

## Studying the Private Sphere of Ancient Chinese Nobility through the Inscriptions on Bronze Ritual Vessels\*

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The question whether people had a private life in pre-modern times has been debated for a long time. Scholars of privacy in all regions and periods have to deal with a lack of documentation as well as methodological and epistemological difficulties. A project on the history of private life conducted by the Institute of General History (Moscow) of the Russian Academy of Sciences attempts to overcome them through multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural approach.<sup>1</sup>

Most of its participants concentrated on the study of representations, ethical values and behavioural models related to the sphere of private life. The participants distinguished their investigative paradigm from the “history of mentalities” with its tendency to generalisations, adopting what may be called “case histories.”<sup>2</sup> The main efforts were directed not on reconstructions of what was common and typical but on examinations of the most private cases, if any could be discovered in the sources available. In Yuri Bessmertny’s words, their methodology was based on the “perception of human society as an incompletely integrated system,”<sup>3</sup> able to contain

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<sup>1</sup> This project has been led by Yuri L. Bessmertny in co-operation with the Max Planck Institute of Social History in Göttingen since 1994 and has attracted scholars from various institutes within the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University, Russian State Humanities University and other academic bodies.

<sup>2</sup> The name of one of the editions, published under this project period timely, the almanac “Casus”, speaks for itself. The subtitle of this title is “Individual and unique in History” (Cf. “*Kasus. Individual’noe i unikal’noe v istorii*”, ed. Bessmertny Yu. L., Boitsov M. A. Moscow: RGGU, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001 (in print)).

<sup>3</sup> Bessmertny, Y. L., Summary to the *Chelovek v mire chuvstv. Ocherki po istorii chastnoi zhizni v Evrope i nekotoryh stranah Asii do nachala Novogo vremeni* [Man in the World of Feeling. Essays on the History of Private life in Europe and in Certain Countries of Asia before the Modern Times]. Collective of authors. Ed. By Yu. L. Bessmertny, Moscow: RGGU, 2000, p. 578.

“non-standard situations”. Accordingly, private life was regarded as a system that is discrete to a certain extent and has space for individual and non-standard behaviour. Special focus was aimed on the place of the individual (typically male or female member of the élite) and the level of his behavioural freedom. Thus the attention of some researchers was drawn to examples of “deviant behaviour” and its possible influence on the evolution of ethical norms and behavioural stereotypes.

Indeed, a case may be defined as specific only when examined in comparison with the typical. Thus, the project’s members considered the macro-historical research of serial data necessary to understand “what in every society configured the private life into a system”, while at the same time the micro-historical method to reveal “what contravened to its integration and allowed an existence of “non-systematic, unique phenomena.”<sup>4</sup>

A historian of private life has to deal with a quite amorphous substance, which can be hardly defined positively, as well as negatively. The definition of “private” as opposite to “public”, accepted by sociologists of modern times, in scholarly literature related to pre-modern history is conceptually debatable. The concept of “public life”, in its proper sense is more appropriate to an open, constitutional, democratic modern society (or, at least, to ancient republics in Greece and Rome), rather than to authoritarian hierarchical societies of the past<sup>5</sup>. To avoid the ambiguity, related to the concept “public”, Yuri Bessmertny suggested regarding as private in the pre-modern societies “a social sphere that both objectively and from the viewpoint of our contemporaries was opposite to the sphere of service (irrespective of what kind of service it might be: that to the polis, the state or the “golden calf”)<sup>6</sup>. This scheme is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas in his work, dedicated to the genesis of civil society in the epoch of European Enlightenment regards both private and public spheres as interdependent, and considers that one side of private sphere becomes public, articulating the public opinion and addressing to the governmental structures. Habermas calls it “authentic” public sphere as different from “pseudo-public” sphere of governmental structures. (See Habermas, Jürgen, “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere”. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989, p. 27-31).

<sup>6</sup> “The opposition of the two spheres did not always acquire an identical concrete meaning. Yet the “unifying” point here was that relationship in the “non-public” sphere presupposed not “service” but mutual aid. Not of the least importance was the fact that there reigned specific emotions uncharacteristic of other spheres of life, feelings like mother’s love, sensuality, sufferings caused by disability of old age, or the loss of near and dear, and so on”. (Bessmertny, Y. L., Summary to the “*Chelovek v krugu sem’i. Oчерki po istorii chastnoi zhizni v Evrope do nachala Novogo vremeni*”

not irreproachable as well, since these spheres often not only were not opposite to each other, but also perfectly overlapped<sup>7</sup>. However, Bessmertny himself warned of the low productivity of following the absolutization of dualistic oppositions like “private / public”, “individual / communal”, “central / marginal” etc<sup>8</sup>. Different spheres of social life, i.e. such of service, public associations and private relations were tightly interlaced with each other, and often communications between the same persons included official, public and private aspects at the same time. The forms and limits of private sphere varied depending on the cultural and historical circumstances, as well as on the events of the own life of certain individuals, and were perceived and appreciated differently from various points of view. In particular, the case of Chinese language dramatically demonstrates the semantic variability of the concept “private” / “privacy” and its dependence on the corresponding discourse.

