

but which, even in Ho-nan, may have remained outside the pale of what was perhaps already moulding into shape the earliest Chinese community. No trace of writing yet occurs at Yang-shao or Chu-chia-chai, the sites of which may tentatively be dated early in the second millennium B. C.

On the other hand Chinese script is found already full-fledged at An-yang, the site of one of the Shang capitals in the second half of the same millennium. There too many cowries have been unearthed, together with imitations made of mussel-shell (蚌, *yao*), and already perhaps of bone and stone (cf. *TP*, 1923, 7-8; ANDERSSON, *Archæolog. Studien*, 78). Real cowries still occur, however, among the finds of the great Hsin-chêng tomb in Ho-nan and of the Sha-ching graves in the Chên-fan district of Kan-su; sites which are dated approximately in the middle of the first millennium B. C. (*Children of the Yellow Earth*, 323). ANDERSSON is of opinion that «the cowry seems to have come to China from India». This is not impossible, although cowries of various species are known to occur at the Liu-ch'iu Islands, at the Pescadores, and even on the shores of Shan-tung (cf. *JRAS*, 1888, 439). We must await the results of further research before passing a final judgement on a question which is of course of far-reaching consequence for the history of prehistoric and proto-historic intercourse in the Far East.

As pointed out by ANDERSSON, the early imitation of cowries in mussel-shell, bone, and stone, prompted probably by an inadequate supply of the true material, supports the view that a shell currency existed in China under the Shang dynasty. It was long ago observed, and by the Chinese themselves, that Chinese writing provided a strong argument to warrant the same conclusion. The character 貝 *pei* (\**puâi*), which means «cowry» and which, in its most ancient form, is a pictogram of a shell, enters as the radical into most of the Chinese characters meaning «precious», «trade», «riches», etc., and is down to our own day one of the components of the usual term for «a precious thing», 寶貝 *pao-pei*. And *pao-pei* is still used sometimes as a designation of the *Cypræa* (cf. TARANZANO, I, 372); but perhaps this is borrowed from Japan, where the characters *pao-pei*, read *takaragai*, are a current designation of this shell. This 貝 *pei*, however, is a substitute borrowed in the first millennium before our era to replace the original *pei* pictogram, which was then abandoned. As to the original *pei* pictogram, it may be worth noticing, from the point of view of symbolism, that, contrary to the use of the cowry motif on pottery and bronzes, it seldom shows the longitudinal slit of the lower part of the cowry, and as a rule seems to represent the back with its transverse streaks (cf. 汪仁壽 WANG Jên-shou, 金石大字典 *Chin-shih ta tzü-tien*, 27, 21-22; TAKATA, *Kojô-hen*, 99, 1-3). In the etymological vagaries, mostly based on phonetic puns, which started with Liu Hsi's *Shih ming* (end of Han) and found a fresh expression in Lu T'ien's *Pi ya* (second half of the 11th century), *pei* is derived from 背 *pei*, «back». There is no foundation in GILES's statement (*Glossary of Reference*, 211) that it was the pearl oyster which the ancient Chinese used as currency under the name of *pei*, and that the ancient form of this character was a picture of the open shell.

Our information on this early Chinese shell currency is scanty, and is marred by the fact that *pei* was the generic designation of all sorts of shells. The *Erh ya*, an ancient dictionary which is now included among the «Thirteen Classics» and goes back to about the second century B. C., has a passage on *pei* (JUAN Yüan ed., 9, 21 b; cf. KLAPROTH's inaccurate translation in *JA*,