

# *To become a god*

Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-  
Divinization in Early China

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# I *Anthropomorphizing the spirits*

## Sacrifice and Divination in Late Bronze Age China

In both strains of the secondary literature discussed in the Introduction, a common reading of the Chinese Bronze Age prevails: humans and spirits were seen as continuous and were perceived to be harmoniously linked. Moreover, this period is repeatedly seen as the formative era in Chinese history, the period when one first finds the assumption of a continuity between the human and divine realms that, the argument goes, thereafter pervades Chinese history.

Weber saw this as a restricting aspect of Chinese culture, as did Roetz, who argued that it ultimately reversed the transcendental breakthrough of the Axial Age. Most of the scholars we looked at, however, from Chang and Mote to Graham and Schwartz, fully celebrated it. But is it true? Were humans and spirits seen as linked in a harmonious continuum? And is it true that this period marks the beginning of a set of assumptions that (for better or worse) predominated in later Chinese history? In order to explore this question, it will be worthwhile to look anew at some of these materials as well as at some of the secondary literature devoted to the Bronze Age.

## The Foundations of Chinese Cosmological and Bureaucratic Thought

One thinker who has tremendously influenced several recent scholars of the Chinese Bronze Age is Mircea Eliade. It was Eliade who popularized the notion that primitive cultures universally attempt to define a sacred space in which they can link Heaven and Earth: "Mountains are often looked on as the place where sky and earth meet, a 'central point' therefore, the point through which the *Axis Mundi* goes, a region impregnated with the sacred, a spot where one can pass from one cosmic zone to another."<sup>1</sup> Building on Granet, Eliade argued that the Chinese capital was perceived along similar lines—as an *axis mundi*, or a symbolic cosmic mountain: "In China, the capital of the perfect sovereign stood at the exact centre of the universe, that is, at the summit of the cosmic mountain."<sup>2</sup>

Paul Wheatley has extended Eliade's argument to formulate a theory of the origins of urban centers in China. Like Eliade, Wheatley argues that Chinese urban centers not only "in traditional China but also throughout most of the rest of Asia" emerged out of a widespread form of cosmological thinking, which he refers to as "astrobiology." Given this cosmology, the goal of ritual specialists was to "establish an ontological link between the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane."<sup>3</sup>

For Wheatley, the figure who has most convincingly worked out the ways in which capitals were constructed according to such cosmological models is Eliade:

Throughout the continent of Asia . . . there was thus a tendency for kingdoms, capitals, temples, shrines, and so forth, to be constructed as replicas of the cosmos. Mircea Eliade has illustrated this point with a plethora of examples drawn primarily from the architecture, epigraphy, and literature of the ancient Near East and India, and numerous others could be adduced from Southeast Asia and Nuclear America. In the astrobiological mode of thought, irregularities in the cosmic order could only

1. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 99–100.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 101, referring to Granet, *La pensée chinoise*, p. 324. See also Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 39. Eliade's reference to Granet is slightly misleading. Granet's concern in the passage that Eliade cites is the notion of the ruler as the microcosm of the universe. As Granet argues on the previous page: "he [the king] is the center, the pivot of the world" (*La pensée chinoise*, p. 323). Eliade would have found better support for his argument in Granet's discussion of time and space in Chinese thought (*La pensée chinoise*, pp. 77–99).

3. Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, pp. 414–16.

be interpreted as misfortunes, so that, if a city were laid out as an *imago mundi* with the cosmogony as paradigmatic model, it became necessary to maintain this parallelism between macrocosmos and microcosmos by participation in the seasonal festivals that constituted man's contribution to the regulation of cyclic time, and by incorporating in the planning a generous amount of symbolism.<sup>4</sup>

The capital thus serves as an *axis mundi*, in the same way as a "shaman's sapling" does.<sup>5</sup>

After describing the "cosmo-magical basis" of urban forms, systematized by Eliade as involving things such as a "parallelism between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos" and necessitating the use of ritual to "maintain the harmony between the world of gods and the world of men," as well as a "participation in the symbolism of the center, as expressed by some form of *axis mundi*,"<sup>6</sup> Wheatley then notes the degree to which Chinese thinking conforms to the Eliadean model:

Indeed, the astrobiological conceptual framework of which these ideas are an expression was structurally conformable to the associative or co-ordinative style of thinking of which the Chinese were perhaps the foremost exponents. In fact, it might even be said that the pre-established harmony of the Chinese universe, which was achieved when all beings spontaneously followed the internal necessities of their own nature, and which led Chinese philosophers to seek reality in relation rather than in substance, represented the most sophisticated expression of astrobiological concepts ever attained by any people.<sup>7</sup>

Not only does China conform to this "traditional"<sup>8</sup> way of thinking, but China is in fact the fullest and most sophisticated expression of it. In this specific sense, Wheatley's argument is quite comparable to Graham's view that China was the civilization that most fully developed the universal mode of correlative thinking.

K. C. Chang has a similar argument, although he builds it on slightly different foundations. In a highly influential article, Chen Mengjia argued that, in the Shang dynasty, kings were shamans.<sup>9</sup> K. C. Chang developed this argument in detail and, as mentioned in the Introduction, saw shamanism as

4. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Chen Mengjia, "Shang dai de shenhua yu wushu."

lying at the heart of Chinese culture.<sup>10</sup> He compiled bodies of evidence that, in his opinion, "point to an ancient Chinese shamanism at the core of ancient Chinese belief and ritual systems, which were preoccupied with the interpenetration of heaven and earth."<sup>11</sup>

Chang did not indicate which scholarly definition of shamanism he had in mind in making these arguments, but he did occasionally refer to Eliade.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as is apparent from the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph, Chang's interpretation of a shamanistic cosmology is identical to Eliade's. Thus, although Wheatley did not argue that the Shang kings were shamans, Chang's reading of early Chinese culture is quite similar to the one developed by Wheatley.

For Chang, divination—the late Shang ritual about which, because of oracle-bone inscriptions, we know the most—was based in shamanism, as was the *bin* (or "hosting") ritual:

Was Shang divination an act of Shang shamanism? The inscriptions make it clear they were directed to long-departed ancestors, and that the diviner served as an intermediary. The inscriptions often contain the word *bin*, which in later classical texts usually means to receive as a guest or to be a guest. In the oracle bone inscriptions, the word is often placed between the word for king and the name of a specific ancestor or of Di; the Supreme God. A phrase consisting of these elements is sometimes interpreted as "the king receives as a guest a specific ancestor," or "the kings receives as a guest the Supreme God." But more likely it means that the king "called upon" a departed ancestor or God. . . . In any event, there was a Shang ritual that enabled the king and the spirits to be together, presumably brought about by some kind of middleman. The act of divination was intended, similarly, to bring the middleman diviner and the spirits together.<sup>13</sup>

The divination ritual itself involved either the ascent of the shaman to the spirits or the descent of the spirits to the shaman:

The descent of the spirits or the ascent of the shaman or king was achieved in a manner not altogether clear. Music and dance were apparently part of the ceremony. Alcoholic drinks were possibly involved: the Shang were notorious drinkers, and many bronze ritual vessels were designed to serve alcoholic beverages. Did the alco-

10. The argument is most fully developed in K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, pp. 44–55.

11. K. C. Chang, "Ancient China and Its Anthropological Significance," p. 164.

12. See, e.g., K. C. Chang, "The Animal in Shang and Chou Bronze Art," p. 543.

13. K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, p. 54.

hol or other substances bring about a trance, during which the shaman engaged in imagined flight? Possibly, but there is as yet no evidence for this. The role of animals in the ritual art of the Shang may provide significant clues.<sup>14</sup>

Chang builds on his theory of shamanism to provide a reading of the origin of the Chinese state comparable to that given by Wheatley. Chang reads the late Neolithic in China as an "Age of Jade *Cong* [jade tubes], the period when shamanism and politics joined forces."<sup>15</sup> Chang reads these jade tubes as symbols of "the interpenetration of heaven and earth" and as thus representing "a microcosmic *axis mundi*."<sup>16</sup> The Chinese Bronze Age, "the period of the further development of shamanistic politics," followed from this.<sup>17</sup> Thus, like Wheatley, Chang's reading is similarly based on the notion that Chinese civilization developed through ritual specialists who attempted to join Heaven and Earth by building a particular *axis mundi*.

Julia Ching has expanded on this point as well. Chinese civilization, she argues, in part came together because of a common inspiration,

that the human being is open to the divine and the spiritual, attuned to the divine and the spiritual, and desirous of becoming one with the divine and the spiritual. I am here referring to the familiar adage that describes the harmony underlining Chinese thought and civilization: Heaven and humanity are one—*tianran heyi* (literally: Heaven and the human being join as one).<sup>18</sup>

Like Hall and Ames, Ching posits the notion of a continuity between Heaven and man as a basic assumption of Chinese thought. But Ching goes on to claim that the origin of this notion lies in shamanistic experience:

It is an adage that I believe to have originated in that very mystic and ecstatic union between the human being and the possessing deity or spirit. This was the primeval experience, the experience of a shaman. It was never forgotten. It has been celebrated in songs, myths and rituals. It was formulated philosophically as an expression of the continuum between the human being as the microcosm of the universe as macrocosm. And this microcosm-macrocosm correspondence has been basic to most of philosophising in China.<sup>19</sup>

14. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

15. K. C. Chang, "An Essay on *Cong*," p. 42.

16. K. C. Chang, "Ancient China and Its Anthropological Significance," p. 158.

17. K. C. Chang, "An Essay on *Cong*," p. 42.

18. Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p. xi.

19. *Ibid.*

The ecstatic experience between the shaman and deity, therefore, provided the primeval experience of Chinese culture, and the correlative cosmology found in later Chinese philosophy was an expression of this experience.

For Ching, this experience is directly comparable to the primeval experiences of oneness that Eliade cites as the root of religious life:

*In illo tempore* ('Once long ago' or 'At that time'). Thus do the Gospels begin their chapters. Thus does Mircea Eliade describe the primeval, sacred time when mankind had its original experience of oneness with the deity. This was an experience recapitulated in myth and reenacted in ritual. Eliade speaks more of India, and of the Australian aborigines, then he does of Chinese civilisation. But his insight, *mutatis mutandis*, is reflected in the Chinese experience as well, as I have just described.<sup>20</sup>

A primordial experience of a linkage between humans and deities exists in all humanity, and the distinctiveness of Chinese civilization lies in its remembrance of this experience.

A very different approach to the study of Bronze Age China has been undertaken by David Keightley. Although he occasionally quotes Eliade,<sup>21</sup> Keightley's understanding of the Shang originates in very different intellectual sources. Accordingly, his interpretation differs markedly from those scholars, such as Wheatley, Chang, and Ching, who base their interpretations of the Shang upon Eliade. In particular, Keightley rejects the shamanistic hypothesis.

In contrast to both K. C. Chang and Julia Ching, David Keightley has convincingly questioned the prevalence (or even presence) of shamanism in Bronze Age China.<sup>22</sup> Keightley's argument, based on an exhaustive review of the evidence, is that Chang's theory of the continuing presence of shamanism in the Shang is wrong. To the contrary, Keightley argues, the transition to a state society involved a routinization and control of whatever shamanistic practices might have existed earlier. Shamanism as discussed by figures like Chang would have "flourished at an earlier, pre-agrarian, hunter-gatherer stage of social development." "The rise of agrarian cultures, accordingly, like that of the Late Shang, has been associated with a reduction of the role played by shamans at the state level, or by its reorientation." Keightley's

20. *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

21. See, e.g., Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," p. 215n18.

22. Keightley, "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors."

critique, therefore, is based on claims concerning what he calls "stages of social development." Since the Late Shang kings were ruling a Bronze Age, agrarian state, he concludes that "the Late Shang kings were not shamans," or "were, at best, 'light' or 'small' shamans, whose involvement in the full shamanic experience was much reduced from what it might once have been at an earlier stage of societal development." They were "bureaucratic mediators" who had "so routinized and disciplined older forms of religious mediation" that only the "civilized trappings" of an earlier shamanism would still have existed.<sup>23</sup>

This argument that the Shang state was orderly, bureaucratic, and "civilized" recurs throughout Keightley's article. Thus, he reads the *bin* ritual according to a similar bureaucratic mentality,<sup>24</sup> concluding, in opposition to Chang, that the ritual was not shamanistic:

The Shang king was the communicator with the hierarchy of the dead; he attracted them to his cult center, in sequence, with rigorously scheduled sacrifices and hosted them with ordered groups of rituals; he communicated with them through the highly formalized techniques of pyromantic divination; he commissioned inscriptions, carved into divination bones, that recorded the whole procedure in detail. Orderly divination, the hosting of guests (whether alive or dead), sacrifice—these were the ways of civilized men dealing, not with the wild and the unknown, not with ecstatic inspiration or trance, but, through ritual and schedule, with their own kin.<sup>25</sup>

Both sacrifice and divination are here explicable as expressions of a rational, bureaucratic, civilized system, rather than of the shamanistic model advanced by Chang.