In ancient Chinese language the character *si* 私 had the following meanings<sup>9</sup>:

1. Private, particular, as opposed to *gong* 公– communal (identified with the interests of the state and society as a whole). A servant or an official of someone other than the head of the state.
2. Selfish, partial. In one’s own interests. Without authorization.
3. Secret, clandestine, private. Illicit, especially used of bribery and smuggling. Without witness.

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[Man within his Family Circle. Essays on the History of Private life in Europe before the Modern Times]. Collective of authors. Ed. by Yu. L. Bessmertny. Moscow: RGGU, 1996, p. 356). The substitution of “service” for “mutual aid” as a basic principle of private communication is not satisfactory. Of course, we should not imagine the private sphere as a realm of love and harmony. The hatred, envy, violence belong to this sphere as well. That is true in Bessmertny’s observations, is that the relatively intensive emotional coloration is characteristic to private aims and actions of any kind, whether they concern of one’s personal affections or commercial interests.

<sup>7</sup> Theoretically all the forms of human communication in pre-modern societies may be reduced to the model of service: humans served deities, men served state, vassals served sovereigns, slaves served owners, peasants served landlords, sons served fathers, withes served husbands, friends were at service to each other etc. Both in private and external spheres the model of service predominated.

<sup>8</sup> Bessmertny, Y. L., “*Vydelenie sfery chastnoi zhizni kak istoriograficheskaya i metodologicheskaya problema*” (Identification of the sphere of private life as historiographical and methodological problem) // *Chelovek v krugu sem'i*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Note, that not all of these connotations were inherent to the word *si* in Western Zhou time, which is in the focus of the present study, but some of them were acquired by it in later periods.

4. Private, particular, proper. Property of private persons or groups (*jia si* 家私 – familial property). *Si ren* 私人 – members of a clan, relatives, friends; servants, belonged to families of great seigniors. Brother-in-law<sup>10</sup>.
5. To love or favour [someone] particularly. To consider [something] as one's own.
6. One's everyday clothes.
7. In one's mind.
8. To urinate.
9. Genitals.<sup>11</sup>

I consciously organized the glosses in this order to demonstrate how the content of the concept *si* was drawing from the level of the whole state towards the most intimate parts of an individual. On the level of political organisms from the viewpoint of central power and state ideologists, any socio-political or economical activity, maintained apart from or against to the interests of the centralized state, was regarded as “private”. In this context this concept acquired the strongly negative connotations.

On the level of big social units, organized on the basis of kinship – clans, - the private sphere constituted of everything, related to any of their affairs, assets, members and subordinates. The concept “private” was understood positively.

On the level of individuals any manifestations of immediate inter-human communication in a certain socio-communicational structure, especially while extended beyond or contradicting to the institutionalised norms and behavioural patterns, accepted in this structure, characterized by relatively intensive emotional coloration, could be ranged to the “private” sphere. Finally, the bodily functions and

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<sup>10</sup> A term, used by a women referring to her sister's husband. This term appears to me very interesting. In ancient China after marriage a woman became a member of her husband's clan, losing her membership in the native one. When sisters became wives of the men from different clans, they could not have any institutionalized ground to regard each other's relatives by marriage as relatives. Thus their relations to each other's husbands were defined as *si* – “private”.

<sup>11</sup> This glossary is based on the following dictionaries: *Guhanyu dacidian* [The Big Dictionary of Ancient Chinese Language]. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999. P. 2086; Couvreur, F. S., *Dictionnaire classique de la langue Chinoise*. Sien-Hsien: Imprimerie de la mission catholique, 1930, p. 654; Chinese-English Dictionary, Giles, Herbert A. Second Edition, Leyden: Brill, 1912. vol. II, p. 1276, No. 10308; *Hanyu dacidian* [The Big Dictionary of Chinese Language], Shanghai, Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1993-95, Vol. II, p. 2405.

states of mind could be classified as “private” too. Positive or negative evaluation depended on every particular case.

Therefore, in pre-modern societies we should not look for the private sphere as a certain separate sector, wholly removed from the communal life. Multiple “private spheres” of various level with more or less definable, albeit alterable and penetrable boundaries<sup>12</sup> may be distinguished there. However, on every level these private spheres were characterized by fractionality and limited accessibility from the exterior.

The most immediate manifestation of private communication may be obviously observed in the familial structure, whether in a nuclear family or in a clan, though the concepts “familial” and “private” do not coincide, as far as many sides of familial life, including childbirth and education, wedding, funerals, familial economy and others, belong not only to the private sphere, but also to the public one. On the first stage of the “Private life” project (1994-96) its participants were concerned with investigations of the specifics of the familial life in pre-modern societies, in particular, of the relationship in couples and between parents and children. As a result, a book entitled “Man within his Family Circle” was published in 1996<sup>13</sup>.

