

中央研究院

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第二十一期

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中華民國五十五年春季

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THE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF TOTEMS IN ANCIENT CHINESE CULTURE*

WEN-SHAN HUANG

No other kind of human activity is so permanent as art and nothing that survives from the past is so valuable as a clue to the history of civilization. For the prehistoric ages a part of our knowledge of the customs and beliefs is derived from surviving works of art. The artistic representation of totems by primitive peoples is not a universal phenomenon; some groups make artistic representation, others do not. It is reported that this kind of representation did appear in the cave art of the Aurignacian Period at Europe. Around 2000 B.C. there came into existence some totemic art which archaeology has made us familiar with. What we intend here is to explore the general nature of the links which must presumably exist between the form of the totemistic culture system and the form of the contemporary art. To some extent a survey of the various forms of society and their corresponding types of art has already been made by sociologists. Thus, Sorokin pointed out:

“Each form of art expresses a certain mentality or soul and is inseparably connected in each instance with a specific type of personality and culture..... When a culture or civilization passes from one dominant type to another its art undergoes a similar change..... In other words, a given type of dominant type does not exist and change by itself, independent of the culture and the type of human personality that predominates in the society in which it appears and functions. Art is the flesh of the flesh; it is one with the society, culture and prevalent type of personality which has produced it. Each type of art emerges, grows, changes, and declines of the given type of culture, society, and personality.”⁽¹⁾

It is apparent that the artistic representation of totems expresses the mentality or soul of that specific culture. Social customs demand the object and cultural needs select the forms and organize the ornament. If sympathetic relationship has been established between men and the outer world, the primitive artist is impelled

* My thanks are extended to Dr. L. Carrington Goodrich, Professor Jane Mahler of Columbia University and Dr. Horace M. Kallen of the New School for Social Research who assisted in the preparation of this paper.

(1) Pitrim A. Sorokin, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis*, 1950, p. 47.

to represent natural phenomena in all their essential vitality. The artist himself thus becomes representative and art to that extent is cultural or communal.

As we know the art of the Neolithic Age—of the period, that is to say, stretching from about 4,000 B.C. to the fringes of historical times is almost entirely different from the art of the preceding Paleolithic Age.⁽¹⁾ Men ceased to use caves for the purposes from which the art of the Paleolithic Age had risen. The art of pottery became the main source of our knowledge of the art of the Neolithic Age.

During the third or fourth millenniums B.C., and even earlier, it is evident that there existed throughout the larger part of China a sedentary agricultural population whose potteries had a great deal in common. Around 2,000 B.C. there came into existence the Yang Shao culture in the west and the Lung Rhan culture in the east. The pottery technique of vessels is highly developed. The designs are more or less reminiscent of the geometric and spiral decorations used elsewhere among earlier agricultural peoples. For a long time students of art have wondered whether the designs painted on the vessels had any meaning beyond simple decoration. To this question, Dagny Carter gave this answer:

“But, unfortunately, we know almost nothing about the religious beliefs of these prehistoric people. Mythology, from which our scientists have been able to draw in order to form an idea of the religious thought and beliefs of early men, elsewhere, was expurgated from the Classics by Confucius and his followers, who abhorred everything tinged with superstition. The thoughts and beliefs of the prehistoric Chinese must therefore to a large extent be reconstructed from later beliefs, a criterion not always reliable.”⁽²⁾

The inferential interpretation of the designs thus by Andersson as a “resurrection symphony” in form and color, and Elliott Smith as “life quest” admittedly are hazardous. Yet as Carter has shown early symbolism is also often continued as custom long after it has lost its original meaning. This custom or belief may be found in totemism. Without going into the detail of the chronology of the pottery sites of the prehistoric period,⁽³⁾ it has been repeatedly pointed out that the painted ware called Hsin T'ien after its main site has unmistakably a design of totemistic representation.