Keightley's concern with rationalization in the successive stages of social development reveals a strong Weberian influence. And, like Weber, Keightley is interested in how the religious orientations he finds in the Shang played out in later Chinese history. So, like Chang, Keightley sees the Shang as the origin of later Chinese cultural orientations, although he and Chang read this history very differently. As Keightley argues in his seminal "The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture": "It is the argument of this exploratory essay that the secular values and institutions representing the great tradition of the Zhou and Han dynasties were characterized to a significant extent by habits of thinking and

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 816-17, 820.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 808-14. See also Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," p. 218.

25. Keightley, "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors," p. 813.

acting that had been sanctified at least a millennium earlier by the religious logic of the Shang theology and cult.<sup>26</sup>

For Keightley, however, what one finds in the Shang is not Chang's shamanism but Weber's vision: "The radical world optimism which Weber identified as a central Confucian value was already present in Shang religious belief."<sup>27</sup> As he elaborates: "In Weberian terms, then, we can refer to the hierarchical, contractual, rational, routinized, mathematical, compartmentalized nature of Shang ancestor worship as bureaucratic."<sup>28</sup> The Shang, then, was the origin of a bureaucratic mentality that Weber—correctly, in Keightley's view—saw as a dominant aspect of later Chinese culture. For Keightley, the oracle-bone inscriptions reveal a bureaucratic mentality that both routinized whatever shamanistic tendencies might have existed in the Neolithic period and initiated the "radical world optimism" that Keightley, following Weber, sees as characterizing later Chinese culture.

Keightley's position leads him to a view of urban genesis somewhat different from that given by Wheatley. He refers quite favorably to Wheatley's emphasis on the importance of religion in the genesis of the Chinese state.<sup>29</sup> But Keightley reads the significance of religion in China differently. If Wheatley is working from Eliade, Keightley is working from Weber. After describing the importance of religion for the Shang state, Keightley continues:

There is nothing uniquely Chinese in this account so far. Religious belief has played similar roles in the genesis of other states. [Keightley provides another reference here to Wheatley.] Significant in the Chinese case, however, were the modes of conceptualization central to the theology. For it is in the logical relationships that Shang theology postulated as basic, and in the emotions associated with those relationships, that we find the characteristic elements which influenced the development of political culture in Zhou and later times. We find, in fact, a paradoxical situation: a Shang state permeated with a commitment to the ancestors, strongly religious in the totality of its demands; and yet we find that the commitment can be characterized as nonreligious, nonmysterious, and—because so explicitly goal directed—rational in its logic. The logic may be characterized, in fact, with appropriate cautions to which I shall return, as "bureaucratic" in Max Weber's sense of the term.<sup>30</sup>

26. Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," pp. 211–12.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 216. See also Keightley, "Clean Hands and Shining Helmets," p. 42.

28. Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," p. 216.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

30. *Ibid.*

If Wheatley (like Chang and Ching in this particular sense) saw the significance of China as lying in its embodiment of, in the fullest sense, a primordial cosmological emphasis on the linkage of the human and sacred realms, Keightley sees the significance in the peculiar bureaucratic logic of Shang religion.<sup>31</sup>

However, as we saw in the Introduction, the Weberian reading of Chinese culture does share a number of similarities with the cultural-essentialist model underlying (in somewhat different ways) Wheatley's and Chang's interpretations. Thus, although Keightley rejects the shamanism hypothesis for early China and although he does implicitly revise Wheatley's interpretation, he also sees humans and divinities as harmoniously linked in early China. He explicitly compares this with the situation in early Greece: "Greek epics also derive much of their complexity and dramatic tension from the frank recognition that unresolvable conflicts exist in the world. This fundamental assumption is symbolized in the conflict between the values and wills of men and gods." According to Keightley, no such discord between gods and men can be found in early China: "There was little discord between gods and men. . . . The Chinese knew neither a Prometheus nor a Zeus."<sup>32</sup>

Like Wheatley, Chang, and Ching, therefore, Keightley sees in the Shang the origins of what he deems to be dominant orientations of Chinese thought. Moreover, although his reading of these dominant orientations is based on a Weberian interpretation and although he (very convincingly, in my opinion) rejects the shamanism hypothesis, he, too, emphasizes a contrast between China and Greece based on the tragic cosmology of the former and the optimistic cosmology of the latter. Indeed, Keightley's critique of Chang was aimed almost entirely at pointing out the lack of any evidence for ecstatic techniques and ascensions. But the most important issue for Chang was his claim that, in the Shang, humans and gods were linked in harmony—and Keightley, despite his enormous differences from Chang,

31. Keightley's argument is foreshadowed in a review of Wheatley's book that Keightley wrote some five years before the article under discussion. Overall the review is favorable, but he does argue that the next step in a comparative inquiry should be to stress differences as well as similarities between China and the rest of the world. See "Religion and the Rise of Urbanism," p. 529.

32. Keightley, "Clean Hands and Shining Helmets," pp. 41–42.

accepts this as well. As was noted in the Introduction, the Weberian perspective and the cultural-essentialist perspective (Keightley and Chang respectively, in this instance) read early China in similar ways.

Thus, although Chang and Ching emphasize the shamanistic union of human and deity in the oracle bones, and Keightley emphasizes rational, bureaucratic hierarchy, all three agree that Shang divination and sacrifice practices reveal an assumption of harmony between humans and divinities. In what follows, I question parts of this reading. In doing so, I follow David Keightley's research on Shang oracle-bone inscriptions closely and, in particular, build directly on Keightley's arguments concerning what he calls "making the ancestors."<sup>33</sup> But I argue that acceptance of Keightley's arguments opens to question some of the notions of harmony that Keightley himself, as well as so many other scholars, want to read into the Shang.

### The Agon of Humans and Spirits in the Late Shang

The main god of the pantheon was Di,<sup>34</sup> who controlled the wind and rain:

Divining: "Crackmaking on *bingyin* [day 3], Zheng divining: This eleventh month, Di will order the rain."<sup>35</sup>

Divining: "This eleventh month, Di will not order the rain." (Heji 5,658 正)

Divining: "On the next *guimao* [day 40], Di will order winds." (Heji 672 正)

The very existence of these divinations implies that there is no belief here that Di will necessarily give rain when humans need it.

Indeed, Di often created disasters for the king:

Di will make [for] the king misfortune. (Heji 14,182)

As did other spirits:

Que divining: "Huan [the Huan River] will make [for] this city misfortune." (Heji 7,854)

One of the concerns in divination was thus to discover whether the divine powers intended to send down misfortune:

33. David Keightley, "The Making of the Ancestors."

34. For the exact nature of Di, see below, pp. 48–49.

35. Guo and Hu, *Jiaguwen heji* 5,658 正 (hereinafter cited in the text as Heji)

Crackmaking on *xinmao*, Nei divining: "The king will have the making of misfortune." (Heji 536)

Crackmaking on *xinmao*, Zheng divining: "The king will not have the making of misfortune." (Heji 536)

Crackmaking on *wuxu*, Bin divining: "This city will be without the having of misfortune." (Heji 7,852)

Divining: "This city will have the sending down of misfortune." (Heji 7,852)

A constant give-and-take existed between human actions and divine powers. In a world controlled by spirits, certain human actions were seen as coming into contact with divine powers, and it was thus around these actions that sacrifices, rituals, and divinations came to be associated. The goal of these activities was to influence, mollify, and determine the will of the divine powers, to persuade them to grant assistance, and to prevent them from making disasters.

Take, for example, the issue of making a settlement. Following are a number of inscriptions from Period I:<sup>36</sup>

Divining: "The king will make a settlement, [for if he does] Di will approve." (Heji 14,201)

Divining: "The king ought not to make a settlement, [for if he does not] Di will approve." (Heji 14,201)

Crackmaking on *renzi*, Zheng divining: "We will make a settlement, [for if we do] Di will not oppose." Approved. Third month. (Heji 14,206)

In order to make a settlement, a divination must be performed to determine the will of Di. It seems plausible to hypothesize that founding a settlement involved bringing divinely controlled natural elements into the human realm and required divination to determine if the action would be acceptable to Di. Contrary to Wheatley, the making of a settlement did not involve correlative concerns or a notion of an *axis mundi*. The concerns were based, instead, on a potentially agonistic relationship between humans and Di: Di controlled

36. Period I is Dong Zuobin's term for the earliest grouping of oracle-bone inscriptions, dating to the reign of Wu Ding. For convenient summaries of the issues surrounding the periodization of oracle-bone inscriptions, see Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, pp. 91–133; Shaughnessy, "Recent Approaches to Oracle-Bone Periodization"; and Li Xueqin and Peng Yushang, *Yinxu jiagu fenqi yanjiu*.

the land, and humans had to utilize rituals to make that land available for human use.<sup>37</sup>

Agriculture was another repeated topic of concern in the early portions of the corpus of oracle bones. Like the making of a settlement, the preparation of fields involved a human appropriation of natural elements controlled by divine powers. As we find in two Period I inscriptions:

Command Yin to prepare the great fields.

Ought not command Yin to prepare the great fields. (*Heji* 9,472)

The divinations reflect an attempt to determine whether this act of preparing the fields, of readying them for human appropriation, was acceptable to the divine powers.

Similar concerns underlie the opening of a field for agriculture. The following is a set of inscriptions located on a single scapula. Reading from bottom to top:<sup>38</sup>

On *guihai*, divining: "At PN open the fields."<sup>39</sup>

On *guihai*, divining: "The king will command the Many Yin to open the fields in the west, [for if they do, we] shall receive millet."

On *guihai* divining: "The Many Yin ought not to do [this], [for if they do not, we] shall receive millet."

On *wuchen* divining: "We will pray for millet, [starting] from Shang Jia. We will offer the *liao* [burning sacrifice]."

37. Indeed, I would question not only Wheatley's reading of the Shang material but his use of a correlative model to account for the rise of cities in general. As noted above, Wheatley's argument concerning the *axis mundi* was based on the work of Eliade. Eliade in turn based his arguments on the Pan-Babylonian scholars—with the crucial difference that the Pan-Babylonian scholars saw notions of the sacred center as diffused from the Near East, whereas Eliade saw them as a universal aspect of what he called primitive cultures. In other words, the entire notion of an *axis mundi* came originally from the Pan-Babylonian scholars' reading of Near Eastern materials, and Eliade, and later Wheatley, then universalized the notion.

However, the existence of the notion of an *axis mundi* in the Near Eastern materials has been called into question as well. As Jonathan Z. Smith (*To Take Place*, p. 16) has argued: "There is no pattern of the 'Center' in the sense that the Pan-Babylonians and Eliade described it in the Near Eastern materials." Thus, beyond the problems I have raised for Wheatley's reading of Bronze Age China, I would question the entire Eliadean argument on which Wheatley based his comparative analysis.

38. As is common for scapulas. See Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, p. 52.

39. Here and below, the abbreviation "PN" is used to refer to an unidentified place name.

On *guihai* divining: "We will pray for millet, [starting] from Shang Jia."

On *yichou* divining: "The king will order the opening of the fields at Jing."