Evidently, the private sphere of inter-human communication in pre-modern times was not limited to the familial space. Therefore, since 1997, the investigational field was extended to the circle of non-relative intimates, such as friends, companions and neighbours, and, on the other hand, deepened to one’s inward life<sup>14</sup>. The second book, “Man in the World of Feeling”, was ready to publication in 1999<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Kurt Lewin proposed a topological distinction between more “peripheral” and “central” regions of personality. The central regions may be defined as intimate, personal regions, in which the individuum is more sensitive than in peripheral. Greater accessibility and lesser resistance against external interactions characterize the peripheral layers. “Then the accessibility of different regions is regarded not from the point of view of a second individuum, but of a group, the domain of the displayed outward, communal, “public” life will be associated with more peripheral regions, while the domain of the private life – with the more central ones” (Lewin, Kurt, “Sozialpsychologische Unterschiede zwischen den Vereinigten Staaten und Deutschland”, in: *Die Lösung sozialer Konflikte*, Bad Nauheim, 1953, p. 49).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. “*Chelovek v krugu sem’i*”.

<sup>14</sup> It was at this stage that I joined the project and the following year contributed to the second volume; see M. S. Khayutina, “*Druziya I gosti v drevnem Kitae (Epoha Zapadnogo Zhou period Chunqiu. XI-V vv. do n. e)* [Friends and guests in Early China (Western Zhou - Chunqiu epochs, the Eleventh to Fifth Centuries B. C.], in *Chelovek v mire chuvstv*, pp. 221-42.

<sup>15</sup> It was printed, however, one year later due to the technical difficulties (cf. *Chelovek v mire chuvstv*).

Considering the scarcity of transparently private documents, such as private correspondence and diaries, the “Private life” project participants accepted all sources that were able to shed light on any aspects of private life in pre-modern times. They used, in particular, edited texts of various kind, genealogies, population registers, court protocols, notarial acts, epitaphs and so forth. My contribution to the second stage of the project was a study based on epigraphic and edited sources, including inscriptions on ritual bronze vessels and bells, and the *Shi jing* 詩經 [The Book of Poetry]. In the present article I will try to substantiate the reliability of one of these sources, bronze ritual objects, for the study of private sphere and to attempt to reveal some traces of privacy’s representations in Western Zhou (1056/45/40 - 771 BC) society.

My study concerns the private sphere of ancient Chinese aristocratic clans<sup>16</sup> and, as far as it is possible, the private relations and ideas of their individual representatives. Below I will examine two inscriptions, composed by one official from the late Western Zhou, where, in my opinion, some representations of privacy were manifested.

The ancient Chinese aristocracy used special bronze vessels (see fig. 1) for offering sacrificial food and wine to ancestral spirits, as well as bronze bells for playing music during the ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> The bronze artefacts often have inscriptions [*jinwen* 金文]. Their content, composition, length and other features modified over time. These inscriptions, originating not from the state archives but from the treasuries of various aristocratic clans from different regions of the country, constitute the only kind of immediate, authentic, unedited documents that are available for the study of

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<sup>16</sup> There is no agreement in the English-speaking literature on the terminology, employed for designate the different types of kinship organization. In this paper the clan will be regarded, according to the terminology proposed by G. P. Murdock, as different from the sib as a consanguineal group (cf.

Murdock G. P., *Social structure*, New York : Free Press, 1965, p. 66-68). In defining the clan itself I will follow M. V. Kryukov’s understanding of ancient Chinese clan (*zongzu*) as a „group of hierarchically subordinated families, descending from a common eponymous ancestor“ (cf. Kryukov M. V., *Formy social’noi organizacii drevnih kitaicev* [Forms of the social organization of the ancient Chinese], Moscow: Nauka, 1967. English summary „Sib and Clan in ancient China“, p. 200). Unlike the sib, the clan included both consanguineal and affinal relatives. A female lost her membership in the father’s clan after marriage and obtained the new one in her husband’s clan, while her membership in the native patrisib remained intact. The both structures, patrisib *xing* and patriclan *zongzu* coexisted in Zhou China.

<sup>17</sup> The Zhou aristocracy inherited this ritual practice already in the pre-dynastic period from the Shang.



**The Small Ke's Tripod**

the pre-Warring States period, i.e. from the Shang dynasty to the Spring and Autumn period (16th century BC to 481 BC).

Several bronze vessels were cast upon the order of a person, named Ke 克. It is debatable, whether these objects belonged to one single person<sup>18</sup>, or there were three different Ke<sup>19</sup>. However it is evident that the owner of the three of them was the certain Ke, who held the office of *shanfu* 善夫 in the royal administration. A *shanfu* served the King personally, “taking out and bringing in” the royal commands of administrative or military purpose<sup>20</sup>. Creel remarks, that in two poems of the Book of Songs the *shanfu* was “listed fourth among the chief royal officers”<sup>21</sup>.