The painted pottery of this stage appeared about 1300–1,000 B.C. Its sherd is much coarser than that of the preceding stages such as Yang Shao. (2,500 B.C.; its amphorae usually have thick swollen necks; they are often carinated, and have their lower halves covered with fine mat impressions. The heavy necks are often

(1) Bishop, *Man from the Farthest Past* says that the Mesolithic followed the Ice Age (some 10,000 years ago in Europe) and this ran into the Neolithic. See pp. 10, 284.

(2) Dagny Carter, *Four Thousand Years of Chinese* New York, 1951, p. 8–9.

(3) Wu, G. C. *Prehistoric Pottery in China*, University of London, 1938.

adorned with rows of meanders, the shoulders with a combination of two short volutes, in the shape of a buffalo's horns. Scattered between designs are sometimes small figures of animals such as dogs and what looks like horses and of men. And it is also pointed out by other students that the animal figures represent a tiger in the left, a deer in the right and a bear in the middle. The presence of this curious design certainly seems to establish plausible connection with totemism in the neolithic period.⁽¹⁾

All the culture thus far referred is without the art of writing (so far as we now know); and the people made only limited use of bronze. About 1450 B.C. we come to the realm of history. Of the Shang dynasty (C. 1450-1050), which followed, we have knowledge both from later texts and from excavations and the documents archeologists have brought to light. Of the origin of the Shang State we have no details, nor do we know how the Hsia culture passed into the Shang civilization. We know bronze implements and especially bronze vessels were cast in the town. The bronze weapons are still similar to those from Siberia, and are often ornamented in the so-called "animal style", which was still used among all the nomad peoples between the Ordos region and Siberia until the beginning of the Christian era.

The bronzes of the Shang people are unique in the art history of the world. Nowhere at any time have there ever been cast bronze objects of such magnificence and perfection, either in regard to the metal, the casting, or the decoration. The ornamentation, as pointed out previously, on early Shang bronzes consist almost entirely of zoomorphic figures often placed on the foundation of a fine spiral or meander groundwork. The designs with which the bronzes are adorned seem a first glance innumerable. With the work done in this field, particularly by Jung Keng and Karlgren,⁽²⁾ we know there are great or small variations or combinations of the same elements.

The principal form on these bronzes is that of the so-called T'ao-t'ieh, a hybrid with the head of a water-buffalo and tiger's teeth. Except this form, the animals

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- (1) Prof. Chen Chung-fen and many others had pointed out this connection. See his Introduction to Chen Char-Wu's work, *The History of Totemistic Art*, Shanghai, 1927. Another striking feature of this pottery is the presence in the design of snakes represented by geometric rather realistic form. It is probably true that there was snake totem in the neolithic age. Since the discovery of Andersson (Cf. *Children of the Yellow Earth*, 1938), considerable speculation has been devoted to the subject. Prof. Lin Wei-hsiang of Amoy University has published conclusive evidence of the existence of snake totem among the Fan tribe in Taiwan.
- (2) Jung Keng, Ching Wen Pen, *Inscriptions on Bronzes*, 2nd ed. re. and enl. Chang-sha, 1939. *Shang chou i ch'i T'ung K'ao*. (The bronzes of Shang and Chou. 2 vols.), Peking, 1941. Karlgren, B. *New Studies on Chinese bronzes*. In *BMFEA* No. 9, 1937. See also *Bibliography in Descriptive and Illustrative Catalogue of Chinese Bronzes*, Compiled by the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, 1946.

used in the designs can be recognized. Representation of the dragon, cicada, the elephant, the water-buffalo, snakes, and birds, and the head of deer, rams, and the ox are unmistakable. We seem also to find owl, parrot and perhaps the silkworm et al. These animal patterns vary from quite natural representation to extremely formal ones, and most are ingeniously contrived to fit the shape of the vessel on which they are shown.