"At PN open the fields." (*Heji* 33,209)

Thus, a successful millet harvest depended in part on whether the Many Yin opened the fields in the west: according to the third inscription in the set, they would receive millet only if they did not prepare the western fields. Here again, the human appropriation of a field could potentially upset the divine powers.

Plowing involved similar issues:

Crackmaking on . . . , divining: "The multitudes will do the plowing. There will be no loss. . . ." (*Heji* 8)

As did cutting grasses for hay:

Divining: "Do the grass-cutting [i.e., make hay]. The rain will not . . ." (*Heji* 13,793)

Moreover, the harvests themselves were controlled by divine powers:

On *guihai*, divining: "The Many Yin ought not undertake the harvesting of the millet." (*Heji* 33,209)

*Jiawu*, divining: "Today we will *sui* [sacrifice], [for if we do, we] will receive millet [i.e., a good harvest]." (*Heji* 2,124)

The goal of these divinations was thus to determine whether the divine powers would allow humans to appropriate natural resources.

But just as divine actions affect the human realm, so human actions have repercussions in the divine world. I explore this point more fully below; here it is enough to point out that a recurrent concern in the inscriptional material is to determine the proper amount of sacrifices at any given time that will influence the divine powers in a way favorable for human concerns:

The king will set forth jades to Zu Yi, [give] the burnt sacrifice offering of three penned sheep, and cleave three great . . . This was used. (*Heji* 32,535)

. . . will make the *ding* sacrifice at the two shrines, [for if he does,] the king will receive assistance. (*Heji* 2,345)

Crackmaking on *bingzi*: "In sacrificing [to] Zu Yi, we will offer the *ding* [sacrifice], [for if we do,] the king will receive assistance." (*Heji* 27,226)

The sacrifices are aimed at gaining assistance for the king: making a particular sacrifice, it is hoped, will result in divine aid. The purpose of the divina-

tion was thus apparently to determine if a particular sacrifice, offered at a particular time, would indeed have the desired effect.

A similar concern with controlling the divine spirits can be seen in the frequency of exorcism rituals in the inscriptional corpus. If the divinations concerning agriculture and settlements were aimed at making divinely controlled land available for human appropriation, exorcism involved driving the spirits away from the human realm altogether.

Divining: "Make an exorcism [to eliminate] Fu Hao's trouble." (*Heji* 13,646)

At times, this ritual form of controlling and managing the divine forces could encompass large portions of the pantheon:

Crackmaking on *yihai*, Bin divining: "Make the great exorcism [starting] from Shang Jia." (*Heji* 14,860)

There is, thus, in the late Shang, a constant agon between humans and spirits, with spirits controlling natural phenomena and humans attempting to appropriate aspects of the natural world for their own benefit. This results in seemingly endless attempts by humans to placate, coax, and influence the spirits through sacrifice and divination. And the attempt seems often to fail: the spirits are capricious and far more powerful than the rituals humans use to control them.

### Placing the Ancestors: The Construction of the Shang Pantheon

The obvious questions, then, are: What precisely are these divine powers, wherein lies their capriciousness, and how precisely are human rituals supposed to control them?<sup>40</sup> A significant portion—but by no means all—of the pantheon consists of ancestral spirits.

The construction of the pantheon begins with an individual's death:<sup>41</sup>

Crackmaking on *bingshen*, Chu divining: "In making Xiao Si's day, let it be a *gui*." Eighth month. (*Heji* 23,712)<sup>42</sup>

40. My understanding of these issues has been helped greatly by Sarah Allan's *The Shape of the Turtle*.

41. My argument here follows the interpretation given by, and set of inscriptions compiled by, Li Xueqin in his "Ping *Yinxu buci zongshu*."

42. The same divination is found on *Heji* 23,714; *Heji* 23,713 has the same divination, but without the *ri*.

The divination is an attempt to determine the temple name of Xiao Si, as well as the day on which he or she receives cult.<sup>43</sup> And the following inscription reveals that Xiao Si (still being referred to by the name he or she had while alive) is venerated on a *gui* day:

Crackmaking on *renwu*, Da divining: "On the next *giuwei*, offer to Xiao Si three penned sheep and X-sacrifice one ox." (*Heji* 23,719)

Once the day on which the ancestor will receive sacrifices has been determined, the ancestor then receives a temple name based on that day. Thus, for example, Father Yi receives cult on an *yi* day:

Crackmaking on *jiachen* [day 41], Que divining: "On the next *yisi* [day 42], make an offering to Father Yi of penned sheep." Use. (*Heji* 1,402 ⅡE)

This pattern holds throughout our sources. The rituals following death, therefore, involved the attempt to make the spirit of the deceased into an ancestor and to place that ancestor within a ritual system designed by the living. As Keightley has brilliantly argued, the Shang were "making" their ancestors.<sup>44</sup> The deceased were given temple names, granted a day on which to receive sacrifices, and placed within the sacrificial cycle. Xiao Si moved from being a dead—and presumably highly powerful and potentially dangerous—spirit to being an ancestor with a defined place. In short, the point of these rituals was to place the deceased in

43. I am here following David Keightley's interpretation of temple names. For a brief summary, see his *The Ancestral Sacrifice*, pp. 33–35. Keightley was reacting against K. C. Chang's argument that the temple name reflected different descent groups within the Shang lineage; see Chang's "T'ien kan: A Key to the History of the Shang."

The evidence given here—clearly demonstrating that the temple names were given posthumously—should be sufficient to disprove the theory that the names represented different descent groups. It should further be mentioned that one of the circumstantial pieces of evidence Chang used in defense of his hypothesis was Dong Zuobin's alternation of Old and New Schools of diviners (for Dong's theory, see his "Yinxu wenzi yibian xu"). Chang argued that this alternation was based on a regular alternation of the kingship between the *yi* and *ding* descent groups. Here too, however, the evidence does not support Chang. Recent scholarship has fairly successfully questioned Dong's reading of alternating Old and New School diviners; see, e.g., Lin Yun, "Xiaotun nandi fajue yu Yinxu jiagu duandai"; Li Xueqin, "Xiaotun nandi jiagu yu jiagu fenqi"; and Qiu Xigui, "Lun Li zu buci de shidai." Chang's theory, therefore, is no longer tenable.

44. Keightley, "The Making of the Ancestors."

the proper hierarchy of sacrifices. And it was a place determined by the living.

The entire pantheon of Shang ancestors was built up through such a process. By adding together the clues from the inscriptional evidence, scholars have been able to work out the entire ancestral hierarchy.<sup>45</sup> Shang Jia was the highest ancestor of the Shang, and Da Yi was Cheng Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty, according to later accounts from the Zhou. The hierarchy also seems to reflect the power possessed by each ancestor: the older the ancestors, the more power they possessed.

Thus, sufferers of relatively minor things like toothaches, sicknesses, and dreams would divine to recently deceased ancestors to see if the sicknesses in question were caused by curses:

Divining: "It is Father Yi who is cursing Fu Hao." (Heji 6,032 正)

Divining: "It is not Father Yi who is cursing Fu Hao." (Heji 6,032 正)

Divining: "As for Fu Hao's dream, it is not Father Yi." (Heji 201 正)

If such divinations reveal that the problem is indeed a curse from one of the ancestors, then sacrifices would be made to dispel the curse:

Crackmaking on *wuyin* [day 15], Bin divining: "Exorcise Fu Jing to Mother Geng." (Heji 2,725)

"... Mother Geng exorcise Fu Hao's tooth."

"[We] ought not to Mother Geng exorcise."

"Exorcise the misfortune to Father Yi." (Heji 2,194)

Crackmaking on *yimao*, Que divining: "Exorcise Fu Hao to Father Yi. Cleave sheep, offer pigs, and make a promissory offering of ten penned sheep." (Heji 271)

All these divinations and sacrifices are aimed at the generation immediately above the living.

But, for topics like the harvest, higher ancestors would usually be invoked. The following divination begins with the highest ancestor, Shang Jia:

On *guihai* divining: "We will pray for millet [starting] from Shang Jia." (Heji 33,209)

45. Much of the crucial work for this was done by Dong Zuobin and published in his "Yinxu wenzi yibian xu." On the hierarchy itself, see the useful summary in Keightley, *The Ancestral Sacrifice*, pp. 98-103.

Similarly, military campaigns would involve significant portions of the pantheon:

Divining: "This spring the king will not ally with Wang Cheng to attack Xia Wei [for if he does,] the upper and lower [divine powers] will not approve. It will not be we who will be receiving the divine assistance." (Heji 6,506)

The ancestors, therefore, appear to grow more powerful the longer they are dead. The generation of ancestors immediately above the living can curse specific individuals with sicknesses, toothaches, and nightmares, whereas the higher powers control phenomena that affect the entire Shang people, such as harvests and military campaigns.

And this hierarchy provides the context for understanding the *bin* ritual—the ritual discussed by both Chang and Keightley. If Chang read the ritual as an example of shamanism, Keightley read it as revealing a proto-bureaucratic sense of hierarchy. Let us look at the evidence:

Ought not entertain. (Heji 33,796)

Crackmaking on *wu* . . . Que divining: "We ought not make the entertainment [ritual]." (Heji 15,191)

Crackmaking on *yichou*, Que divining: "We ought not perform the entertainment [ritual]." (Heji 15,179)

Divining: "Cheng will be a guest to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Da Jia will be a guest to Cheng." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Cheng will not be a guest to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Da Jia will not be a guest to Cheng." (Heji 1,402 正)

Crackmaking on *jiachen* [day 41], Que divining: "Xia yi will be a guest to . . ." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Xia Yi will not be a guest to Cheng." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Da . . . will be a guest to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Xia Yi . . . to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Da Jia will be a guest to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

Divining: "Xia Yi will not be a guest to Di." (Heji 1,402 正)

The *bin* ritual involved attempts by one figure to entertain or treat another. The "figures" involved were humans, ancestors, or Di. The crucial point, as Keightley has argued so effectively, is that the figures in question are ar-

ranged hierarchically: humans entertain the most recently deceased ancestors, and the most recently deceased ancestors entertain the still earlier ancestors, who in turn entertain Di.<sup>46</sup>

This hierarchy of ritual action reveals a hierarchy of power, since the recently deceased ancestors were seen as weaker than the older ones, who were in turn weaker than the nature gods and Di. As Keightley has demonstrated: "In terms of functions, Di, the Nature Powers, and a few of the Former Lords, like Huang Yin, tended to affect the dynasty or the country as a whole, influencing the weather, the crops, and warfare; by contrast, . . . the ancestors were more directly concerned with the king's personal activities: his illnesses, his well-being, and the fault-free management of the rituals."<sup>47</sup> And the hierarchy also reveals a hierarchy of pliability—at least from the point of view of the living: the more recently deceased ancestors were seen as more amenable to human ritual promptings. To quote Keightley again: "The Shang conceived of the Nature and the Ancestral Powers as occupying a hierarchy of negotiability, with the close ancestors and ancestresses of the pantheon being most open to this kind of pledging, and the higher Powers, both ancestral and natural, being less approachable in this way."<sup>48</sup>

The goal of the ritual was thus to prompt the weaker ancestors to host the more powerful, all the way up to Di. The ritual, then, served two purposes: it maintained the proper hierarchy of the pantheon, and it used the lower, more pliable ancestors, to mollify the higher, more powerful ancestors—ultimately including even Di.

But then who—or what—is Di? Several scholars have tried to argue that Di is the supreme ancestor. Robert Eno even argues that Di is in fact a collective name for the entire pantheon of ancestors.<sup>49</sup> But I would argue against Eno's reading. It is difficult to read the *bin* ritual inscriptions meaningfully if we interpret Di as a collective name. But then the question still stands: If Di is a singular being, then what is he? The evidence for answering the question is limited. But it is clear that Di is more powerful than the other ancestors. He is the most powerful of the gods and controls the wind and rains. It could be argued that Di is very much like an ancestor: as we

have already seen, the more distant ancestors are more powerful. At the same time, however, he is not part of the sacrificial pantheon: he does not have a temple name, and he does not have a designated day in the sacrificial cycle. Indeed, Di never receives sacrifices at all.<sup>50</sup> As the most powerful god, Di seems relatively uncontrollable by human ritual.