Which of the Zhou kings Ke served, for a long time remains a subject of academic discussion. In the inscription on the *Da Ke ding* (“great Ke’s *ding*-tripod”) *shanfu* Ke mentioned his *zu* 祖 (the term referring to any male ancestor starting back from the grandfather) Shi Hua-fu who served Gong-wang (917/15-900 BC). The

<sup>18</sup> See Guo Moruo, “*Shi Ke xu ming kaoshu*” [Investigation of the inscription on the *shi* Ke’s *xu*-container] // Beijing: Wenwu, 1962, No. 6, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> A personal name Ke (“Mighty”) could be assumed by different persons. See Li Xueqin, *Xia Shang Zhou niandai zalun* (“Associated articles on the chronology of Xia, Shang and Zhou”), Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1999, pp. 151-155.

<sup>20</sup> See Vasil’ev K. V. *Istoki kitaiskoi civilizacii* (The Sources of the Chinese Civilization). Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1998. P. 133.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Creel, Herley G., “The Origins of Statecraft in China. The Western Zhou Empire”. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 120. These are the poems 193 and 258, composed probably quite soon after the end of the reign of Li-wang, whom served our *shanfu* Ke. The first one traditionally after Zheng Xuan’s commentary was attributed to the time of Li-wang himself. However, upon Legge’s astronomical argument, it should be composed under the reign of You-wang (781-771 BC) (See Legge, James, *The She King // The Chinese Classics*, 1872, repr. Hong Kong University Press, 1960, vol. IV, P. 320). The poem No. 258 traditionally is attributed to the reign of You-wang’s father Xuan-wang (827/25-782), although the drought, to which the text is referring, could happen even in the last years of Li-wang’s reign, (see Legge, *ibid.*, p. 528). This chronology is rather uncertain, and the both texts may be of even later provenance. The both poems witness a very high status of *shanfu* in the state hierarchy in late Western Zhou period. The three figures, listed before stewards, were different in these poems, with prime minister on the first place, and heads of ministries and guard in between.

character *zu* was often understood namely as “grandfather”, that suggests that Ke should be in office himself at least some 30 years after Gong-wang’s reign. Some scholars date his lifetime back to the reign of Xiao-wang (872-866 BC), Yi-wang (865-858 BC) or Li-wang (857—842/28 BC)<sup>22</sup>. The latest date attired more adherents, assuming that from the archaeological point of view the *Da Ke ding* is featured as a late-middle Western Zhou vessel. However, the *Xiao Ke ding* vessel is dated by the 23<sup>d</sup> year of one reign, but Li-wang did not held the throne so long<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the most plausible date for shanfu Ke’s inscriptions would be the reign of Xuan-wang (827/25-782)<sup>24</sup>.

An excerpt from an inscription on a bronze ritual vessel known as the *Da Ke ding* [Ke’s large tripod]<sup>25</sup> reads as follows:

The king was in [the capital] Zongzhou. On the sunrise he entered the Muwang temple and took his place. Ji, accompanying the *shanfu* Ke, entered the gate and stopped at the Middle Yard facing north. The king ordered the *yinshi* 尹氏 [official title<sup>26</sup>] to write down an order to *shanfu* Ke. The king said thus: “Ke! Formerly I charged you to execute my orders. Now I reward you for your service. I bestow on you [fields and men in 8 different locations – M. K.]. Respectfully use them mornings and evenings for the service. Do not dare to disregard my orders.”

<sup>22</sup> See *Shanghaibowuguan. Shang Zhou qingtongqi minwen xuan* 3 (Shanghai Museum. “Selection of inscriptions on the Shang and Zhou bronze vessels”, part 3). Beijing: Wenwu, 1988, p. 216; Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou niandai kao* [Study of Western Zhou chronology]. Shanghai: Shangwu, 1955. P. 33; Guo Moruo, “*Shi Ke xu ming kaoshu*”, p. 9-10, Kryukov, V. M., *Ritual'naja komunikacija v drevnem Kitae* [Ritual communication in ancient China], Moscow - Taipei, Taiwan: Medea Enterprises Co., 1997, p. 284. Lau, Ulrich, „Quellenstudien zur Landvergabe und Bodenübertragung in der westlichen Zhou-Dynastie (1045? – 771 v. Chr.). Sankt Augustin, Germany: Monumenta Serica, 1999, p. 246; Nivison, D., “Fully Dated Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions”, <http://www.stanford.edu/~dnivison/WZBronzes.html>, 1997

<sup>23</sup> He fled into exile in the locality Zhi, while certain Gong He usurped the Zhou throne. It is hardly believable that Li-wang could give audiences in the Zhou capital and distribute lands and other goods while hiding in Zhi.

<sup>24</sup> I’m grateful to David S. Nivison for sharing with me his last viewpoint on Ke’s vessels dates in communication via e-mail from October 15, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Bronze objects are usually identified by the names of their casters (in this case, Ke) and the type of object (*ding* and *gui* tripods, *pan* plates; *he* wine vases; *zhong* and *goudiao* bells). When a caster had more than one object of the same type, the objects are differentiated by size (*da*: large or *xiao*: small).

