

To become a god

Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-
Divinization in Early China

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Introduction

I begin with the origin of the cosmos:

Long ago, in the time before there existed Heaven and Earth, there was only figure without form. Obscure, dark, vast, and deep—no one knows its gate. There were two spirits (*shen* 神) born together; they aligned Heaven, they oriented Earth. So vast—no one knows its end or limit! So overflowing—no one knows where it stopped! Thereupon, they divided and became yin and yang, separated and became the eight pillars. Hard and soft completed each other, and the myriad things were thereupon formed. The turbid *qi* 氣 became insects, and the refined *qi* became humans.¹

The passage is from the opening of the "Jingshen," chapter seven of the *Huainanzi*.² It and similar passages are often quoted in the secondary literature as examples of cosmological thinking, of attempts to describe the universe as a spontaneous, self-generating system. Something without form existed in the past and then spontaneously divided into Heaven and Earth, with the *qi* forming the various objects and beings of the universe.

In referring to cosmogonies like this, Frederick Mote has famously argued: "The genuine Chinese cosmology is that of organismic process, mean-

1. *Huainanzi*, "Jingshen," 7.1a.

2. The passage would have been written some time before 139 BC, the probable date when Liu An gave the work to Emperor Wu of the Han.

ing that all the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process."³ But, if this passage is an attempt to describe the beginnings of a spontaneous universe, then what are we to do with the third sentence: "There were two spirits born together; they aligned Heaven, they oriented Earth"? Why would a universe that is self-generating and spontaneous require two spirits to align and orient it? The spirits themselves may have been born naturally, but their subsequent actions are almost like those of demigods—figures who actively plan and organize the structure of the cosmos.

Indeed, the words used to describe the actions of the spirits (aligning and orienting: *jing ying* 經營) are loaded terms, with strong resonances in the early texts. The terms were commonly used to describe the ways that sages surveyed and organized prior to an act of construction. In the "Shao gao" chapter of the *Shangshu*, for example, we find: "The Grand Protector arrived in the morning at Luoyang and performed crackmaking about the site. Once he obtained the cracks, he aligned and oriented (*jing ying*)[the city]."⁴ The passage refers to the preparations for the construction of the new capital of the Zhou at the beginning of their dynasty. The Grand Protector, after receiving favorable auguries, aligned the boundaries of the city from which the Zhou could then control the north China plain.

The terms are found as well in the *Shijing* poem "Lingtai" (Mao #242), which is also quoted in *Mencius* 1A/2:

He aligned and commenced the Numinous Tower,
He aligned it and oriented it.
The people labored on it,
In less than a day they completed it.⁵

The figure (understood at least by the time of Mencius to be King Wen) personally aligned and oriented the Numinous Tower prior to the actual work of construction.

In these passages from the *Shangshu* and *Shijing*, the words refer to the organizational activities of sages, and in both cases the organizational work involved an attempt to align and orient human structures so as to harmonize them with divine powers. So why would the authors of the *Huainanzi* pas-

3. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, p. 15.

4. *Shangshu zhengyi*, "Shao gao," 15.1b.

5. Shi, #242.

sage utilize such loaded terms to characterize the actions of spirits before the emergence of the cosmos? Why do spirits have to align the cosmos before it is spontaneously formed?

The answer, as I will argue in Chapter 7, has little to do with early Chinese assumptions about the cosmos. Soon after the passage just quoted, the authors of the chapter discuss programs of self-cultivation that enable the adept to become a spirit.⁶ Spirits first aligned and oriented the cosmos, and humans can then become spirits and exercise control of the cosmos as well. The opening cosmogony of the chapter, therefore, sets the basis for a series of crucial claims concerning the ability of humans to divinize themselves and thus gain control over natural phenomena. The authors are less interested in positing a spontaneous universe than in asserting the theomorphic powers of human adepts.

A similar concern with humans becoming spirits and thus gaining power over the natural world appears in another chapter of the *Huainanzi*:

If one climbs twice as high as Kunlun, [the peak] is called the Mountain of Liang-feng. If one ascends it, one will not die. If one climbs twice as high, it is called Xuanpu. If one ascends it, one will become numinous and be able to control the wind and the rain. Twice as high, it stretches up to Heaven. If one climbs it, one will become a spirit. This is called the Realm of the Great God (Di).⁷

The passage describes the process of self-cultivation metaphorically as an act of climbing the peaks above Kunlun Mountain ever higher toward the realm of the Great God. With each step in the process, one gains ever more power over natural phenomena—first achieving immortality and then gaining direct control over the wind and rain. Ultimately, one becomes a spirit and lives with the Great God.

Both *Huainanzi* passages posit not a spontaneous cosmos but one organized and controlled by spirits. And, in this particular sense, the passages were in the mainstream of the claims made in most texts from early China: as I will argue below, visions of a purely spontaneous cosmos, in which natural phenomena are not under the power of spirits, arose very late in the Warring States period and were never more than a minority opinion. What is noteworthy about these two passages are rather the claims made about the

6. *Huainanzi*, "Jingshen," 7.2b.