The most reasonable hypothesis is that Di was not recognized as part of the Shang ancestral line, and he was probably not an ancestor at all. And this may in part explain the motivation for the *bin* ritual. If the human ability to influence Di directly is limited, humans can nonetheless attempt to influence the lower ancestors, who can influence the higher ancestors, who can in turn influence Di. In other words, they can create a hierarchical chain that ultimately includes Di.

We thus find inscriptions such as:

Crackmaking on *guichou* [day 50], Zheng divining: "We will dwell in this settlement and perform the great entertainment ritual, [for if we do,] Di will approve." Third month. (Heji 14,206 IE)

Crackmaking on *guichou* [day 50], Zheng divining: "Di will not approve." (Heji 14,206 IE)

To determine whether Di approves of the Shang's continued dwelling in a particular settlement, a "great entertainment ritual" is offered. The term "great X ritual" is used in Shang inscriptional literature to refer to a ritual encompassing the entire pantheon. The "great exorcism," for example, includes all ancestors, beginning with Shang Jia:

Crackmaking on *yihai*, Bin divining: "Make the great exorcism [starting] from Shang Jia." (Heji 14,860)

It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the great entertainment ritual involved the full pantheon, including the entertaining of Di by the higher ancestors. Thus, the way to gain the support of Di for the continued occupation of the settlement was through the *bin* ritual: Di could not be coerced into accepting the Shang order through sacrifices, but the pantheon could be employed to coerce him through the *bin* ritual.

46. Keightley, "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors," pp. 808–14. See also Hu Houxuan, "Yin buci zhong de shangdi he wangdi," p. 89.

47. Keightley, "The Making of the Ancestors," p. 9.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

49. Eno, "Was There a High God Ti in Shang Religion?"

50. There are no inscriptions in which Di clearly receives sacrifice. Shima Kunio has attempted to argue that Di did in fact receive sacrifices, but his evidence is unconvincing; see his *Inkyo bokuji kenkyū*, pp. 195–97. For a careful, and convincing, refutation of Shima's argument, see Eno, "Was There a High God Ti in Shang Religion?" pp. 7–8.

These attempts to use the *bin* ritual to create and maintain a proper hierarchy of non-ancestral powers can further be seen in the entertainment of nature spirits such as the sun and the Yellow River:

Crackmaking on *yisi* [day 42]: "The king will entertain Ri [the sun]. (*Heji* 32,181)

He will not entertain the sun." (*Heji* 32,181)

Crackmaking on *xinsi* [day 18], divining: "The king will entertain He [the Yellow River] and offer a *liao* [burnt-offering sacrifice]."<sup>51</sup>

Crackmaking on *renzi* [day 49], Lü divining: "The king will entertain Ri [the sun]. It will not rain." (*Heji* 22,539)

In contrast to the treatment of Di, the king himself can directly entertain these nature powers. But, as we saw with Di, the *bin* ritual appears to connect the non-ancestral divinities with ancestral powers:

Crackmaking on *guiwei* [day 20], Que divining: "On the next *jiashen* [day 21], the king will entertain Shang Jia and Ri." The king prognosticated and said: "It will be an auspicious entertainment ritual." They really were entertained. (*Heji* 1,248 正)

The purpose of the ritual was to entertain Shang Jia, the highest Shang ancestor, alongside the sun. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that natural powers as well were being brought into and harmonized with the ancestral powers. Dead humans are made into ancestors, and non-ancestral powers are then brought into accord with these ancestors. And, in the case of Di, the ancestors themselves are called upon to bring Di into the pantheon.

### Transforming the Spirits: Sacrifice in the Shang

So what does this mean for our understanding of the *bin* ritual? I would agree with Keightley that Shang ritual process should not be read as shamanistic. Humans do not ascend to the heavens, nor do the ancestors descend into humans. The ancestors certainly descend to receive their sacrifices, but there is nothing shamanistic about that.

But I would not follow Keightley in reading this as proto-bureaucratic. And my disagreement comes down to a question concerning Keightley's argument about sacrifices in the Shang. For Keightley, "Shang religious practice rested upon the *do ut des* ('I give, in order that thou shouldst give') belief

51. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, Kaogu yanjiusuo, *Xiaotun nandi jiagu*, 1,116.

that correct ritual procedure by the Shang kings would result in favors conferred by Di."<sup>52</sup> A similar reading of Shang sacrifice underlies Poo Mu-chou's understanding:

In the [Shang] inscriptions one senses that the diviner addressed the deities, or ancestors, as if they were immediately accessible. In fact, since man believed so firmly that the deities and ancestors actually extended care and power to the propitiator directly, the world of extra-human powers in the conception of the Shang diviners should be seen as having been either conterminous with the human world or a continuous extension of it.<sup>53</sup>

The ancestors, deities, and humans are on the same plane, and sacrifice allows for a proper relationship between them: "A person's relationship with the powers, moreover, can be described as *do ut des*."<sup>54</sup> Keightley and (following Keightley) Poo Mu-chou are arguing that insofar as the Shang divinational and sacrificial experts saw humans and divinities as continuous, a simple bureaucratic operation of giving and taking was set up between them: one gives in order to receive. In making this argument, Keightley is reading China according to a sacrificial model proposed by the early theorists of sacrifice—Edward Tylor, Robertson Smith, and, to some extent, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss.<sup>55</sup> All these theorists read sacrifice as a gift from human to god. And Weber lies in this tradition as well. Weber reads the sacrificial *do ut des* as a rationalization of magic<sup>56</sup>—just as he reads the this-worldly orientation of later Chinese religion.

In fact, however, Hubert and Mauss's argument contains more than just a discussion of sacrifice as a gift. Indeed, as many have argued,<sup>57</sup> the definitions of sacrifice as a gift that still appear in the work are the weakest parts of the argument. Other parts of Hubert and Mauss's analysis are far more powerful and may prove more helpful for analyzing Shang sacrificial practices than the gift model. The main idea behind their argument is that sacrifice is a transformative act. They read the act as involving a series of trans-

52. Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," pp. 214–15.

53. Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, p. 28.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*; William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*; Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*.

56. Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1: 424.

57. See, in particular, the excellent discussion by Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice*, pp. 64–66.

formations of sacralization and desacralization between the sacrificer,<sup>58</sup> the victim, and the divine powers involved. Thus, for example, Hubert and Mauss argue that the sacrificial victim is sacralized by the process, as, therefore, is the sacrificer.<sup>59</sup> Sacrifices throughout the world are then read as a series of permutations of this model; Hubert and Mauss focus in particular on which transformations are emphasized and what function these transformations have in the society under discussion. Of particular interest to our current concerns is their description of one aspect of the Vedic soma sacrifice: "Thus not only is it in sacrifice that some gods are born, it is by sacrifice that all sustain their existence. So it has ended by appearing as their essence, their origin, and their creator."<sup>60</sup> In other words, gods as well as the sacrificer can be transformed by sacrifices.

And, in fact, Keightley's argument concerning the "making of ancestors" points precisely to this transformative notion of sacrifice rather than to the bureaucratic *do ut des* framework within which both he and Poo Mu-chou attempt to interpret Shang sacrificial action. The Shang sacrificers were not assuming that human and divine powers were continuous or that the giving of a gift would result in benefits from the gods. They were rather transforming spirits into figures who would operate within a humanly defined hierarchy. In other words, sacrifice did not rest upon the "belief" that correct ritual procedures would result in favors. Rather, it rested on the attempt to create a system in which this would be the case.

Thus, when dead beings are given a temple name and placed within the sacrificial hierarchy, they are being formed into ancestors who will, the living hope, act on their behalf. And the *bin* ritual not only maintains this hierarchy but also (again, it is hoped) brings Di into it as well. And all these divine powers are then called on to act on behalf of the living. Perhaps, then, instead of representing a bureaucratic mentality, the ritual involved an attempt to create hierarchy. Hierarchy was not an assumption; it was a goal.

I would argue that the guiding assumption behind Shang sacrificial action is that if left to their own devices, the spirits (Di, nature spirits, and deceased humans) do not act in the best interests of humans. Indeed, the

58. The "sacrificer," according to the Hubert/Mauss model, is the "subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice thus accrue, or who undergoes its effects" (Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, p. 10).

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-49.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

assumption seemed to be that spirits were capricious and quite possibly malicious. And they were more powerful than humans: they control natural phenomena, and they have the ability to send disasters.

Accordingly, humans had to, within the limits of their powers, use rituals to place these spirits in a hierarchical system, in which (it was hoped) the spirits would further the interests of the living. The Shang ancestral cult represented an attempt to forge nature spirits and the ghosts of deceased humans into a single, unified system. The deceased humans would become ancestral spirits, defined by their roles in a hierarchy, and both nature spirits and nonrelated yet nonetheless powerful deceased humans would be placed in this hierarchy as well. Moreover, these ancestral spirits would themselves serve to keep the non-ancestral spirits in place.

And, from the evidence in the divinatory material, it is clear that these efforts often failed. Even with the sacrificial system in place, the spirits frequently, at whim, created problems for the living, and the living then had to divine to determine what additional sacrifices would mollify the spirit in question. Spirits, in short, were more powerful than mere human rituals, and Di and the other (natural and ancestral) spirits would frequently act contrary to the interests of humans. Thus, humans were neither collaborating with the spirits nor assuming that their rituals would work. Instead, they were attempting, within their limited powers, to use rituals to create an ordered, helpful pantheon of spirits.

My full argument, then, is that adopting Keightley's insight about "making ancestors" leads to a questioning of Keightley's own Weberian framework. If correct, this would mean that there was no assumption of a harmonious collaboration of man and spirit in the late Shang. The need to make spirits of the deceased into ancestors and to bring nature deities and Di itself into that pantheon shows, among other things, a belief that spirits are *not* inherently inclined to act on behalf of the living. And the divinational record reveals a belief that the ritual system often did not work anyway.

This reading of the inscriptions implies that a this-worldly optimism did not prevail in the Shang and that humans and spirits were not seen as inherently connected. On the contrary: the specific concern of the Shang cult was, in a sense, to anthropomorphize the spirit world: to make the deceased into proper ancestors and to have the ancestors guide the nature spirits and Di. The reigning assumption, then, would appear to be that the relations between humans and spirits were, without this ritual action, agonistic and po-

tentially dangerous; the goal was thus to domesticate the sprits and thereby render them controllable.

### A Moral Cosmos? The Zhou Conquest and the Mandate of Heaven

In the mid-eleventh century BC, the Shang fell to the Zhou armies led by King Wu. This would become one of the defining moments in early Chinese history. But was it just a military victory of one state over another, or did it represent a fundamental change in the perceived relations between humans and spirits in early China?

Scholars who emphasize that the Shang was foundational for later Chinese culture argue, not surprisingly, against a fundamental break. (Both Chang and Wheatley, for example, quote from Zhou texts in discussing Shang materials.) But several scholars have tried to argue, on the contrary, that the Zhou conquest does indeed represent a rupture. Indeed, there is a clear pattern: scholars who see a substantial break tend to find in the Western Zhou the very things that Wheatley, Chang, Ching, and Keightley tried (in my opinion unsuccessfully) to find in the Shang: a belief in an inherent and harmonious link between divine powers and humanity. For example, Eno recently described the Shang/Zhou transition in the following terms: "Whereas the Shang king had been merely chief priest to the high gods, the Mandate of Heaven theory made the Zhou king Tian's [Heaven's] executor on earth.<sup>61</sup> Tian and the king were now virtually indistinguishable."<sup>62</sup> In a footnote to this statement, Eno further remarks: "This had not been the case with the Shang. There are inscriptions that portray the Shang high god Di

61. Heaven was the high god of the Zhou, just as Di was the high god of the Shang. However, as we shall see, the Zhou presented Heaven and Di as the same deity and used the two terms interchangeably.

