑

图八 安阳小屯殷代乙十一建筑基址安门时祭用奴隶的倒葬坑

Human Sacrifices of Shang Dynasty in Anyang

图六 安阳侯家庄西北冈东区殷代殉用 10 个奴隶人头的方坑墓

图九 益都苏埠屯殷代大墓墓基坑里跪着的殉葬奴隶

Human Sacrifices of Shang Dynasty

Royal graves at the site of Yin Xu.

More than 13,000 people were slaughtered to appease gods and the ancestors of royalty. Most of the victims were young men, aged between 15 and 35. Around 50 victims would be killed at a time, but 339 people were put to death in the biggest mass sacrifice uncovered so far. These findings fit what we know from written records from Shang Dynasty, which suggest that human sacrifices weren't made simply whenever prisoners were captured. Instead, there seems to have been a pool of potential sacrifices that nobles could draw upon on request.

Cheung and her colleagues explain:

The early Shang scholar Yang reported that on more than one occasion, Shang nobles and vassals had to ask for the king's permission to offer captives to the king for sacrifice, and only after consulting an oracle would the king demand a specific date for the delivery of such captives. Yang thus argued that war captives were offered for sacrifice upon request, not upon availability.

Altar vessel of Shang Dynasty

“Some well-defined "nature" deities, such as river and mountain deities, required their own sacrifice. Unlike other ancient agricultural states, no sacrifice was ever offered to the sun or the moon. Instead, the river god Ho played an important part in ancient Chinese ritual, requiring his own set of animal and human sacrifices which were sunk, or buried on the river banks. Perhaps, in their agricultural endeavor, the Shang feared the capricious nature of the river more than the sun. Probably in the Shang, but definitely in the Zhou dynasty, Ho required a yearly sacrificial marriage with a select virgin who, in a place called Yeh in the area of the Shang capital, was ritually sacrificed/married to Ho. She was placed on a raft and drowned. She differed from other human victims in

that she was a surrogate member, probably a precious one, the community was willing to "sacrifice" only to ensure its well-being. This practice was discontinued under pressure of Confucian "humanism" in the year 400 B.C.. (It resembled the sacrifice of a virgin to the Nile god Hapi).

According to official historical records compiled during the Zhou dynasty (1046 BC–256 BC), Shang was the second Chinese dynasty the quasi-legendary Xia dynasty (c.2070 BC –1600 BC). However as there are no conclusive archaeological records proving the existence of the Xia dynasty, Shang is so far the earliest confirmed Chinese dynasty in that the earliest written record were dated to this era. Written artifacts excavated from Shang archaeological sites were predominantly in the form of oracle bone script. These writings were used specifically during state divination ceremonies where the Shang ruler both acting as a king and as a high priest, would carve scripts concerning matters of state importance (such as military affairs, prayers for bountiful harvest, and matters concerning sacrificial offerings) onto specially prepared tortoise carapaces and cow bones. The Shang king would then prod the oracle bones with a red-hot bronze rod, which would cause the bones to crack under the intense heat, indicating that the singular supreme deity of the Shang people, Shang-Di (上帝, lit.: "the lord from above") had answered the questions inscribed on the bones, and the cracks left

on the bones were supposedly Shang-Di's divine answers. Only the Shang king could interpret these and announce them to his people as divine mandates.

A sizable portion of the oracle bones uncovered in Shang archaeological sites contain script specifically concerning human sacrifice. These written records are also corroborated by the discovery of numerous sacrificial mass-graves in those sites. In most Shang sacrificial rituals, only animals and valuable chattels (such as bronze wares) would be used as offerings. There were only two exceptional circumstances where human sacrifices were made: *xunzang* 殉葬 and *renji* 人祭. *Xunzang* 殉葬 (lit. "burial sacrifice") refers to the practice in which personal slaves and servants of Shang king, upon their master's death, were expected to commit ritual suicide or to "volunteer" themselves to be buried alive alongside with their master. While the practice of committing ritual suicide upon the master's death has lingered throughout Chinese history, the second type of human sacrifice, *renji* 人祭 (lit. "human offering sacrifice") was practiced during the Shang dynasty period, and also the most massive in scale in terms of number of people killed in a typical *renji* ceremony. *Xunzang* victims (or "volunteers") were mostly personal slaves (i.e. house servants), and therefore in *xunzang* burial sites we could find a pretty even mix of male and female human remains. *Renji* victims, on the other hand, appears to

be predominately male. Unlike xunzang, the people sacrificed for Renji were not personal slaves, but mostly prisoners of war and field slaves (keep in mind that Shang field slaves were typically captured from distant lands outside of Shang domain).