How did this zoomorphic art or the so-called animal style come into existence, what does it consist of, and what are its real implications? The designs, including the so-called t'ao-t'ieh masks, are mostly zoomorphic in form and no doubt partly "symbolic of the animistic religion of the time."⁽¹⁾ But what is this animistic religion? As Mrs. Caster has pointed out: "His artistic aim was to make a decorative design that expressed the religious and cosmological ideas of the time. The motivation was symbolic and the symbolism was closely connected with the ritual in which the vessels were used." But, again, what are these religious and cosmological ideas of the time? Does the snake suggest a lunar conception, the cicada-renewal of life, the owl-power over darkness? Is the bottle-horn a fecundity symbol, the zigzag line a sign for water and fertility? Nobody seems to know.⁽²⁾

The most prominent feature in the Bronzes of Shang and Chou is, of course, the so-called T'ao-t'ieh. Karlgren, in his great analytical work, *Yin and Chou in Chinese Bronzes*, defines the evolution in the bronze decor which he calls the A Style and the B Style.

"The primary Yin (the A Style) was eminently an animal style.....there is a vast difference between the primary simple and forceful t'ao-t'ieh's and the the elegant, almost painfully drawn and richly embellished t'ao-t'ieh's in the B Style."⁽³⁾

The A Style is characterized by a strong tendency to cover the whole body of the vessel with decor and to leave no large surface bare. The predilection for the t'ao-t'ieh, cicadas, dragons, snakes, birds, and, now and again, the elephant, makes the A Style essentially an animal art.

The secondary B Style, which superseded the primary A Style before the end of the Shang or Yin dynasty and was dominant in early Chou, revolted from the use of the earlier animal motifs, and dissolved them into degenerate form whenever employed. The animal heads on legs and handles and the free animal heads in the middle of the neck band were, however, preserved unaltered. In the late Chou, the style from about the seventh century B.C. onward became quite archaistic in its choice of decoration, and at least ten Shang motifs, neglected by the Middle

(1) A.G. Wenley, Introduction to the Catalogue issued by the Freer Gallery of Art.

(2) K.E. Foster, *Handbook of Ancient Chinese Bronzes*, 1949, pp. 22-23.

(3) B. Karlgren, "Yin and Chou in Chinese Bronze," *BMFEA*, VIII, 1936, pp. 90-109.

Chou artist, were now revived and reappeared, though in somewhat altered form. Among these can be listed the t'ao-t'ieh, ubiquitous in the early period, the scaled animal, free animal's head, snake and cicada.

With regard to the t'ao-t'ieh motif, numerous theories have been advanced by serious students of art and famous sinologists in order to solve this knotty problem. Let us cite some examples:

(1) Osvald Siren, in his published history of Chinese art, holds that the term t'ao-t'ieh covers essentially a whole ideological complex capable of divergent interpretations, the meaning depending upon its combinations with other elements. The dragon and the cicada, both-symbolic of life-renewal, are especially significant in such combinations. From this point of view the bronze designs become a symbolic vocabulary which by various combinations express somewhat divergent ideas.⁽¹⁾

(2) Li chi, of the Academia Sinica, suggests that the t'ao-t'ieh may have symbolized the bull. To prove his point he shows a whole series of bull's heads excavated at Anyang that had been used as ornaments. The bull has all over the world from the earliest time been used as a symbol of power and male virility.⁽²⁾

(3) While noting the astonishing phenomenon of the vanishing of the t'ao-t'ieh at ca. 1000 B.C. Bachhofer says: "Nothing is known about the ideas it stood for. The name was first used by Lü Pu-wei (d. 232 B.C.) when he described what he believed to be a Ting of Chou date. It is, however, that the t'ao-t'ieh played an apotropaic role, i.e. it had to ward off evil spirits from the objects that bore the image"⁽³⁾

(4) Grousset believes that the t'ao-t'ieh is the hall-mark of Chinese genius—the special contribution of the soul of China during the archaic period. He cites Vignier's interpretation as follows:

"Another classic motive is the t'ao-t'ieh, a monster with a big head and no apparent body, like the the Kirtimukha of Indian art, or certain monstrous

(1) Siren, Osvald, History of Early Chinese Art (Vols. I & II, London), 1929.