<sup>26</sup> On the interpretation of *yinshi* title see below.

Ke bowed and thanked the Son of Heaven for his beneficence. He used it to make a treasured vessel in honour of his enlightened ancestor Shi Huafu. Ke will gain longevity for ten thousands years without limit. Sons and grandsons will use [the vessel] as a treasure.<sup>27</sup>

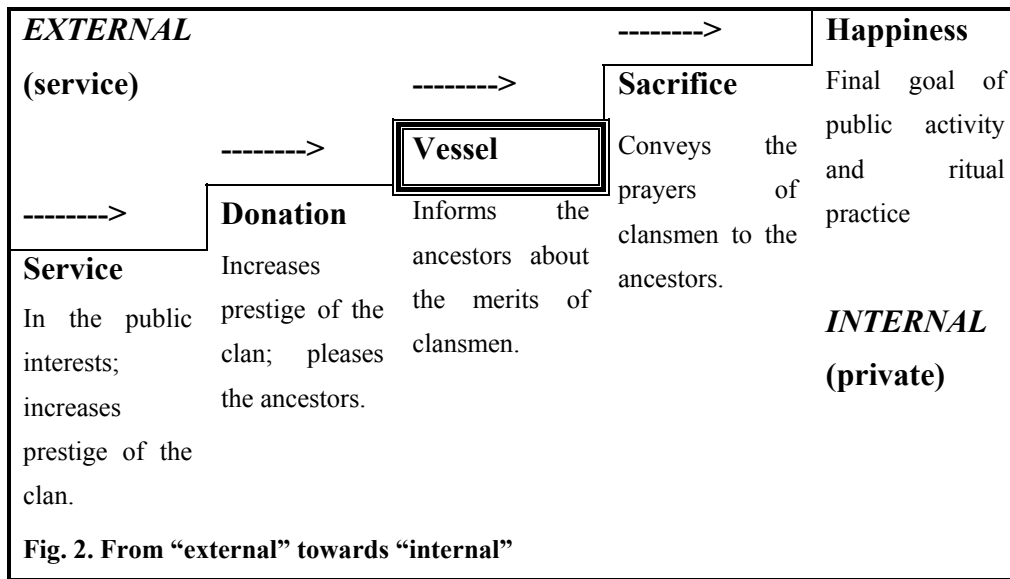
This text, as most of similar bronze inscriptions of the time, converges two spaces: service to the state, and the private life of an aristocratic clan. A standard *jinwen* usually opens with a report on the events leading up to the casting of a vessel (i.e. military campaigns, civil service or ritual actions in which the caster took part, resulting an audience at the king, and the receipt of gifts from the king), then refers to the vessel's manufacture, and ends with a dedication statement.<sup>28</sup> In this last part of the inscription, the caster indicated for which ancestor the vessel was intended and specified the blessings expected from its ritual usage. Lothar von Falkenhausen has interpreted this structure as a three-part chronological composition encompassing the past, the present and the future.<sup>29</sup> It may also be observed from a spatial perspective as a transition from external events to internal goals, or from a public to a private space, where the casting of a bronze object may be regarded as a fulcrum between these two spaces (see Fig. 2).

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<sup>27</sup> Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi* [Great corpus of Western and Eastern Zhou bronze inscriptions], Beijing, 1957, vol. 7, pp. 121-22.

<sup>28</sup> For the structure of bronze inscriptions see Shaughnessy, Edward L., *Sources of Western Zhou History. Inscribed Bronze Vessels*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 73-85; Falkenhausen, Lothar von, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies: A Review Article", *Early China*, no.18 (1993), pp. 152-67; Kryukov, V. M., *Ritual'naja komunikacija*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>29</sup> Falkenhausen, op. cit., pp. 152-61.



How can we determine what had priority in the system of values manifested through these bronze inscriptions: external or internal, service or private sphere? Although the bronze inscriptions have not previously been assessed explicitly on the basis of the dichotomy between public and private spheres, different approaches to their nature and functions implicitly presuppose different levels of their privatization.

Edward Shaughnessy regards *jinwen* as archival documents intended to commemorate the deeds and merits of their owners and their ancestors for later generations.<sup>30</sup> This approach supposes the dominance of public over private with respect to external events, i.e. the protagonist’s achievements in state service are endowed with substantive value, and the text appears to merely serve their reflection. The message to the “sons and grandsons” in this context appears to be a prescription to commemorate the glorious history of their clan, with consequent connotations of loyalty to the ruling house. The notification of a gift appears to be slightly more private. However, from the inscription on the *Da Ke ding*, as well as from many other texts, the gifts should “be used for the service”.<sup>31</sup> Only the desire to obtain longevity looks certainly private, but the question is then why it occurs in such a non-private context.