Shima Kunio (*Inkyo bokuji kenkyū*, pp. 174–86) and, following him, Robert Eno (*The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 183–86) have tried to argue that Heaven does in fact appear in the Shang inscriptions, represented by the graph *ding* 丁. I find the argument unpersuasive. The word *ding* simply refers to the *ding* day, and I would read the inscriptions about sacrifices *yu ding* 于丁 as simply meaning sacrifices "on a *ding* day," or "to *ding* ancestors" (i.e., ancestors sacrificed to on *ding* days), not "to Heaven." As Eno (*The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 186) himself points out: "Criteria for identifying which inscriptions use the graph as a cyclical sign and which as Tian need to be developed, otherwise the argument that all instances of □ in the sense of a deity refer to *ding*-sign kings remains plausible."

62. Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 23.

as the potential adversary of the king and the state."<sup>63</sup> The potentially arbitrary aspects of divinity in the Shang are thus replaced by an inherent linkage in the Zhou. Similarly, Lester James Bilsky, in his survey of early Chinese religion, has argued that, in the early Western Zhou: "The gods and spirits were thought of as immortal beings who invariably acted according to the ideals of perfection and who, thus, inhabited a world of ideal perfection."<sup>64</sup> Both Eno and Bilsky, in other words, find in the Western Zhou a linkage between humanity and divinity comparable to that which K. C. Chang and others have found in the Shang.

David Pankenier, in what is perhaps the most fascinating of recent attempts to discuss the Shang-Zhou transition, provides an account that builds on the work of many of the scholars discussed above. Pankenier's stated goal in the essay is to provide "an account of the ancient Chinese politico-religious imagination according to which macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondences legitimated the social order."<sup>65</sup> Pankenier sees the Shang/Zhou transition as a crucial moment in the development of this cosmological view. To make this argument, Pankenier claims that the Shang did *not* think according to such a cosmology. To the contrary, the late Shang—the period covered in the oracle-bone materials—reveals a lack of interest in cosmology and astrology:

The window on the world of the Shang provided by the oracle bone inscriptions, formulaic and limited in scope though they are, seems skewed by the particular preoccupations of late Shang divinatory theology. Cosmology and astrology figure almost incidentally, the natural powers finally not at all, in a magico-religious practice largely devoted during the final decades of the dynasty to the routine observances of the ancestral cult. (p. 174)

In contrast, Pankenier argues, the Zhou developed a view based on the cosmological linking of the king with Heaven.

When put in these terms, the argument seems directly based on the rationalization models discussed in the Introduction—the arguments, found in works from Weber to those committed to a general "religion to philosophy" framework, for a gradual shift in early China from a magical view to a

63. *Ibid.*, p. 212n25.

64. Bilsky, *The State Religion of Ancient China*, 1: 62.

65. Pankenier, "The Cosmo-Political Background of Heaven's Mandate," p. 122 (hereinafter cited in the text).

rational one. Indeed, Pankenier at one point even describes the Shang/Zhou transition in precisely these terms: "My portrayal of the emergent contrast between late Shang and early Zhou religious dispositions is informed by Clifford Geertz's elaboration (following Max Weber) of the distinction between 'traditional' and 'rationalized' religions" (p. 173/1103).

However, Pankenier's overall argument in fact is much closer to those of figures like Wheatley. Pankenier wishes to argue that a form of correlative cosmology, based in astrology, formed in China in the second millennium BC with the emergence of the state. Indeed, he quotes and supports Wheatley's argument on this point (p. 145). Starting well before the Shang, Pankenier argues, kingship was understood as an institution that maintained the proper correlation between the human and natural realms: "The ability to comprehend the celestial motions and to sustain a reciprocal conformity between their regular variations and human activity, that is, the discernment necessary to 'pattern oneself on Heaven,' was a fundamental qualification of kingship" (p. 146).

Pankenier's full argument, therefore, is that the lack of cosmological and astrological thinking distinguishes the late Shang not only from its successors but also from its predecessors: "The late Shang may have represented a significant departure from the norm in significant respects" (p. 175). The theological shift from the Shang to the Zhou was thus not a unilinear evolution from a magical to a rational worldview; rather, the Zhou reverted to a more archaic notion of cosmology:

With regard to the supernatural sanction underpinning the universal kingship the key shift is marked by a deemphasis of legitimacy based on the principle of contiguity, that is, membership in the royal lineage, toward a focus on legitimacy premised on emulating Heaven as the paradigm of order and harmony, an ethos inspired by an archaic, fundamentally metaphorical idea about the congruence obtaining between the supernatural and temporal realms. (pp. 173-74)

Even the ethical aspects of Zhou thought are simply a more articulated aspect of an earlier cosmology:

By attributing human-like personality to Heaven, and by vigorously reviving the conception of phenomenal nature as an index of Heaven's activity, the Zhou Chinese inevitably reimbued nature with an ethical quality. This feeling for the ethical dimension comes most strongly to the fore in the early Zhou texts, but it was by no means a Zhou innovation. (p. 170)

In short, Pankenier sides with Wheatley in arguing for a deep strain of cosmological thinking directly associated with the rise of the state. The Shang was simply an aberration.

In view of the evidence of a fundamental consistency between late Zhou cosmological conceptions and their second millennium B.C. antecedents, the Zhou claim to have re-established the continuity of a cosmo-political tradition that took its cues from Heaven and the natural order now appears well founded. (p. 176)

The Zhou thus represents the consolidation of an earlier archaic tradition resting on the harmony of man and Heaven.

And this tradition accounts for the optimistic, humanistic disposition of Chinese thought: "By taking matters into their own hands, so to speak, a fundamentally optimistic, human-centered disposition began to evolve, burdened though it was by a heavy responsibility to maintain ritual regularity" (p. 155). Pankenier thus finds in the Western Zhou, as well as earlier in the Chinese Bronze Age, the same form of this-worldly optimism that Weber defined as characterizing Chinese culture in general.

But are these scholars right? Are the views of the Western Zhou that different from those of the Shang? Did the Zhou introduce a fundamentally different (or, in the case of Pankenier, restore a more primordial) way of conceptualizing the relations of humans, spirits, and the cosmos than that which existed in the Shang? More pointedly, is it true that such a correlation of the wills of Heaven, the ancestors, and the king was assumed to exist in the early and middle Western Zhou—along with an attendant this-worldly optimism?

The answer to these questions is, in my opinion, no. But before spelling out my own view, let me provide some of the evidence behind the argument for a fundamental break in religious beliefs between the Shang and Zhou.

A few years after the conquest, the Duke of Shao, one of King Wu's brothers, purportedly gave as the reason for the Shang's failure that "they did not respect their power (*de*) and thereupon prematurely lost their mandate."<sup>66</sup> The Zhou then received the mandate to rule instead.

A fuller discussion of what this mandate entailed can be seen in the inscription on the Maogong *ding*:

66. "Shao gao," *Shangshu*, 15.6a. My translations have been aided by Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," p. 49; and Nivison, "An Interpretation of the 'Shao gao,'" p. 181.

The king said to the effect: "Father Yin, as for greatly illustrious Wen and Wu, august Heaven was extensively satisfied with their virtue, and made us, the rulers of Zhou, a counterpart [of himself]. [We] greatly responded to and received the great mandate, and led and embraced the borderlands which were not coming to court. None was not opened by Wen's and Wu's brilliant glory. It was Heaven that directed and gathered their mandate, and it was the former officers who yielded to and assisted their rulers, toiling and laboring for the great mandate. And then august Heaven tirelessly watched over and protected us, the rulers of the Zhou, and greatly strengthened the mandate of which the former kings were the counterpart."<sup>67</sup>

Heaven granted the mandate to the Zhou rulers Wen and Wu, and Wen and Wu then served as the counterpart of Heaven on earth.

At first glance, this appears to be quite different from the Shang material. Throughout the Shang texts there is a strong notion that the world has a proper pattern. However, the evidence clearly reveals this pattern to have been given by humans to the spirits, not the other way around: living humans, through their rituals and particularly through their sacrificial system, place spirits into a hierarchy and thereby attempt to obtain an order favorable to themselves. Spirits do not give this pattern to humans; nor left to their own devices, would the spirits observe such a hierarchy. And, in fact, even with the full sacrificial system in place, spirits are still quite capricious: the rituals do not always work. What appears different about the notion of a mandate is that it explicitly comes from Heaven, and Heaven's support is based on the virtues of the rulers in question rather than on their ritual actions. Humans do not determine the ancestors; rather, they follow Heaven and are rewarded for doing so and punished for not doing so.

Thus, for example, the decision by King Cheng, Wu's son and successor, to found the city of Luoyang is presented in several Western Zhou texts as simply the fulfillment of the wishes of Di. The "Shao gao" chapter of the *Shangshu* quotes the Grand Protector as making precisely this point:

The king should come and continue the [work] of the Di on high, and himself serve in the center of the land.<sup>68</sup>

67. Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 30.181:637. All bronze inscriptions are referenced in terms of this work, henceforth abbreviated as "Sh."

68. "Shao gao," *Shangshu*, 15.5a.

The founding of the city is thus presented as a continuation of the actions of Di (or Heaven), and it serves to center the realm. Contrast this with the inscriptional material discussed above concerning the making of settlements. There, the concern was the human appropriation of land controlled by Di, and the king was attempting to use sacrifices and divination to determine Di's will. Here, Di is the prime mover, directing the king to settle a new city.

Indeed, the entire relationship between ancestors and descendants that prevailed in the late Shang appears to have been turned upside down. Instead of having the kings determine the ancestors, living kings are frequently presented in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions as simply following the models and paradigms of the ancestors. As King Kang states in the *Da Yu ding*:

Now it is that I approach the model and receive from King Wen upright power. Like King Wen's commanding the two or three officials, now it is that I command you, Yu, to assist Rong in respectfully supporting the continuance of the power. (Sh 12.61:647)

King Kang presents himself as following the model of King Wen and receiving the latter's power. Even Kang's act of giving commands is posed as following in the mold of King Wen. Similarly, the king commands Yu to use the same approach of modeling himself on a great ancestor:

The king said: "Ah. I command you, Yu, to model yourself on your inheritance from grandfather Nangong."

Instead of the living making the deceased into proper ancestors, the descendants are here presented as following the deceased. And all are part of Heaven's larger mandate. We find the following on the Lu Bo Dong *gui*, a vessel from the reign of King Mu:

It was the king's first month, with the *chen* at *gengyin* [day 27], the king said to the effect:

"Lu Bo Dong, in planning, starting from your grandfather and father, [your family] has helped in laboring for the Zhou state and helped in opening up the four quarters. May it be extensive, Heaven's mandate. In what you have undertaken, you have not failed." (Sh 17.92:211)

Post-conquest military endeavors were also presented as a carrying out of Heaven's mandate. For example, in the Ban *gui*, King Mu is presented as ordering the Duke of Mao to attack the eastern states. After the attack, the Duke is recorded as saying:

The Duke [of Mao] announced his service to above: "It is that the people did not come (to court). In<sup>69</sup> norms they darkened<sup>70</sup> Heaven's mandate." (Sh 15.79:34)

War is thus presented as a maintenance of the mandate of Heaven, just as the initial conquest was presented as a fulfillment of the mandate.

Throughout these inscriptions and poems, then, we see a recurring theme: Heaven (or Di) is the director, and the Zhou follow his divine plan. Each successive king is posed as adhering to the model of his predecessors, and each act of conquest, consolidation, and domestication is presented as simply a continuation of the ancestors' work. Moreover, the king's aides are presented as simply serving the royal house in its work, a service accomplished by modeling themselves on their forebears. The living, in such rhetoric, do nothing but respect the model of the ancestors. Unlike the potentially antagonistic relationship of man and divinity in the Shang, then, the Western Zhou writings seem to pose Heaven as acting with the king.

But does the Western Zhou represent a fundamental break from the Shang in terms of the perceived relations between humans and spirits? I think not. The problem here is that we must be careful to contextualize statements and understand why they were written. Above all, we must avoid the temptation to take statements at face value and read them as common beliefs or assumptions of the time. In what follows I will argue that perhaps Eno, Bilsky, and Pankenier are jumping too quickly from statements made in a particular context to claims about an overall belief system of the time. More specifically, the view that there existed a belief in the early Western Zhou of the identity of the king and Heaven seems to me suspect.

