



EARLY CHINA SEMINAR
LECTURE SERIES

On the Newly Identified Phrase ‘Worry is gone’ *yōu wáng* 憂亡, in the Shāng Oracle Bone Inscriptions

Adam C Schwartz · Hong Kong Baptist University



Among a recently published collection of Shāng dynasty oracle bones scientifically excavated from various deposits at Xiǎotún village, Ānyáng, Hénán Province, there is a fragment of an ox scapulae inscribed with the previously unknown divinatory phrase *yōu wáng* 憂亡 ‘worry is gone.’ I propose, against current interpretations, to read the phrase as it is written and not as a mistaken inversion of the high-frequency phrase *wáng yōu* 亡憂 ‘there is no [reason to] worry.’ When coupled with other divinatory phrases using the word *yōu* 憂 that occur in the oracle bone inscriptions, the newly identified *yōu wáng* 憂亡 thus completes an integral circle of worry: ‘reason to worry’ > ‘am/is worried’ > ‘worry is gone.’ The discovery, in so far as it can be accepted, affords a more comprehensive understanding about the mentality of this negative inner emotion among professional diviners and their royal patrons at the commencement of China’s historical period.

December 8, 2023, 4:30–6:30 pm

Faculty House, 64 Morningside Drive, Columbia University

*Please check the announcement board in the first-floor lobby for room information

Seminar Co-Chairs:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

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