(2) Cf. Charter, *op. cit.*, p. 32. It may be noted in this connection that Li Chi has pointed out that "most probably also, the people of this dynasty believed in and practiced totemism, in the light of some recent interpretations of certain folk literature that survived in the various compilations of the Chou philosophers", (Li Chi, The Beginnings of Chinese Civilization, University of Washington Press, 1957. p. 20). Again, see illustrations of the Pattern of carved decoration and sections of bone handle from Hsiao-t'un on p. 30 (Figure 5). It is significant that three of the units are composed of t'ao-t'ieh masks." Dr. Li also says: "These five units of decorative patterns, essentially similar to one another, pile up on the handle with a vertical succession that reminds one of the arrangements of animal heads carved on the totem poles found on the northwestern coast of Canada, except that the composition of the Hsiao-t'un handle seems to carry a more subtle rhythm." (*op. cit.*, pp. 30-31).

(3) Bachhofer, Ludwig, A Short History of Chinese Art, Pantheon, 1946. p. 109.

heads of central America before the time of Columbus (see the discussion of this question by Arthur Waley and Percival Yetts in *Burlington Magazine*, Feb. 1946, p. 104) No doubt, as M. Charles Vignier remarks, this predilection for what suggests an immanent presence, this deliberate avoidance of concrete realism, are due to a peculiar feeling for nature, of a deeper kind than that expressed in the plastic conventions of the Indo-Mediterranean races (Vignier, Vol. 1 fibule, mirrors and masks) In fact, according to Vignier's theories, the tiger and the dragon, the bear and the owl all had their origin in the t'ao-t'ieh "either as the direct outcome or by the formation of hybrids between it and other forms." Their individual character emerged, according to Vignier, about the 5th century B.C. The dragon, or kuei, which appears sometimes as a dragon with the head of a bird (Kuei-lung) is a beast with either a squat or an elongated body, a head ending in a snout, spikes on its back, and a serpent's tail. Akin to this general type are the salamanders and serpents (li and k'iu), the latter of which are represented by an elongated S lying on its side—a form perhaps already to be distinguished from the aenolithic phases". (Andersson, *An Early Chinese Culture*, PL. XIV, 1 & 2)⁽¹⁾

(5) Concerning the t'ao-t'ieh, attempts have naturally been made to link up this art with western models. Thus Rostvotzeff says: "I have not the slightest doubt that what is meant is a horned lion-griffon, the most popular animal in the Persian art." He further says: "In my book on the Iranians and Greeks I was inclined to accept a common origin, from which both the Chinese and the Scythian animal style were derived. I must say that I was wrong. The real Scythian style as described above is different if compared with the early Chinese animal style of the Chou period. It is more primitive, more realistic, less conventionalized. It does not operate with fantastic animals. The fantastic animals entered the repertory of the Scythian animal style in Southern Russia late, probably not before the 5th to the 4th centuries B.C. Some features, of course, are common to the Chinese and the Scythian animal style: the use of the beaks and eyes as ornaments, the treatment of extremities in a conventional way, the filling of surface on the animal's bodies with other animals, the animal palmettes. However, it seems as if all these features which are common to the Scythian and to the Chinese animal style, appeared in China are comparatively late."⁽²⁾ He places their advent

(1) Grousset, Rene, *The Civilization of the East: China*, 1934, N. Y., p. 27-30.

(2) Rostovtzeff, *The Animal Style in Southern Russia and China*, Princeton, 1929, p. 70-4, The Shang period ended about the 11th century B.C., but dated examples of Scythian art, according to Rostovtzeff, hardly go back of the 7th century B.C. If there was any borrowing between the two subjects of art, this leaves distinctly open the possibility that the influence went from China to Scythia rather than vice versa.

into Chinese art almost as late as the Han Period. On the other hand, Bishop considers the Shang art to be in large measure a continuation of an art which had long been existant in this same genal region.⁽¹⁾