69. Guo Moruo (*Liang-Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi*, p. 20b) reads this *cai* 才 as the exclamatory *zai* 哉. Tempting though such a reading may be, I am not sure it is justifiable. I have instead read it as *zai* 在, as is common in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.

70. Following Guo Moruo (*ibid.*) in reading 昧 as *mei* 昧.

### Pacifying the Spirits: Western Zhou Sacrificial Practice

The notion of a mandate is linked with the idea of proper sacrifices. In the "Duofang" chapter of the *Shangshu*, the Duke of Zhou is reported to have said: "It was your last king of Shang who took pleasure in his ease, scorned his governance, and did not keep the sacrifices pure. Heaven thus sent down timely disasters." Heaven then turned to the Zhou: "It was our Zhou king who efficaciously upheld the people, was able to utilize his power (*de*), and direct the spirits and Heaven. Heaven then instructed us to utilize his favor. He examined and gave us the mandate of Yin to administer your numerous regions."<sup>71</sup> Of note here is the fact that one of the fundamental distinctions drawn between the two rulers is an ability to utilize sacrifices properly. The last Shang king failed to do so, and Heaven thus sent down disasters. In contrast, the Zhou king was able to direct the spirits and Heaven properly, and he thus won the mandate. But what does it mean to use sacrifices properly?

The Tianwang *gui*,<sup>72</sup> which dates to the reign of King Wu, is inscribed:

The greatly illustrious deceased father King Wen serves and pleases<sup>73</sup> the Di on high. (Sh 1.1:1)

The late King Wen, Wu's father, is presented as serving and pleasing Di. Here again, the ancestors are expected to do what they can to keep the highest power, Di, working on behalf of the living.

Although the ritual involved here is different from those discussed above, the concerns are quite similar. The inscription in the bronze vessel was presumably intended for the ancestors—in this case King Wen—who would thus read the inscription after descending to consume the sacrifices offered in the vessel.<sup>74</sup> The inscription, therefore, is not so much a statement of fact as an exhortation to Wen to serve Di: "May the greatly illustrious deceased father King Wen serve and please the Di on high!"

71. "Duofang," *Shangshu*, 17.5b, 6a. My translation has been aided by Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," pp. 64–65.

72. Also known as the Da Feng *gui*.

73. Guo Moruo reads this as 烹, a type of sacrifice that is being offered to Di (*Liang-Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi*, p. 1b.) But since there is no *yu* 于 following the word, it seems difficult to read Di as the indirect object of a sacrifice verb. I thus read the word in its usual meaning.

74. For an extremely helpful analysis of meanings of bronze inscriptions, see Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies." See also *idem*, *Suspended Music*.

This concern with coaxing or even controlling the ancestors appears frequently in bronze inscriptions. For example, in the Bo Dong *gui*, a vessel from the middle Western Zhou:

[I.] Bo Dong, for the first time will make a treasure for the western palace. It is to be used to pacify (*sui* 妥: 綏) the spirits, and to embrace and call out to the earlier, cultured men, who grasp virtue and uphold generosity. It is to pray for ten thousand years to have sons' sons and grandsons' grandsons eternally treasure it. (Sh 17.91:207)

The explicit statement that the vessel was made for use in pacifying the spirits through sacrifices, like the oracular material discussed in the preceding sections, implies a belief that the ancestors were at least potentially not supportive.

But if, in the Tianwang *gui*, it is Wen who serves and pleases Di, what happened to the Shang ancestors? How, in the aftermath of the conquest, were the Shang ancestors replaced by the Zhou in serving the Di? Hints can be found in the "Shifu" chapter of the *Yizhoushu*, a chapter that may indeed date to the early Western Zhou.<sup>75</sup> We are told that after conquering the Shang, King Wu declared: "In declaration to the earth altar, [Wu] said: 'It is I, the young one, who pacifies [my] cultured, deceased father. May it reach to [me], the young one.'<sup>76</sup> The descendant, King Wu, claims to pacify (*sui*) his deceased father, King Wen, and hopes that this will result in benefits for himself. The term *sui* is the same one used in the Bo Dong *gui* to describe the pacification of the spirits. The declaration reveals that Wu is not at all certain of his deceased father's support.

King Wu's actions in the aftermath of the conquest are telling: "On *wuchen* [day 5], the king then performed an exorcism, made an inspection, and gave a commemorative sacrifice to King Wen. On this day, the king established the government."<sup>77</sup> All these actions, taken immediately after the conquest and immediately before the establishment of the Zhou state, appear to be acts of consolidation, aimed at driving away malevolent forces and settling the new order. The exorcism, as discussed above, serves to drive spirits away from the human realm—presumably, in this case, the spirits are the Shang ancestors. Sacrifices are then given to Wen—presumably to per-

75. See Shaughnessy, "New Evidence on the Zhou Conquest," pp. 60–66.

76. "Shifu," *Yizhoushu*, 4.12a–b.

77. *Ibid.*, 4.10a.

suade him to accept the new order. These are the actions of a king who sees himself in a position similar to that implied by the oracular inscriptions discussed above: he is acting in ways that he is not convinced will be supported by the divine powers and hence performs ritual acts aimed at coercing their acceptance.

Another of the actions taken by Wu after the conquest, the beheading of the Shang masters of cauldrons,<sup>78</sup> is particularly intriguing. Bronze vessels were used to offer sacrifices to the ancestors and thus to pacify them and maintain their support. Cauldrons in particular were associated with such notions.<sup>79</sup> The beheading of the Shang cauldron makers can be understood as symbolizing the end of the Shang means of determining the will of the divine powers.

And the sacrifice of the last Shang king makes the transfer complete. The chapter records another announcement by Wu:

[Wu] announced in the Zhou temple, saying: "Earlier, I have heard, [my] cultured, deceased father cultivated himself on the standards of the men of Shang. With the dismembered body of Zhou [the last Shang king], I announce [the change in rulership] to Heaven and to [Hou] Ji."<sup>80</sup>

The announcement is directed both to Heaven (the high god) and to Hou Ji (the ancestor of the Zhou people). King Wu acknowledges that the Shang formerly held the rulership and that King Wen modeled himself on the Shang. By sacrificing the Shang king and beheading the Shang masters of cauldrons, Wu ends the sacrificial system to the Shang ancestors. The claim is that now the Zhou, not the Shang, will be the ones to serve Heaven.

In the aftermath of the conquest, it is King Wen who is called on to serve and please Di and thereby bring order to the realm. We thus find in the *Shijing*, Mao #235:

King Wen is above,  
How glorious he is in Heaven.

78. *Ibid.*, 4.11b.

79. Relevant here is the transfer of the Yin kings' cauldrons to Wu, also recorded in the *Yizhoushu* (4.10a). Later texts present such transfers as a standard occurrence during a legitimate change of dynasties. See, e.g., the *Zuozhuan*, Huan, second year, in which the Shang are reported to have transferred nine cauldrons to the Zhou. The *Shiji*, "Qinshihuang benji," records the failure of the first emperor to get the cauldrons from the Zhou, a failure understood to signify the illegitimacy of the Qin dynasty.

80. "Shifu," *Yizhoushu*, 4.12a.

Although Zhou is an old state,  
 Its mandate is new.  
 Are the rulers of Zhou not illustrious,  
 Was the mandate of Di not timely?  
 King Wen ascends and descends,  
 Residing to the right and left of Di.

Much is said in these few lines. The Zhou is an old state, but only with King Wen did Di grant it the mandate to rule. Thus, it is Wen who resides with Di, descending to the human realm to receive sacrifices and ascending to the heavens to serve Di and maintain his support for the Zhou. Wen thus serves the same function as the Shang ancestors had earlier.

These ritual exhortations to ancestors continue throughout the dynasty. But what about the descendants? The inscription on the Tianwang *gui* concludes:

King Wen looks down from above. The greatly illustrious king [Wu] makes the inspection, the greatly majestic king [Wu] becomes the successor. (Sh 1.1.11)

Here we see another side of the equation: the living, in this case King Wu, attempts to become a proper successor to the ancestor. The deceased Wen is presented as watching his descendant from above, and Wu claims legitimacy because of his ability to inspect Wen and serve as his successor. The relationship between them, therefore, is bi-directional: the living work to make the deceased into proper ancestors, who will work to maintain Di's favor for the living. But, as the deceased are made into proper ancestors, the living promise to make themselves into proper descendants.

These themes pervade the Western Zhou bronze inscriptional material. A further example is an extremely late vessel, the Hu *gui*, which was commissioned by King Li.<sup>81</sup> The vessel was cast in the twelfth, and possibly last, year of Li's reign before his forced exile:

[I], Hu [King Li], make this great sacrificial treasured *gui* tureen, with which to make tranquil and compliant my august cultured and valorous grandfather and deceased father; may [they] go to the former cultured men,

81. Published in Luo Xizhang, "Shaanxi Fufeng faxian Xi-Zhou Liwang Hu *gui*." Although I disagree in a few specific points, my translation of the inscription generally follows that given in Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, pp. 171-72.

may [they] frequently be in the court of the Di on High, ascending and descending, continuously encompassing the august [Di] on High's great and generous mandate, thereby commanding and protecting our family, my position, and Hu's person.

The presentation is similar to that seen in the earlier vessels, except that the ancestral line is now older. King Li has ordered the vessel for sacrifices to his deceased father and grandfather, whom he thereby hopes to "make tranquil and compliant." The father and grandfather, rendered compliant through sacrifices, are exhorted to approach the "former cultured men"—a reference to the founders of the dynasty, presumably Kings Wen and Wu. The latter in turn are called on to ascend and descend between the human realm and the court of Di, preserving Di's mandate for the Zhou and thus protecting the living king's position.

The inscription closes with the King's exhortation that he be able to continue his sacrifices and thus gain long life and a continuing mandate from Di:

May [I], Hu, for ten thousand years greatly bring to realization my many sacrifices, thereby seeking long life and entreating an eternal mandate to govern in position and act as the stem below.

The text is a prayer to the king's ancestors to remain with Di in order to protect the king's position.

The repeated claim throughout these poems and bronze inscriptions is that the deceased must be made into proper ancestors who will then convince Di to maintain support for the Zhou royal line. The living represent themselves as proper descendants to these proper ancestors. The living, in other words, will follow the ancestors, but only after the deceased have in fact been made into proper ancestors.

The bronze inscriptions and the poems from at least the "Zhou song" section of the *Shijing* may thus have been written from a perspective not unlike that seen in the Shang oracle inscriptions, a perspective, namely, of living humans attempting to coerce the divine powers to grant aid or, at least, not to send down disasters. Statements in these works that the descendants are simply following the example of the ancestors, who in turn were simply following the example of Heaven, should perhaps not be taken purely at face value. Instead of reflecting an assumption that descendants should simply follow their ancestors, such statements more likely arose as an attempt by

the descendants to coerce the ancestors, sometimes through rituals of control, sometimes through acts of rhetorical submission. The claim that in taking an action the speaker is simply continuing what the ancestors initiated should perhaps be read more as voicing an argument rather than an assumption: it may be the case that at least sometimes it is not that the descendants think they have followed the ancestors but that the descendants have acted on their own and then claimed that in so doing they were simply following the ancestors. Their goal would be to win the ancestors' support. Even the ancestor, then, must be urged to become linked with Heaven. And the descendants do follow the ancestors, but only when the ancestors have been made into proper ancestors. There was no more of an assumption concerning harmony in the Western Zhou than there was in the Shang.

A statement, quoted above, in the "Shao gao" chapter of the *Shangshu*, concerns the founding of Luoyang: "The king should come and continue the [work] of the Di on high, and himself serve in the center of the land."<sup>82</sup> The statement, attributed to the Grand Protector, clearly presents the founding of the city as the king continuing the work of the Di. But the *He zun*,<sup>83</sup> a vessel inscribed in the fifth year of King Cheng's reign, characterizes this act in a different way:

It was the time when the king [Cheng] first moved and settled at Chengzhou. He once again received

King Wu's abundant blessings from Heaven. It was the fourth month, *bingxu* [day 23].