Guo Moruo 郭沫若(ed), *Jiaguwen Heji* 甲骨文合集 (Beijing: 中华书局影印本, 1980-1983), 1079. The oracle bone inscription reads: “甲辰 至戊陷人.丙午雨 (On the sexagenary cycle day of Jiachen...human were sacrificed on the hour of Wu, it rained on the sexagenary cycle day of Beigwu).”

Specifically, *renji* functions as prayers to Shang-Di to deliver the Shang people from famine. This kind of sacrifice would take place during periods of severe food shortage (usually due to drought or war). Hundreds of captured slaves were typically executed during a *renji* ceremony, usually via decapitation. The corpses of the victims, along with their severed heads, were buried in mass sacrificial pits or collectively incinerated, in order to placate what they thought was an

angry Shang-Di.

Oracle bone inscription (Heji 1027): “不其降冊千牛千人 shall one thousand cattle and one thousand human be sacrificed?” Guo Moruo (1980-1983), Heiji, 1027.

To pray for the end of the famine brought by Shang-Di’s wrath, the Shang king would demonstrate to the supreme deity of their devoutness through the specular spilling of sacrificial human blood. Oracle bone inscriptions refer to such sacrificial human blood as *qiu* (洎, lit. “cascade”), but the precise method for extracting the sacrificial blood unknown. The largest recorded human sacrifice of this kind was done by Shang king Wuding, where over 9,000 slaves were slaughtered as offerings to Shang-Di.

Oracle bone inscription (Heiji 32035) “shall human blood be offered on the day of Xinyou? 辛酉其若亦沚伐”

In the Zhou Dynasty, human sacrificial cases were greatly reduced, but still happened occasionally. For instance, according to the records of Sima Qian, when the Duke Wu of the Qin State died in 678 BEC, 66 persons were sacrificed. In 621BEC, when the Duke Mu died, 177 people became sacrificial victims, among whom were three famous excellent senior officials from the Zi Ju 子车 family, to whom the people of the Qin State expressed deep regret and sympathy in a famous song titled “The Yellow Bird”.

Besides human sacrifices in Qin State (秦国), they were also found in Qi State (齐国). Archaeologists discovered bones in four pits at a ruins site in east China's Shandong Province, which are believed to be remains of human sacrifices, local authorities said Friday.

The bones were found in the sacrificial pits of a ruins dating back to the Qi State of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 BC) in Jinan, according to the city's archaeological research institute.

"Human sacrifices should have been rare at that time, but the new discovery proves that they still existed in the Shandong area," He Li, head of the excavation team of Jinan's Institute of Archeology, said.

In addition to human bones, animal offerings were also found in the pits, including two relatively complete pig skeletons and a cattle skeleton.

"People living in this area may have had a high social status," said He, adding that these new findings can shed light on the sacrificial customs in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty.

The ruins, covering around 600 square meters, consist of workshops and residences as well as the sacrificial pits. More than 130 artifacts including bone, stone, and ceramic items have been excavated so far.

Photo taken on March 21, 2018 shows excavation at a ruin from the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 B.C.) in Zhangqiu District, Jinan City, East China's Shandong

Province. The discovery of human remains in the ruin shows people were still used as burial sacrifices in the Qi State of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, according to Jinan's Institute of Archeology. (Photo: China News Service/Liang ben)

However, this cruel and inhumane practice was severely criticized by enlightened scholars and statesmen in the later Zhou Dynasty, when the earliest trend of humanistic and rationalist thought appeared in China.

These criticisms along with the general waking of humanistic consciousness aroused the respect for the value of human life and formed a great social pressure to abandon the inhumane practice of human sacrifice. However, the belief of the immortal soul, and the care for afterlife in the netherworld did not disappear. Actually, from the perspective of the dead, sending someone along with the dead to accompany him or her in the netherworld can also be considered as a type of humanistic care. Just as some Qing Dynasty scholars have keenly observed, some kind of human sacrifice and combined burial were arranged between those lovers whose relationship had not been approved by existing social law and etiquette, and could not be accepted as a legal union during their life time. For instance, the Queen Mother Xuan 宣太后 of the Qin State once suggested her young lover, Wei Choufu 魏丑夫, should be buried with her after her death. And the Princess Guantao 馆陶, an aunt of Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty, was finally buried together with her long time secret lover Dong Yan 董偃 after her death. This is a kind of complement of their banned love in this world and a comfort to their loneliness in the netherworld.

As a result, two kinds of substitutes were suggested to replace human sacrifice: one is using wood or pottery figurines to replace persons(it resembles shabti of Egypt in meaning and shape); the other is to find another dead person and move his or her remains to burry together with the newly dead, i.e., let them have a netherworld marriage.

