Abstract

The nature of Western Zhou society is still a subject of much debate and remains the key to the periodization of ancient Chinese history. This exercise represents an attempt to collate the views and evidences put forward by the "slave society" school and the "feudal society" school in a concise and systematic manner, and to make a stand on this issue through a critical evaluation of their arguments. On the basis of available documentary and archaeological resources, it is found that the arguments of the "slave society" school are not well formulated. Evidences point to a system with a superstructure of fiefs and clans in the early years of the Western Zhou, together with the "nine squares" economic system and a hierarchy of feudal classes. These form, collectively, a picture of life under the system of feudal gentry and prove that the views of the "feudal society" school are basically acceptable.