Vassili M. Kryukov<sup>32</sup> and Lothar von Falkenhausen<sup>33</sup> challenge this documentary approach. They regard *jinwen* as essentially religious documents, a

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Shaughnessy, Sources, P. 175-182.

<sup>31</sup> Kryukov defined their nature as “institutional” (Cf. *Ritual’naya kommunikaciya*, pp. 137-91).

<sup>32</sup> See Kryukov V. M., “*Dary zemnye I nebesnye (k simbolike arhaicheskogo rituala v rannezhouskom Kitae)*” [Earthly and Heavenly Gifts (on the symbolism of archaic ritual in Early Zhou China)] / *Etika I*

means of sacred communication between clansmen and their ancestral spirits. The addressees of the message thus were not their respectful and curious sons and grandsons but the ancestors themselves. This interpretation throws a different light on the relationship between public and private.

Ancestral worship held the central place in the religious life of the ancient Chinese. These powerful deities on whom the clansmen's very lives depended were to a high degree private, as every clan had its own patrons. Based on the reciprocal exchange, it supposed offering and performing appropriate ceremonies by the descendants and providing of sacral patronage in reward. Only authorized users, i.e. the members of a clan,<sup>34</sup> could conduct communication with the ancestors. Bronze, often characterised in the inscriptions as *ji jin* 吉金 "blessed/ fortunate/ happy metal" (i.e. a sacred material), served as a mediator in this sacred communication, while the inscriptions were supplementary means to facilitate and control it.<sup>35</sup>

The prescription to use the sacred objects "as treasure", ubiquitous in bronze inscriptions, meant precisely their use in sacrifices. The character *bao* 寶 [treasure] consists of the graphs *yu* 玉 [nephrite] and *bei* 貝 [cowry] under a roof,<sup>36</sup> hence *bao*'s value first in the sacred and only next in monetary aspect. Nephrite and cowries, like bronze, were believed to be sacred materials. The determinative "roof" plausibly represents the roof of the ancestral temple, where the treasure was used and stored. At the same time, as Vassili Kryukov has noticed, it conveys a supplementary semantic nuance of "concealment"<sup>37</sup>. A synonym of *bao* in early Zhou inscriptions was the homonymic term *bao* 報 [to safeguard, to secure]. These terms were interchangeable

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*ritual v tradicionnom Kitae* (Ethics and Ritual in Traditional China), Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1988;

<sup>33</sup> Falkenhausen, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> "The Spirits of dead do not enjoy the sacrifices of these who are not of their kindred, and ...people only sacrifice to those who were of the same ancestry as themselves" (Legge, James, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen // The Chinese Classics*, 1872, repr. Hong Kong University Press, 1960, vol. 5. p. 157).

<sup>35</sup> Falkenhausen, op. cit., p. 167; Kryukov, V. M., *Tekst i ritual v drevnem Kitae* [Text and Ritual in Ancient China], habilitation thesis, Moscow, 1997, pp. 371-75.

<sup>36</sup> A phonetic *fou* 缶 forms the fourth part of the character.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kryukov, V. M., *Tekst i ritual. Opyt interpretacii drevnekitaiskoi epigrafiki epohi Yin-Zhou*. [Text and Ritual. An essay of interpretation of ancient Chinese epigraphy of Yin-Zhou epoch], Moscow: Pamyatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2000, pp. 22-23. Kryukov compares the term *bao* with a corresponding term in the Russian *sokrovishctshe*, meaning a treasure, which has to be concealed.

in referring to the bronze vessels.<sup>38</sup> The need to protect any object against any undesirable interactions automatically draws the line between those who could access it freely and the others, whose access could lead to any harmful consequences. The bronzes were concealed from the free public access, and their sacrificial use required authorization both from living and dead users who could only be within a particular clan. Starting from the late Western Zhou period the limited access upon invitation was allowed to some of the clan's associates<sup>39</sup>. In this respect, the sacred bronzes should be regarded as the private belongings of each clan.

The construction of sacrificial vessels itself is meaningful. The inscriptions were usually placed on their inner surface. It probably did not suggest that vessels' sacred entrails needed protection from those who gathered around them, since the content of the texts, commemorating the glorious deeds of the ancestors and the owners themselves and offering standard prayers were usually well known to these people. Further, since only authorized clan members attended the ceremonies, the sacred space was already protected from strangers or uninitiated observers. The interiorization was due to belief that the sacred message was transmitted to the spirits by contact with sacrificial food. That is, communication proceeded *inside* the medium, and therefore its *internal* space was functionally more valuable. The evolution of the external decoration of vessels from the highly elaborated Shang-style vessels towards standardization and simplification through the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods supposes the decrease of the functional abilities of their external surface in favour of the inner space.