(6) Ackerman seems to think that the t'ao-t'ieh is a bull and had already taken place in the west, for instance, in Duristan. She says: "In more realistic figures on ritual bronzes and jades the Chinese god, like the West Asiatic soure-god, wavers between human and animal form. He is sometimes bull-faced; the lines under the eyes may be horns; for centuries he continued to be bull-horned; and he could be bull-mouthed, and likewise bull-footed. Lieh-tzu, Lao-tzu's pupil, states that ancient gods and heroes had no proper human shape but had been, amongst other things, ox-headed. The bull had been a vitalistic emblem amongst the earliest red-burial people, where it appears as focus of the first known rites. In the Shang period, bovids were economically important so that the iconographic preeminance of the motive was supported by a somewhat comensurate social significance. The bull is represented on the bronzes chiefly as the eyes-and-nose mask, probably worn on occasion by pantomimes and personators in place of the false heads which are quite frequently shown in use. The eyes are commonly the slanting eyes of a tiger. The reduction of animal symbolsm to the eyes-and-nose mask, or even to the eyes alone, had already taken place in the West and appears likewise in Luristan."⁽²⁾

(7) On the other hand, after pointing out the design themselves are much too various to have been representations of a single type of creature, Creel says: "In my opinion the name of the T'ao-t'ieh cannot be supposed to stand for a type of creature represented; it rather denotes a style of treatment to which various animal forms were subjected in the production of designs for this art."⁽³⁾

(8) Another denotation would seem to constitute a fatal weakness in Karlgren's theory. He says: "The T'ao-t'ieh is, in my opinion, nothing but a dragon mask. The dragon (Yang, male) is, as we have seen, a regular fecundity-fertility symbol, and as such the T'ao-t'ieh regularly occurs on the bronzes of the ancestral temple."⁽⁴⁾

From the above citations, it appers that the real significance of early Chinese

(1) Pacific Affairs, 1934, 7, 310.

(2) Phyllis Ackerman, *Ritual Bronzes of Ancient China*, N. Y. 1945, p. 83.

(3) Creel, *On the Origins of the Manufacture and Decoration of Bronze in the Shang Period*. *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 1, 1, 1935-1936, p.39. Creel noted that under this name we find lumped togethe rrepresentation of beings of the most divergent sorts. Sometimes they wear horns which are distinctly bovine, and give the general impression of the head of an ox. Others have unmistakable the great curved horns of the ram, while others wear the characteristics "bottle horn" which is frequently on the dragons of Shang art."

(4) Cf. Bull, *Mus. of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Stockholm, 2, 41. See also the paper by Cloude Levi-Strauss in *Renaissance* II, III (1944-45), 168-186.

symbolic ornament of T'ao-t'ieh remains undeciphered, and the thinking therein recorded has been misconceived because these successive mischances of scholarship have wrenched the first few thousand years of Chinese cultural development out of their historical setting. For beliefs and cultures do not, any more than individuals evolve in isolation. What has been called the 饕餮 T'ao-t'ieh, literally "glutton", sometimes called 'the ogre mask', is almost universal on the more elaborate Shang bronzes. Since designs which are grouped together under this name are almost universal on the Shang and early Chou bronze vessels, one should be justified in inferring that the T'ao-t'ieh was an important factor in the culture of these periods. There is, however, no mention of any such being on any of the oracle bone inscriptions known to scholars. In the Thirteen Classics, we find that the name occurs once in the following passage in the Tso Chuan: 緡雲氏有不才子，貪于飲食，冒于貨賄，……天下之民，以比三凶，謂之饕餮。舜臣堯，賓于四門，流四凶，族渾敦，窮奇，檮杌，饕餮，投諸四裔，以禦魑魅。

Legge translates "The officer Tsinyuan in the time of Huangti had a descendant who was devoid of ability and virtue. He was greedy of eating and drinking, craving for money and poverty……All the people under heaven likened him to the three other wicked ones, and called him Glutton. When Shun became Yao's minister, he received the nobles from the four quarters of the empire, and banished these four wicked ones, Chaos, Monster, Block, and Glutton, casting out into the four distant regions, to meet the spite and the sprites and evil things." (Tso Chuan, 280, 12-13, and 283). In this passage the T'ao-t'ieh was always taken by commentators and art historians, especially in the West, as an individual human being. But judging from the whole context of the passage, it appears that the so-called Chaos 渾敦, Monster 渾敦窮奇, Block 檮杌, and Glutton or T'ao-t'ieh are clans and not individual human beings.⁽¹⁾

And so far as we know, there is not any other occurrence of the expression T'ao-t'ieh in any work which can be considered at all early, until we come to Lü Shih Chun Ch'iu of Ch'in dynasty. There, we read:

"On the Chou Ting, there is figured a T'ao-t'ieh. It has a head but no body. This creature was in the very act of devouring a man, but had not swallowed when disaster overtook its body."