In the Ming (1368-1644) and the Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties, cremation was prohibited by law. Both The Great Ming Dynasty's Codes of Law and the Great Qing Dynasty's Codes of Law have severe punishment to the crime of destroying or abandoning the corpses, including burning or discarding to rivers. Under the high pressure of the government law enforcement, the once prevailing cremation was finally replaced by traditional land burial.

The funeral and burial rituals in ancient China were based on mixed ideas of Confucian ethics and ghost superstitions. The Confucian ethics emphasizes the social status, the hierarchy of patriarchal clan system and human relationship, etc., while the ghost superstition emphasizes the afterlife in the netherworld, which in a sense contradicts with the philosophy of Confucius himself. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the idea of ghost superstition and afterlife embodied in burial and funeral rituals seemed to be enhanced. One piece of evidence is the reviving of human sacrifice in royal funerals.

It is recorded in the History of the Ming Dynasty that when the first

Emperor of Ming Dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398, r. 1368-1398) died, many maids in the palace followed him to death. Then, when Emperor Cheng Zu 成祖 (r.1402-1424), the Emperor Ren Zong 仁宗 (r.1424-1425) and Emperor Xuan Zong 宣宗 (r. 1425-1435) died, they all used some maids as sacrifice. This tradition was halted by Emperor Ying Zong 英宗 (r.1435-1449; 1457-1464), who left a will before his death to abolish human sacrifice. It even happened when a prince died. In 1439, when Zhu Youdun 朱有燾, a grandson of Zhu Yuanzhang died, his wife and six concubines all followed him, despite the fact that the Emperor Yingzong had an edict indicating that they did not have to do that.

Other resources also confirmed that human sacrifice was very common in the Ming imperial family until Emperor Ying Zong's reign. What happened in the royal family definitely had an influence on ordinary people, so the human sacrifice also occurred among commoners, usually, when a husband died, his wife or concubine might sacrifice themselves and die together with him. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, this ugly and horrible custom was still present. The Manchurian rulers' attitude towards it seems to be based on a principle of voluntariness. They set the regulation as follows: if a wife wants to sacrifice herself to her dead husband voluntarily, her choice should be respected, and even should be praised afterwards; but if a concubine

was forced (probably by the wife) to be sacrificed, the wife should be punished to death. Unfortunately, the latter situation seems more common in most cases. A Ming dynasty scholar has recorded the general process of this kind of sacrifice in a local chronicle as following:

After a man has died, one concubine must be sacrificed. She has been appointed to do that before the man's death. Neither could she reject it, nor can anyone else replace her. She should not cry when the time comes, rather, she has to dress up and sit on the bed, then the housewife and others will come in and bow down to her. When it is time, she has to kill herself with a bowstring. If she changes her mind at the last moment and refuses to do it, other people will strangle her to death.

However, in some cases, the woman voluntarily chose to be sacrificed for the man, such as in a story recorded in the Biography of Famous Women in the History of the Ming Dynasty: A girl of a scholar's family called by the author as a "Chaste lady Xiang" was betrothed to a Mr. Zhou of a neighbor county. When she was 19 years old, she heard that her future husband was seriously ill. She asked her wet nurse: "What am I supposed to do if he died when we have not married each other?" The wet nurse replied: "Since you have not married yet, it doesn't matter if you change the marriage contract and marry another man." But the girl did not agree, she cited an ancient story in which a noble prince kept his unexpressed promise to give his sword as a gift to his friend, even when the friend was died, saying: "our ancient sage kept his promise concerning a sword, how can I break my promise concerning my body?" Finally, when the news of Mr. Zhou's death was confirmed, the "Chaste lady Xiang" dressed up in traditional mourning dress and committed

suicide at midnight, leaving behind a note saying “I died for Mr. Zhou”. The two families then followed her will and arranged a joint burial for the unmarried young couple.

This story has been cited by scholars as evidence to prove the prevalence of human sacrifice in the Ming Dynasty. It is quite similar to those cases which happened in the Ming royal family as we have discussed above, the difference is that, at least based on the author’s record, the “Chaste lady Xiang” did indeed voluntarily sacrifice herself for that man, even though she was not his wife yet.

Now at the end of the paper, we can think why human sacrifice does not appear prior to Aha, nor after the 1st Dynasty of Egypt, and human sacrifice was found a little in Greece and ancient Rome, but it existed massively in China. May I get a conclusion that some Egyptian people came to China and brought the ancient Egyptian culture, and Chinese inherited the Egyptian culture?

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