7. *Huainanzi*, "Dixing," 4.3a. See the excellent discussion by John Major in *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, pp. 158–61.

ability of humans to divinize themselves. In contrast to the chronologically earlier *Shijing* and *Shangshu*, these segments do not present humans as trying to propitiate or placate divine powers. Indeed, within the cosmology presented in these *Huainanzi* passages, one need not use divination and sacrifice to manipulate the spirits; instead the adept becomes a spirit directly and appropriates their powers.

This book is an attempt to reconstruct the debate within which such claims of the theomorphic potentials of humans were made and within which such claims grew to be increasingly important. I will trace this debate, which ran from the Shang through the Han, analyzing competing arguments concerning the nature of spirits, the proper demarcation (or lack thereof) between humans and spirits, and the types of potency that humans and spirits should be allowed to exercise over the natural world. As I will argue, claims about the nature of the cosmos, and the degree to which it is or is not controlled by willful agents (human or spirit), arose within this debate and can be understood fully only within that context.

In order to analyze this debate in its full complexity, I will discuss the notions and practices of divination and sacrifice during this period and will look in depth at the ways and reasons that these practices were criticized by figures claiming the ability to become, rather than simply manipulate, spirits. And I will also detail the rise of claims that the cosmos is a spontaneous system—claims that arose in opposition both to the sacrificial and divination specialists of the day and to the proponents of the increasingly popular view that humans had theomorphic potentials. In short, I hope to provide a full cultural and intellectual history of the rise of both self-divinization movements and correlative cosmology in early China.

This historical account of the dispute over the relationship between humans and spirits and the natural world will give us a glimpse of a crucial debate in early China, one that had great ramifications for developing notions of human powers, the nature of spirits, and the types of sacrificial practice that should be supported by the state. It will also throw into question numerous long-standing assumptions about early China. The revised picture should shed light on how these aspects of early Chinese religious practice can be understood from a historical perspective and help point to a very different way of thinking about early China from a comparative point of view. In order to outline the implications of the issues to be discussed, I turn to a summary of some of the relevant secondary literature on these issues.

Secondary Scholarship

One of the points I will try to demonstrate in these pages is the degree to which analyses of these issues concerning humans and spirits in early China have been based, implicitly or explicitly, on comparative frameworks and comparative categories that for the most part originated in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and the history of religions. This is true not only for scholars in America and Europe but also for those in China, Taiwan, and Japan. One of my intents here is to tease out these categories (notions such as shamanism, monism, rationality) as well as some of the comparative frameworks (evolutionary, contrastive cosmologies) in which these categories have been employed. In this section, I outline some of the most influential of these comparative categories and frameworks. This will put us in a position to see, as other scholars are discussed in the main part of the book, the degree to which their approaches are based on the categories presented here.

My goal is not to debunk the use of comparative categories or to argue against comparison per se. On the contrary, I, too, will make comparisons, particularly with ancient Greece, and I will be working with a number of anthropological discussions of, for example, kingship, cosmology, and sacrifice. My goal is, rather, to question the types of comparative categories employed thus far and to point toward what I hope are other, more successful approaches.

Perhaps the single most influential figure in the twentieth century to have studied China is Max Weber. The main corpus of Weber's writings consists of comparative analyses of the major civilizations in world history. His guiding concern was the study of rationalism: Why did particular forms of rational activity develop in the West, and why did such activity develop to only limited degrees elsewhere? To undertake this project, Weber made a typology of what he considered the major spheres of society: the economy, society, government, the law, and religion. Since Weber saw each of these spheres as relatively autonomous, he believed they could be studied separately. For Weber, a civilization was the result of the interaction of these spheres.⁸ Weber's comparative method consisted of comparing each of these

8. Because of the popularity of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber has incorrectly become associated with the belief that religion determines the degree of rationality that a society achieves. In fact, Weber held no such position. His analysis of Protestantism

spheres across civilizations and the different interactions of these spheres in each society in order to determine the levels of rationality achieved in each civilization and to understand what prevented the full fluorescence of rationality in non-Western civilizations.

Perhaps Weber's most influential discussion of these issues with respect to China was his contrasting of Confucianism and Protestantism. Weber measured these two religions (in his terminology) according to a universal yardstick of rationalization:

To judge the level of rationalization a religion represents we may use two primary yardsticks which are in many ways inter-related. One is the degree to which the religion has divested itself of magic; the other is the degree to which it has systematically unified the relation between God and the world and therewith its own ethical relationship to the world.⁹

In Weber's view, Protestantism had achieved an extreme form of rationalization in terms of both of these measures. In terms of the first yardstick, Protestant modes of thought "have liquidated magic most completely," leading to a "complete disenchantment of the world" (p. 226). And, in terms of the second, Protestantism precipitated a "tremendous and grandiose tension toward the world" (p. 227).