This passage apparently has nothing to do with the mythology related in the

(1) The whole passage reads:

昔帝鴻氏有不才子，掩義隱賊，好行兇德，醜類惡物，頑嚚不友，是與比周，天下之民，謂之渾敦。少皞氏有不才子，毀信廢忠，崇飾惡言，靖譖庸回，服纓蒐廝，以誣盛德，天下之民，謂之窮奇。顓頊氏有不才子，不可教訓，不知話言，告之則頑，舍之則鬻，傲狼明德，以亂天常，天下之民，謂之檮杌。此三族也。世濟其凶，增其惡名，以至于堯，堯不能去。緡雲氏有不才子，貪于飲食，冒于貨賄，侵到崇侈，不可盈厭，聚斂積資，不知紀極，不分孤寡，不恤窮匱，天下之民，以比三凶，謂之饕餮。

Tso Chuan. It evidently originated in the Ch'in period when the name T'ao-t'ieh had come to be merely a conventional name for this type of decoration. This expression was later taken over uncritically by the Sung writers in the Hsuan ho po ku t'u lu.⁽¹⁾ Giles states the current theory advocated by the contemporary commentator Kuo when he says that the t'ao-t'eh was "Represented on old bronze and other vessels.....in all cases as a warning against gluttons."⁽²⁾ This explanation is totally inadequate because in another passage of the same book, after describing the customs, social and political conditions of the various simple peoples, we read: "In the places of T'ao-t'ieh and Kung Chi and in the location of Su Yueh and Tan Erh (僇耳), there were no kings. They lived together with the animals....."⁽³⁾

There is, of course, a varied mythology concerning this creature in works of the Han Dynasty. Thus in his Wonder Classics (奇異經) Tung Fang-shuo (東方朔) tried to describe its configuration as follows: "In the Western frontier there were some human beings whose faces, eyes, hands and feet were human-like, but they had wings.....The tribe was called Miao (苗). According to the Book of Classics, the Three Miao were banished to San Wai (三危). The reason for the banishment was due to the gluttonness (t'ao-t'ieh) and impropriety of these western descendants."⁽⁴⁾ Citing this passage to interpret the Tso Chuan, Fu Chin (服虔), a famous commentator, states that T'ao-t'ieh is a name of an animal which has a bull body, human face with eyes.....It is a cannibal. And again according to the Wonder Book, the clan San Mao is the T'ao-t'ieh. From the above, it might be safe to infer that the T'ao-t'ieh, a certain kind of animal, was used as the clan-totem by the San Miao.⁽⁵⁾

The T'ao-t'ieh was used as motif in art decoration not only in Bronzes of the Shang and Chou, but also in bones, potteries, etc. In the pots (Hu) collected by the Institute of Fine Arts and the Imperial University, Tokyo, Japan, there appears the motif of T'ao-t'ieh in their necks. Among the bones and potteries that were excavated at the Waste of Yin, the same kind of motif was also presented. Furthermore, it also appears occasionally in the arms and musical instruments of the same period.⁽⁶⁾ These extremely important evidence suggest that the so-called

(1) Wang Fu and others, Hsuan ho po ku t'u lu. Illustrated catalogue of over 800 bronzes in the Sung imperial collection. Completed about A.D. 1125, 30 pen, pref. 1528; 18 pen, pref. 1752.

(2) Giles, Chinese-English Dictionary, no. II, 159. Cf. also Journ. N. China. Br. Roy. As. Soc.

(3) The text reads:

(4) Cf. Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics, Tso Shi Chuan, Section Year 18.

(5) The Character Miao was derived from the book of classics in which we find the names San Miao and Yu Mao (三苗, 有苗). See the theories of the origins of this name in Young Cheng-chi's Reports on the Surveys of the Tribes of Yunnan, Chap. 5.