The final goal of the sacred communication between living and dead was happiness in general. Mu Chou-poo has called the religion of ancient China “a religion of personal welfare”.<sup>40</sup> This definition may be accepted for the pre-Warring States periods with one reservation. “Personal” suggests the domination of individual welfare over that of the family or clan. However, the holders of bronze vessels (the heads of clans or their lesser segments) performed rituals before the ancestors on

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-23.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Khayutina, M. S. “Sacred Space of an Aristocratic Clan in Ancient China under Transformations (An Attempt of Interpretation)”, presented at the International Workshop "Creating and Representing Sacred Spaces" , Ostasiatisches Seminar der Universität Göttingen, June-July 2000 (proceedings in print).

<sup>40</sup> Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare. A view of Ancient Chinese Religion*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, p. 210.

behalf of the whole clan body, or at least of the family. Thus the happiness obtained as a result of the sacrifices should be distributed among all its living members and expanded further to future generations of “sons and grandsons”. Therefore, the religion of ancient China could be more precisely defined as “a religion of private welfare”, where privacy is located not in the individual but in the family or clan.

The blessings, expected from the part of ancestral spirits, listed in the dedication statements, usually consisted of evidently private matters of the vessel’s holder and internal interests of his clan, such as health, longevity, and ubiquitous multiple progeny. Even when one wished himself or his descendants success in the office, it demonstrates the desire of personal and corporate benefits rather than the idea of selfless service. In an inscription on another vessel known as *Ke xu, shanfu* Ke applied to his ancestors for all of these benefits:

Ke will mornings and evenings use the vessel, sacrificing to his great ancestors and his deceased father. The great ancestors and the deceased father will bless Ke with much happiness, longevity and eternal life, and service to the Son of Heaven. Ke will be bestowed [by the king] with favours without limit. For ten thousand years Ke’s sons and grandsons will use [the vessel] as treasure.<sup>41</sup>

Since in ancient China all areas of an élite man’s life depended on his position in the state hierarchy, it is small wonder that achievements in state service constituted one of his main “private” interests. Besides, not only the mundane well-being of the clansmen depended on the favor of the sovereigns or lesser seniors, but also it was regarded as an important link in the chain of sacred communication between men and deified ancestors. The success in the office, regardless of its external nature, depended to a high degree on one’s ability to copy the model of one’s “enlightened progenitors”, giving devoted service to one’s ancestors and receiving ancestral rewards. In this context, the achievements of men in state service as well as their moral self-improvement were regarded as deeds, which pleased the ancestral spirits and therefore were carefully reported in the inscriptions as acts of filial piety.<sup>42</sup>

It is significant, that in the Spring and Autumn period, the report on external events was dropped from the standard composition of *jinwen*, which often consisted

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<sup>41</sup> *Ke xu*, in Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwen*, vol. 8, p. 123.

<sup>42</sup> It does not mean that the activity of men in the public sphere was subordinate to the service to the spirits; it appears secondary only in the context of ancestral worship.

since of the dedication statements alone. It suggests that most of the authors at this time concentrated on the internal life of their clans.

What is specific to the case of *shanfu* Ke is his decision to express in his dedication on the *xu* vessel his feelings towards some of his associates:

The King ordered the *yinshi*'s assistant [*you* 友] scribe [*shi* 史] Yin 趁 to register fields and men [conferred on] *shanfu* Ke. Ke ... dared to respond to the incomparably bounteous royal beneficence by making a travelling *xu* vessel. [He will] use it to make offers [i.e. at a feast] to the *shiyin* 師尹, friends [*pengyou* 朋友], and relatives by marriage [*hungou* 昏媾]<sup>43</sup>.

Ke is one of the very few of his contemporaries to mention in the message on the sacrificial vessel the people not being members of his clan, who had no right to take part in the sacred communication with the clan's ancestors.

However, the term *pengyou* in Western Zhou apparently defined kin relatives, i.e. members of one clan.<sup>44</sup> As follows from the analysis of other contemporary inscriptions, *pengyou* were the closest associates of an élite male of this period. Since they took part in clan sacrifices, the act of using the sacrificial vessel for a feast with *pengyou* accorded with existing ritual norms. The reference to *hungou*, the relatives of women, married to the clansmen, who were not members of the clan and could not sacrifice to its ancestors, is more unexpected. Nevertheless they could probably attend the ceremonies as guests, since ritual hospitality may be traced back to late Western Zhou. In any case, including reference to outsiders ( *hungou* being the more acceptable in this category) in the dedication on a bronze vessel was a matter of Ke's own choice.

The most unusual feature of the dedication is its reference to the *shiyin*. He was probably the same official as abovementioned *yinshi*. The *yinshi*, who executed the king's orders to transfer the lands to *shanfu* Ke was also mentioned in the inscription on the *Da Ke ding*. Ke's own official status was high, and it is unlikely that he was the *yinshi*'s subordinate (although dedications to patrons occur in *jinwen* from time to time). This suggests that Ke probably had some kind of private relationship with the officer.