The king made a statement to the young men of the lineage in the great hall, saying: "Earlier

your father, the duke of the clan, was able to accompany King Wen. And then King Wen

received this [great mandate]."<sup>84</sup> It was when King Wu had conquered the great city Shang that he then, in court, announced to Heaven, saying: "I will settle this central territory, and from it rule the people." (Sh 48.1:171)

King Cheng is presenting himself as fulfilling the plans of his father, King Wu, who is sending blessings from Heaven above.

82. "Shao gao," *Shangshu*, 15.5a.

83. For a fuller discussion of the *He zun*, see my *The Ambivalence of Creation*, pp. 33–34.

84. Two graphs are illegible here. Tang Lan ("He zun mingwen jieshi," p. 6317) reads the graphs *da ming* 大命. For a discussion of his reading, see my *The Ambivalence of Creation*, p. 229n36.

But note King Cheng's statement. He quotes his father, after the conquest, as having announced to Heaven that he will settle the central territory to rule the people. This is an announcement along the lines of those seen in oracle-bone inscriptions: a statement of one's intentions to the divine powers, in this case Heaven, in order to request approval. This would hardly seem necessary if Wu was simply following Heaven's plan.

In these lines, the feeling is not dissimilar to that discussed above in relation to the late Shang: a potentially antagonistic relationship seems to hold between the king and the divine powers, and the king has to coax and influence those powers into accepting his work. Contrary to Wheatley's attempt to read such claims of centering as implying a correlative mode of thought, the notion here seems, rather, to involve an attempt by the king to stake out a political claim: he is announcing to Heaven his intention of establishing a center and is hoping thereby to gain Heaven's support. The assumption is not of correlativity but of potential antagonism.

Indeed, I think we can go even further. Note again that it is King Cheng who is making this announcement and that the inscription began with a reference to King Cheng's receiving abundant blessings from his father (King Wu) in Heaven. King Cheng's concern here is to maintain the support of his father, who is in Heaven and, Cheng hopes, maintaining Heaven's support. The point, then, is to emphasize to the ancestor Wu that it was in fact Wu's idea to establish Luo as the new political center. King Cheng thereby hopes to maintain the support of Wu, who in turn will work to maintain Heaven's support.

The concerns here are thus quite comparable to those found in the Shang. Heaven (or Di) is the powerful agent, but Heaven is relatively unresponsive to the rituals of the living. The living thus strive to receive the support of the ancestors, who are in turn called on to influence Heaven. The living may present themselves as following Heaven and the ancestors, but such a presentation is part of a larger goal of influencing first the ancestors and, through them, Heaven itself, to support the wishes of the living.

Overall, Western Zhou hymns and inscriptions were based on building a proper ancestral pantheon that would then work on behalf of the living to maintain Di's (or Heaven's) support. The ancestors were called on to descend to the human realm, receive sacrifices as well as ritual exhortations, and then ascend to the realm of Di to serve him and maintain divine support for the Zhou line. The cultic practices are directly comparable to those of

the Shang, with the obvious difference that the Zhou, by sacrificing the last Shang king and beheading his cauldron makers, have replaced the Shang ancestral pantheon with the Zhou ancestral pantheon in the realm of Di.

The Art of Sacrifice: The “Sheng min” Poem of the  
*Shijing* and Hesiod’s *Theogony*

Further evidence for this reading of cultic practices in the Bronze Age can be gleaned from the poem “Sheng min” (Mao #245).<sup>85</sup> Here I read the poem as a reflection on the themes of sacrifice—its origins and its significance.<sup>86</sup> More explicitly, I argue that the poem includes a rather complex presentation of the relationships between ancestors and descendants. After providing a close reading of the poem, I then turn to comparative material from Greece and reconsider the larger comparative claims made by the scholars discussed in the first part of this chapter.

The poem opens by describing the birth of Hou Ji, the ancestor of the Zhou people:

The one who first gave birth to our people,  
This was Jiang Yuan.  
How did she give birth to the people?  
She was able to perform the *yin* sacrifice, and she was able to  
perform the *si* sacrifice,  
so as to no longer be childless.  
She stepped on the big toe of Di’s footprint,  
she was elated about that which enriched her and that which  
blessed her.  
And so she became pregnant, and so it was soon,  
And so she gave birth and so she reared [him].  
This was Hou Ji.

Jiang Yuan was unable to have a child. But she had one great power: she was able to perform the *yin* and *si* sacrifices “so as to no longer be childless.” The

85. My translation had been greatly aided by that of Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), pp. 199–202. Indeed, in some of the later sections of the poem below, I largely quote from Karlgren’s translation.

86. My understanding of this poem has been greatly enhanced by the interpretations of David Knechtges, Stephen Owen, Willard Peterson, and Pauline Yu in *Ways With Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, edited by Pauline Yu, Peter Bol, Stephen Owen, and Willard Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

poem does not explain precisely why this solves Jiang Yuan’s problem, but the ensuing line implies an answer: Jiang Yuan, through her abilities to utilize the sacrifices, was able to make Di descend. She then stepped in his footprint and absorbed some of his potency.

Not only did this allow Jiang Yuan to become pregnant, but it also meant that her child, Hou Ji, was born with divine powers:

And then she completed her months,  
The first giving birth was like sprouting,  
[There occurred] no bursting, no rending,  
without injury, without harm.  
Thereby manifesting his numinous nature (*ling*).

Hou Ji’s gift is apparent at birth: his numinous nature allows him to emerge without harming his mother, and his birth is like the sprouting of a plant. He is thus immediately associated with the generative process.

Nonetheless, Di was angry.

The high Di was not serene  
and not pleased with the *yin* and *si* sacrifices.  
[But] tranquilly she gave birth to the child.

The sense here would appear to be that Di did not approve of Jiang Yuan’s actions. Jiang Yuan used the sacrifices to make Di descend, and without Di’s approval, she stepped in his footprint and captured some of his divine power. Hou Ji, in other words, was born of a transgression, in which Di’s potency was appropriated through a deceitful use of the sacrifices.

Presumably because of Di’s displeasure, Jiang Yuan was forced to give up Hou Ji:

And then she placed him in a narrow lane  
The oxen and sheep nurtured him between their legs.  
And then she placed him in a forest on the plain.  
He was found by those who cut the forest on the plain.  
And then she placed him on cold ice  
Birds covered and assisted him.  
The birds then left.  
Hou Ji wailed  
Really spreading, really strong  
His voice then became loud.

Jiang Yuan keeps trying to abandon her child, but Hou Ji is repeatedly saved by animals and humans. Despite Di's displeasure, Hou Ji is still favored by those below on earth.

Hou Ji continued to grow and was soon able to feed himself by planting:

And then he was actually crawling,  
able to stride, able to stand firmly  
so as to seek food for this mouth.  
He planted with large beans.  
The bare beans were waving like streamers,  
The grain that was cultivated was sprouting.  
The hemp and the wheat were thick,  
The gourds were ample,  
And then Hou Ji's husbandry  
had the way of helping.  
He cleared away the dense grass,  
He sowed it in the yellow earth.  
Really even, really dense.  
really growing, really becoming tall,  
really extending, really flowering,  
really strong, really good,  
really ripe ears, really solid kernels,  
He had his house in Tai.

Hou Ji's gift of being able to aid the generative process manifests itself again. The harvest is enormous, and Hou Ji, with ample food, is able to settle down.

Hou Ji then handed down the grains to the people and thus began agriculture. And thus, too, began the sacrifices:

And then he sent down the fine grains.  
There was black millet, there was double-kernelled black millet,  
There was millet with red sprouts, there was millet with white sprouts.  
Planting them extensively, the black millet, the double-kernelled  
black millet,  
Reaping them and taking them by the acre.  
Planting them extensively, the millet with red sprouts, the millet  
with white sprouts,  
carrying them on his shoulder, carrying them on his back,  
So as to return and initiate the sacrifices.

At this point, the frame of the poem shifts from a narrative of Hou Ji's actions to the perspective of those chanting the poems. The sacrifices initiated by Hou Ji have been handed down, and the chanters describe their continued efficacy:

And so, our sacrifices, what are they like?  
Some pound (the grain), some bale it.  
Some sift it, some tread it,  
Washing it until soaked,  
Steaming it until steamed.  
And so we plan and so we think it over.  
We take southernwood, we offer fat.  
We take a ram so as to sacrifice to the spirits of the road.  
Roasting and broiling,  
So as to start the following year.

The sacrifices, if accepted by the spirits, allow for the start of the next agricultural cycle. Indeed, these sacrifices are enjoyed even by Di himself:

We fill in the *dou* vessels,  
in the *dou*, in the *deng* vessels,  
(when) the fragrance first ascends  
The high Di tranquilly enjoys it  
Oh how pungent it is.  
Hou Ji initiated the sacrifice  
May we not have any faults  
So they [the sacrifices handed down by Hou Ji] reach to the present.

The living are continuing the sacrifices initiated by the ancestor Hou Ji, and when performed correctly, they please Di.

Thus, a proper harmony of humans, spirits, and the natural world is maintained by humans continuing the agricultural and sacrificial practices initiated by Hou Ji. Indeed, the poem links agriculture and the proper use of sacrifices: the harmony of man and god is achieved through the successful appropriation of nature through agriculture and the proper utilization of that agricultural produce to feed the gods in sacrifice.

This may help explain what the poem means when it says that Hou Ji initiated sacrifices. He obviously was not the first to give sacrifices (since his mother had already done so). The sense instead is that Hou Ji was the first to institute correct sacrifices, in which the proper duties of humans and the

god were delineated: humans aid in the growth of the natural world and then feed Di and the other spirits through sacrifices. The spirits in turn support the next year's cycle (presumably through the control of the rains). Humans and spirits thus have their designated duties and their designated spheres.

Thus, the contrast drawn here between the sacrifices of Jiang Yuan and those of Hou Ji is more than simply that the mother's were deceitful and the son's were not. The nature of the sacrifices has clearly changed as well. When Jiang Yuan performed sacrifices, Di was brought down to tread on the land. With Hou Ji's sacrifices, however, Di remains in the heavens, enjoying the ascending fragrance. Humans are in charge of the agricultural work of the earth, and Di remains in his proper place in the heavens, enjoying the sacrifices given to him.

But all this was possible only because Hou Ji possessed the numinous power gained from Di. That power enabled him to aid the natural generative process and thus to begin agriculture and sacrifice. And the only reason he possessed that power is because Jiang Yuan had used sacrifices to steal it from Di. And, even then, the only reason Hou Ji survived long enough to initiate agriculture and the proper use of sacrifices was because figures on earth protected him from Di's wrath. In other words, the successful creation of a proper hierarchy between humans and gods was accomplished when a human stole Di's potency and other humans and animals protected the resultant hero from Di's wrath. Because of Hou Ji, the product of these actions, the earth became productive and humans thrived. And this in turn allowed Hou Ji to begin the sacrificial practices that pleased Di and allowed a continued flourishing of humanity.

The poem does not, therefore, assume an inherent harmony between humans and Di. On the contrary, harmony is achieved only after Di's potency is stolen and Di's plans are thwarted. Harmony was established not by Di but by the human beneficiary of a theft, a theft that gave humans the power to create a hierarchy in which they could thrive. The sacrifices initiated by Hou Ji are presented as continuing to mollify Di and maintain his support. And the significance of this becomes clear when we realize that the poem itself is aimed at Hou Ji, not at Di. The living ("we") are calling on Hou Ji to ensure that the sacrifices continue to maintain Di's support. If he is a good ancestor, Hou Ji will play the crucial role of mediation and work to ensure the support of Di for the living.

The poem is thus playing on the very themes that have concerned us throughout this chapter—only here the themes are worked out in narrative form. Jiang Yuan makes a proper descendant by appropriating divine power through sacrifice, and that descendant then initiates proper sacrifices, which in time will transform him into a proper ancestor. The sacrifices result in a proper genealogical order of ancestors and descendants, each with its own proper sphere of activity. Humans use agricultural produce to keep Di in Heaven, served by the mediating ancestor Hou Ji, and Di's resulting blessings allow for the agricultural produce to continue. A perfect system of genealogical order is created.