(6) Cheng Szu-hui, On T'ao-t'ieh, Journal of the Eastern Miscellany (東方), 28: 7-12, p. 80.

T'ao-t'ieh already prevailed in the art objects of the Hsia dynasty or in those of the Stone Age.

How the people of Hsia came to use T'ao-t'ieh, the clan-totem of San Miao, as their art motif is difficult to trace. On the one hand, we find no creature called T'ao-t'ieh which seems suitable as the model for all these forms. On the other, as we have pointed out in the above, this name was given to this design by Lü Pu-wei, the editor of Lu Shih Chun Ch'iu in the Ch'in date and adopted by the Sung writers. The present writer highly suspects that the original name for this so-called T'ao-t'ieh was Hsia, the totem of the Hsia clan, which is similar to Kuei, a one-legged monster. Thus, according to Shuo Wen, "Hsia (夏) is a glutton, and also signifies a female monkey, which is similar to a human being. It (the character) has as the body and the hands and legs." Similarly, Kuei (夔) is similar to a dragon which has one leg. In this character, the radical denotes the horn, hand and human face.⁽¹⁾ From this kind of linguistic interpretation, we might safely infer that Hsia is undoubtedly an animal which was finally and incorrectly called T'ao-t'ieh, the totem of the Hsia clan. At present, Hsia becomes the designation of the Chinese people.

What was the origin of Hsia we are not in a position to state definitely at this time. But we may say that it was derived from totem complex which could perfectly well have been developed by a Mongoloid people living in Northeastern China, practicing an agricultural economy. In the judgment of a Japanese scholar, Tinpensose (田邊孝次), "the t'ao-t'ieh, a big eyed and opened-mouth monster, might have been created by the Chinese people. The totems that are hung before the entrances of the houses by the South Seas Natives in Asia are exactly the same as that of the t'ao-t'ieh in name as well as in form. Besides, the tribes of Alaska, Siberia and even Peru appear to have used the same motif in their industrial arts. Probably the design was derived from the same source and adopted by the tribes living along the shores of the Pacific Ocean."⁽²⁾ Bishop says that the designs of Shang art have comparatively little in common with those of the West, their affinities being rather with what had been called 'Oceanic Art.' He says further, "The name is not altogether a happy one, for continental Asia before it invaded the Pacific area."⁽³⁾ While admitting the whole spirit of Scythian art is profoundly

(1) The character Hsia 夏 in Seal character 𡗗; and in bronze (Ch'in Kung-tun 秦公敦, 𡗗 is similar to 𡗗, 𡗗, In Shuo Wen, we read: 夔, 貧獸也。一曰母猴, 似人。从頁, 已止父, 其手足。The character Kuei also appeared in the oracle bones which date back to the Shang Dynasty about 1400 B. C.

(2) The Collection of the Fine Arts of the World, vol. II, p. 37.

(3) Pacific Affairs, 7, 310 and note 31. Bishop considers the Shang art to be in large measure a continuation of an art which had long existed in this same general region. He says: "The art of Shang seems in large part to have been taken over from the indigenous people, . . ." (Chinesisch-Amerikanisch Mythen-parallelen, in T'oung Pao (I, 26), 24, 32-53.

different from that of the Shang art, Creel says: In studying Shang design I have constantly been aware of the feeling that this art had great resemblances, certainly in spirit and possibly in detail to that of the group of Indians of the North Pacific coast of North America who are known to American Anthropologists as the Northwest Coast Indians."⁽¹⁾ Resemblance between the mythology of Northern Asia and America have recently been pointed out, but the diffusion of the totemic complex between these areas has yet to be proved.⁽²⁾

Coming again to the Shang, the bird motifs that appear frequently in its designs have by some been interpreted as a prevailing owl motif, while others insist that the designs do not represent owls but pheasants. Siren agrees on the one hand with Marcel Granet in believing that "the Yellow Bird" of the classics—identified with Huang Ti, China's third mythical emperor—was an owl. On the other hand, the owl, symbolic of the sun and of thunder and lightning, was also the patron saint that watched over the particular periods of time when it was propitious to make magic mirrors and swords.⁽⁴⁾ The owl, however, has later actually become the totem of the Shang dynasty. The Shang people believed that they were the descendants of the owl.⁽³⁾ Siren suggests that the snakes and dragons that sometimes ornament the wings of the owl were not put there for art's sake alone but to invoke the assistance of secondary powers. The symbolical meaning of this feature has been interpreted in various ways, but it was certainly not the intention of the artists to reproduce realities from the animal world. The artistic aim was to make a design that expressed the semi-religious and totemistic ideas of the time.