The title *yinshi* 尹氏 reads literally as "a [man] from the Yin clan", or "mister Yin". *Yin* was an official title in the Shang-Yin times, as witnessed from the oracle

<sup>43</sup> Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwen*, vol. 8, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Khayutina M. S., "Druziya I gosti v drevnem Kitae", p. 226.

bone inscriptions from this period<sup>45</sup>. The early Western Zhou chapters of the “Book of Documents” (*Shangshu* 尚書) mention *bai yin* 百尹 – “hundred administrators”, or “various governors”<sup>46</sup>. However, some of the texts of the “Book of Poetry” refer to some persons with Yin being their clan name. Especially the ode *Ji nan shan* (No. 191), addressed to the Grand-master Yin, attires the attention. It reads:

Lofty is that southern hill.  
 With its masses of rocks!  
 Awe-inspiring are you, O [Grand]-master Yin,  
 And the people all look at you!<sup>47</sup>

If the first stanza addresses to this person as to *shi* Yin 師尹, the third one calls him *Yin-shi dashi* 尹氏大師, similarly as in the *Ke xu* inscription:

The Grand-master Yin  
 Is the foundation of our Chow,  
 And the balance of the State is in his hands<sup>48</sup>.

The Yin clan and its particular members are mentioned in the chronicle “*Zuo zhuan*”, covering the events of the Spring and Autumn period (770-453 BC). Here we probably observe the typical case, when the name of a hereditary office transformed into the patronymic name<sup>49</sup>.

The Yin, occupying different positions of *zuoce* 作册<sup>50</sup> and *neishi* 内史<sup>51</sup>, or named without title as *Yin-shi* or simply Yin are mentioned in a number of bronze inscriptions through the reigns of several Zhou kings. As other officials in the same positions<sup>52</sup> they took part in the investiture ceremonies and other receptions of Zhou aristocrats by the kings. They recorded on the bamboo strips the orders of the kings,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Chen Mengjia, *Yinxu buci zongshu* (“Conjoined interpretations of the oracle texts from the ruins of Yin capital”). Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1956, p. 517-518.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Karlgren, Bernard, trans. “The Book of Documents” [Shu-ching]. Stockholm: Bulletin of the Museum of Far eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska Samlingarna), XXII (1950), p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Legge, *The She king*, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> Legge, *ibid*, p. 311. Legge comments: “Yin was the clan name of a great family in the royal domain, members of which, through successive reigns, were charged with the highest functions of the state” (Legge, *ibid*, p. 310).

<sup>49</sup> Another well-known example is the family name Sima, “superintendent of stables”.

<sup>50</sup> Literally “[one], who makes writing tablets”, i.e. records the orders on the bamboo strips.

<sup>51</sup> “Internal scribe”.

<sup>52</sup> There were other *zuoce* and *neishi*, who performed the same duties, that may be additional argument in favor of taking Yin as a clan name and not as a part of official title.

concerning of assignments to positions, registration of land possessions and distribution of other goods. The other official, mentioned in the *Ke xu* inscription, a certain scribe Yin was referred to as *yinshi you*. This expression, translated above as “the *yinshi*’s assistant”, could mean also “the friend of Yin clan”. As I have noted before, the term “friend” in Western Zhou time usually was applied to the members of one clan, and, therefore it appears quite plausible that the scribe Yin also belonged to the Yin clan.

It is possible to imagine that the influence of the Yin family on the distribution process could be of no little importance. The Yin probably concentrated a considerable power in their hands, that corresponds to the image represented in the *Ji nan shan* ode. Curious is, that this ode is dated traditionally to the reign of Xuanwang, that is probably the most plausible time of *shanfu Ke*’s life. It is possible, that the ode and the bronze inscriptions refer to the same person, that is, unfortunately, impossible to prove due to the uncertain chronology for both of these sources.

In any case whether the office of court scribes was hereditary to the Yin clan, or the term *yinshi* designated just the name of this influential office, it explains why *shanfu Ke* was so interested to secure his good relations with a so important source of wealth, that he mentioned it in the dedication on his sacrificial vessel. Thus *Ke* used the object, assigned for the sacred communication, to gain the sympathy of an official, who was not his superior nor relative, that automatically rated this kind of relationship to the private [*si*] category. It confirms, that *Ke* regarded this ritual object as private one, which he was free to use in a not so canonical way..

*Ke*’s actions, reflected in his inscriptions, may be appreciated to a certain extent as deviation from the contemporary norms. Indeed, *Ke* was not the only one, who tried to gain sympathy of one or another representative of power, but he was one of the very few who attempted to legitimate this kind of private relationship, using the authority of his ancestral patrons. As it may be observed from the bronze inscriptions of the Spring and Autumn period, this practice gradually naturalized in the ancient Chinese society, and such kinds of non-kin relations, as friendship, hospitality and fealty have got the religious approval.

The above analysis confirms that bronze inscriptions in general, and that of *shanfu Ke* in particular, may be considered as private documents and therefore as reliable texts for the study of representations of privacy in general by the ancient Chinese nobility, as well as of particular features of its private life.