These points, along with the analysis of Shang and Zhou rituals above, should lead us to rethink some of the larger comparative claims that have been made concerning Chinese Bronze Age views about the relations between humans and divinities. I quoted above Keightley's remark that "the Chinese knew neither a Prometheus nor a Zeus."<sup>87</sup> Let us turn to Hesiod to evaluate the statement.

In the *Theogony*, Hesiod accounted for sacrificial practice through the well-known narrative of the transgressions of the Titan Prometheus. According to Hesiod, Prometheus killed an ox and split it into two portions. The first portion consisted of the animal's meat, which the Titan wrapped in the stomach of the ox in order to make it look unappetizing, and the second was the bones, which were hidden in the fat. Prometheus allowed Zeus to pick the portion he wanted, and his ruse tricked the god into choosing the worst of the two. As a punishment for this ruse, Zeus denied man the fire with which to cook. Prometheus then stole fire and gave it to man, an act that again brought down the wrath of Zeus and prompted him to send down woman. This theft of fire, insofar as it gave humanity the ability to cook, thus won human beings autonomy from the gods, but at the cost of a tragic separation from divinity.

Sacrifice, in such a narrative, recapitulates the crime of Prometheus, serving both as a repetition of the ruse against the gods and as a reminder of the degree to which humanity is still beholden to them: whereas the gods, not dependent on meat, can be satisfied with bones, man, who must eat in order to survive, has to take the edible portion—knowing that the satisfaction of hunger is only temporary. The division of the offerings in the sacrifice thus reveals, under Hesiod's reading, the separation of man and divinity, a separa-

87. Keightley, "Clean Hands and Shining Helmets," p. 42.

tion resulting from the fact that man can gain autonomy from the gods only by transgressing their power and thereby resigning himself to an ultimately doomed life of labor and hardship. The sacrifice is thus an offering to the gods, but one that underscores, rather than alleviates, the radical disparity between humanity and divinity.

As Jean-Pierre Vernant has argued:

In devouring what can be eaten, men simultaneously restore their failing strength and acknowledge the baseness of their human condition—confirming their absolute submission to those very Olympian gods whom the Titan Prometheus, when he established the pattern in the first sacrifice, once thought to trick with impunity. The alimentary ritual which establishes communication between man and divinity itself underscores the gulf which sunders them. That communication is founded upon a religious ritual which, by memorializing Prometheus's error, reaffirms on every occasion of its performance the existence of that uncrossable gulf. And it is the purpose of the myth, as told by Hesiod, precisely to lay bare the origins of the separation and to make plain its dire consequences.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, following the transgression of Prometheus, "contact can only be made with the gods through sacrifice, which at the same time consecrates the impassable barrier between mortals and immortals."<sup>89</sup>

The point is of interest, for according to Vernant and Marcel Detienne, much of early Greek sacrificial practice corresponded closely to Hesiod's reading. An example can be seen in the Athenian Skirophoria, the annual slaughter of an ox for Zeus in the last month of the year. After the animal was slain, its bones and fat were burned as an offering, and the meat was consumed by humans in a great feast.<sup>90</sup> This division of the sacrificial portions is identical to that seen in the narratives of Hesiod, a fact that Vernant interprets as meaning that Hesiod constructed his narratives in relation to contemporary religious beliefs and practices, and thus that the narrative of Prometheus may reveal some of the implicit meanings and significance of early Greek sacrificial practice.<sup>91</sup> And if, as I have argued, the "Sheng min" is

88. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Sacrificial and Alimentary Codes in Hesiod's Myth of Prometheus," p. 61.

89. Vernant, "The Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod," p. 185.

90. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 55–59; and idem, *Homo Necans*, pp. 136–43. See also Jean-Louis Durand, *Sacrifice et labour en Grèce ancienne*.

91. Vernant, "Sacrificial and Alimentary Codes in Hesiod's Myth of Prometheus," p. 62.

equally telling of some of the tensions that surrounded sacrifices in China at roughly the same time, a comparison of the two may yield helpful results.

I argued above that sacrifice is better conceptualized in terms of transformations than of a gift, and the comparatively interesting questions then become how particular sacrifices present different aspects of these transformations. For example, one such issue is the state to be achieved through the sacrifice. Is it posed, to list some possibilities, as simply a removal of some perceived lack, as a means of correcting the currently skewed positions of humanity and divinity, as a reconnection with the divine, or even as a partaking of the divine? Another issue is how this final state is achieved in the sacrifice. Is the sacrifice understood as submission to the divine or as another transgression, a further usurpation of divine power for the sake of humanity?

In the cases at hand, both poems deal with similar problems: both the "Sheng min" and this portion of the *Theogony* revolve around the themes of the introduction of sacrifice and the proper roles for humans and gods. But the transformations in the narratives move in opposite directions. Hesiod's narrative begins with humans and gods linked genealogically; Prometheus's transgression introduces discontinuity—winning autonomy for humanity but at the cost of a life of toil. In contrast, the "Sheng min" begins in discontinuity, and the goal is to achieve continuity. Jiang Yuan must use sacrifice to obtain divine potency, but Hou Ji later institutes sacrifices in which gods and humans are transformed into proper ancestors and descendants. The *Theogony* narrates the dissolution of a genealogical continuity; the "Sheng min" narrates its creation.

It is somewhat misleading, therefore, to say that China knew neither a transgressive figure like Prometheus nor a capricious god like Zeus. At the beginning of the "Sheng min," Di is quite capricious, and Jiang Yuan transgressively appropriates divine powers. What is striking in the comparison of the two narratives, in other words, is not that one involves human transgression and capricious gods and the other does not; both have this. What is striking is, rather, the presentation of the transforming sacrifices.

I mention these points of comparison between "Sheng min" and Hesiod not in order to proclaim these poems as "founding myths" of Chinese and Greek culture, respectively. As I have argued elsewhere, the entire notion of foundational myths needs to be rethought,<sup>92</sup> and, as I have argued in the In-

92. For my critique of the way the term "mythology" is used in early China studies, see chap. 3 of *The Ambivalence of Creation*. In brief, my critique is that the term is used to refer to a

roduction to this book, comparisons that define the cultures in question from the viewpoint of one particular practice are always misleading. The comparison of these two narratives points to a different way of approaching these issues. When scholars read this distinction in terms of differing assumptions in Greece and China—of tragic discontinuity and genealogical continuity, respectively—they are mistaking effect for cause and reading the normative product of sacrifice as a starting assumption. The point is of relevance, for, if I am right that these are normative claims for sacrificial action rather than pervasive assumptions, then a different form of cultural analysis is called for: instead of trying to read other aspects of these cultures in terms of such assumptions, we should situate these normative sacrificial claims within the larger cultural debate of which they were a part. If these are the normative claims of the sacrificial experts supported by the courts, then how were they received? As we shall see in the next chapter, both of these sacrificial models became the objects of significant critique, and one cannot understand those critiques without understanding the practices that were being criticized.

### Conclusion

As discussed earlier in this chapter, both K. C. Chang and Julia Ching posited a primordial experience of shamanism underlying Chinese tradition, and both tried to connect this further to an even more primordial sacred experience of humanity in general. Indeed, both argued that insofar as such a primordial, shamanistic experience underlies all civilizations, China is thus closer to that sacred linking of Heaven and Earth than is the West. Even if Ching and Chang's arguments about China were correct, their attempts to characterize shamanism, as well as a belief in continuity between the human and divine realms, as primordial forms of human spirituality would still be highly suspect. Why is continuity somehow more primordial, and the discontinuity they see in the West what Chang calls an "aberration" in humanity's history?

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primordial, unchanging system of beliefs rather than to ongoing, ever-changing narratives that are constantly being reworked and revised. Analysis should therefore focus on those activities of reworking and revising the stories rather than trying to reconstruct a single ur-myth behind the variety.

As Jonathan Z. Smith has argued:

It strikes me that historians of religion have been weakest in interpreting those myths which do not reveal a cosmos in which man finds a place to dwell and on which he found [sic] his existence, but rather which suggest the problematic nature of existence and fundamental tension in the cosmos. I have in mind such traditions as dualistic creation myths, Earth-diver traditions, Tricksters, or the complex narratives of Corn or Rice Mothers who create by "loathsome" processes (e.g., rubbing the dirt off their bodies, by defecation, secretion). Clearly these mythologies, many of which are extremely archaic, point to a different spiritual horizon than that described by Eliade as the fundamental "archaic ontology."<sup>93</sup>

I would go further than Smith here: I would question the very usefulness of terms such as "archaic" and "spiritual horizon." Nonetheless, the basic point Smith raises is an important one: there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that harmony with the "sacred" is somehow more primordial in human experience than are radical tensions and conflicts. Even for those scholars like Chang who wish to claim that such an assumption existed in early China, there is no basis for arguing that this assumption is closely linked to some archaic, primitive experience lost by other civilizations.

But, in the case at hand, the argument is not only methodologically flawed but also empirically inaccurate: I have followed Keightley in arguing against the hypothesis that shamanism was a guiding force in the state societies of Bronze Age China. Keightley's provocative argument about "making ancestors" presents the ritual systems of the Shang court as attempts to influence from the bottom up. The higher, non-ancestral gods were the most powerful beings, but they were also relatively impervious to human rituals. The spirits of deceased humans were more malleable, but, even here, a hierarchy held: the more distant in time the deceased human, the more powerful but less subject to influence it became. The concern of the ritual system was thus to transform these deceased humans into proper ancestors.

However, although my readings of the oracle-bone inscriptions have largely followed Keightley's, I reach different conclusions. In particular, I question Keightley's attempts to read the Bronze Age material as evidence of a proto-bureaucratic mentality as defined by Weber. The Bronze Age sacrificial systems supported by the Shang and Zhou courts do not, I have argued, reveal an assumption of harmony between humans and gods, nor do

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93. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," p. 100.

they reveal a belief in a *do et des* vision of sacrifice. On the contrary. What we can reconstruct of Bronze Age religion reveals a highly agonistic world in which humans were constantly trying to force impulsive divine powers into roles defined by the living and to convince them to act accordingly. Keightley's argument about making ancestors, in other words, should lead us to see sacrifices as attempts to transform capricious divinities into figures who could be controlled by the living: humans, while in part submitting themselves to the ancestral powers, were also actively transforming and ordering them. In short, the concern in the ancestral sacrifices was not simply to submit to the ancestors; rather, it was to create proper ancestors to which the living could then become proper descendants. And these ancestors were then called on to pacify the higher, non-ancestral powers—including, most important, Di. The cosmos would thus, to the limited extent possible, become ordered by the living.

The Shang sacrificial system was an attempt to domesticate these highly agonistic forces and place them within a hierarchy manipulable for the sake of human interests. Far from revealing an assumption of harmony, a belief in the benevolent intentions of the divine powers, and a desire to adjust to the world as given, sacrificial practice in the Shang was aimed at a radical transformation of the divine world, a transformation undertaken precisely so that humanity could appropriate and domesticate nature for its purposes. Such an attempt to transform both the divine and the natural worlds does indeed involve an enormous investment in sacrificial action, but that investment emerged not from an assumption of harmonious collaboration between man and god but from a sense of radical discontinuity and lack of harmony.

I have argued that similar ideas are visible in the Western Zhou materials as well, and I therefore question the attempt to read the Western Zhou materials as evidence of a correlative mode of thinking. I suspect, in fact, that what we see in the Shang and Zhou are a shared set of practices common in the North China plain. The Zhou conquest simply meant a replacement of the Shang pantheon with the Zhou pantheon, but the general ritual principles were much the same. The basic notion was to try to use sacrifices to build support through the ancestral pantheon and ultimately win the support even of Di.

As I noted in the Introduction, most discussions of ancient China have been based on the claim that a belief in continuity and harmony between the divine and human realms pervaded the Bronze Age period. The comparative

frameworks have then diverged in their reading of the later history of early China: Did such an assumption of harmony continue in early China, or was there a shift toward rationality and humanism with the rise of philosophy? But if, as I have argued in this chapter, no such assumption existed, then we will have to develop a rather different reading of Warring States and Han developments.