Dagny Carter has aptly pointed out that the background of the animal reliefs has been called the lei wen (雷紋), meaning literally the "thunder pattern". Among peoples who lived in Europe not much later than the Shang people, the spiral symbolized the sun. In Egypt, about the time when the Shang people ruled in China, there was a keen competition between a sun-cult, symbolized by the falcon, the wheel and the spiral, and an earlier animistic cult, symbolized by totemistic animal forms. But the Shang people alone succeeded in combining the symbolism of the two cults in their matchless designs.⁽⁴⁾ There is nothing in Chinese literature to justify this conclusion that there was a sun-cult at the Shang or Hsia periods, but large animal masks—bears, dragons, owls and other birds, tortoises and conventionalized animal forms, all sculptured in stone or marble that have been found at Anyang, are traceable to the totemic complex of the previous clans.

(1) Cf. Ed. Erkes, Chinesisch-Amerikanische Mythen-parallelen, in T'ong Pao (I, 26), 24, 32-53.

(2) Dagny Carter, Four Thousand Years of China's Art, 1951, pp. 32-33.

(3) In the Classic of Poetry, we read: "The Heaven ordered the Red owl to come down to give birth to the Shang."

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 36.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Since the emergence of modern culture-analysis by the application of the new discipline of culturology the whole of our ideas about the ancient Chinese civilization has changed. Our present knowledge of totemism, however, is still inconclusive, for the bulk of our scientific archaeological and ethnological works is still to be done. From the foregoing preliminary study we may draw some tentative conclusions:

I. Our basic argument is that in the boundless ocean of socio-cultural phenomena there exists a kind of vast cultural system—totemism—which lives and functions as a real unit in Ancient China. Ordinarily the boundaries of this cultural system transcend the geographical boundaries of national groups.

II. The number of the basic types of cultural system is very small. This can be said of the civilizations called variously “hunters-pastoral-agricultural-industrial” or any other basic forms of culture. The totemistic type is certainly one of the vast cultural prototypes or supersystems which might have existed not only in China but everywhere in the whole world.

III. Each of the vast cultural systems is based upon some major premise or prime symbol or ultimate value, which the system articulates, develops, and realizes in all its compartments or parts in the process of its life-career. The traits and characteristics are explicitly or implicitly present in all its phases. Its main parts are all united by causal interdependence.

IV. The totemism as a cultural system may have its peculiar function in the hunting-fishing-collecting stage of human life. Its determinant in human behavior is unanimously recognized; but in spite of its vastness it is a finite phenomenon and as such has limits in its variations; when it transcends its limit its individuality and disintegrates.

V. Specifically speaking, in primitive society, in order to assure the permanence and solidarity of the clans which compose the society, totemism call on animals or plants for an emblem or symbol of the clan “Durkheim gives a contingent explanation of this phenomenon: the permanence and continuity of the clan require an emblem, which may be—and which must be at first—an arbitrary sign, so simple that any society whatever, even when it lacks all means of artistic expression, may conceive the idea of it. If it is later “recognized” that these signs represent animals or plants, this is because animals and plants are present, accessible, and easy to signify.⁽¹⁾ Actually, the Durkheimian theory of totemism, according to Levi-Strauss, is developed in three stages. “The clan first gives itself an emblem “instinctively,” which can only be a sketchy figure limited to a few lines. Later, an animal figure is “recognized” in the design, and it is changed in consequence.

(1) See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, translated by Rodney Needham, Beacon Press, 1962, p. 60.