Confucianism, in contrast, registers far lower on both of these yardsticks. It is characterized by a "toleration of magical and animist conceptions" (p. 196). More specifically, "one may say that every sort of rationalization of the archaic empirical knowledge and craft in China has moved toward a magic image of the world" (p. 196). Instead of rejecting magic altogether, Confucianism converted a magical worldview into a monistic cosmos: "Cosmogonic speculation with the sacred number five operated in terms of five planets, five elements, five organs, etc., macrocosm and microcosm. . . . This Chinese 'universist' philosophy and cosmogony transformed the world into a magic garden" (pp. 199-200). Chinese cosmological thinking, in short, was

reflected his claim that it was an important influence on the emergence of capitalism in the West. But he did not hold that religion in general is the only factor that determines rationality. For Weber, a full analysis of any civilization involves the study of the interactions of all these spheres, and a full comparative study involves comparisons of each of these spheres with those found in other civilizations. Religion, then, was only one of many spheres. Thus, although I focus here primarily on Weber's views on Chinese religions, I do so only because of the emphasis of this book.

9. Weber, *The Religion of China*, p. 226 (hereinafter cited in the text).

simply a rationalization of magic into a formal system—for that same reason, it never transcended a magical approach to the world.

Confucianism was also "a rational ethic which reduced tension with the world to an absolute minimum" (p. 227). Indeed, there was no tension at all between the human and the divine spheres: "Completely absent in Confucian ethics was any tension between nature and deity, between ethical demand and human shortcoming, consciousness of sin and need for salvation, conduct on earth and compensation in the beyond, religious duty and socio-political reality" (pp. 235-36). Confucianism saw cosmos and society as fully linked, and the ethical imperative was simply to adjust oneself to these cosmic and social spheres:

Confucianism meant adjustment to the world, to its orders and conventions. . . . The cosmic orders of the world were considered fixed and inviolate and the orders of society were but a special case of this. The great spirits of the cosmic orders obviously desired only the happiness of the world and especially the happiness of man. The same applied to the orders of society. The "happy" tranquility of the empire and the equilibrium of the soul should and could be attained only if man fitted himself into the internally harmonious cosmos. (pp. 152-53)

The difference between Protestantism and Confucianism could not be more clear:

From the relation between the supra-mundane God and the creaturely wicked, ethically irrational world there resulted . . . the absolute unholiness of tradition and truly endless task of ethically and rationally subduing and mastering the given world, i.e., rational, objective "progress." Here, the task of the rational transformation of the world stood opposed to the Confucian adjustment to the world. (p. 240)

As a consequence, "the varied conditions which externally favored the origin of capitalism in China did not suffice to create it" (p. 248).

One sees in Weber's argument two concerns that will appear repeatedly throughout twentieth-century discussions of Chinese thought: a concern with comparing China and the West with reference to an evolutionary development of rationality and a concern with comparing China and the West by contrasting their purportedly distinctive cosmologies. At times, as in Weber himself, these two were seen as linked. More often, however, these models came to be presented in opposition to each other. Indeed, these have become two of the basic poles around which scholarship on early Chinese thought and religion has developed. And, intriguingly, although almost all of

these sinological studies were written as attempts to defend the Chinese tradition against Weberian critiques, they tend to do so by maintaining one of these two poles of the Weberian framework and simply reversing the valuation given to China.

These poles can be seen in two highly influential studies published in the 1930s: Fung Yu-lan's *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, and Marcel Granet's *La pensée chinoise*. Fung's work was to become one of the most significant studies of the evolution of Chinese philosophy, and Granet's the most important work on early Chinese cosmological thinking. Both were written to defend the Chinese tradition by showing it to be as strong as the Western tradition. But whereas Fung attempted to do so by showing that Chinese philosophy developed through the same evolutionary process as had the Western tradition, Granet defended Chinese thought by arguing that it was based on a cosmology radically different from, but nonetheless as important as, the cosmology that dominated the West. I will discuss each of these works in turn, beginning with Granet.

Granet's main concern in *La pensée chinoise* was to delineate the "governing ideas"¹⁰ of early Chinese thought,¹¹ and one of his central arguments was that Chinese thought is not "prelogical" or "mystical." On the contrary, once one understands the basic principles that underlie Chinese thought, one can see that it forms a meaningful, coherent system (pp. 28–29).

Intriguingly, Granet's presentation of "Chinese thought" is in its general outlines quite similar to Weber's view of Confucianism, with the crucial difference that what Weber saw as restricting the full development of rationality is the very thing Granet celebrated as part of the genius of Chinese thinking. For example, Granet argued, one finds no "world of transcendent realities outside the human world" (p. 279). Indeed, this claim (made in extremely positive terms) that the Chinese lacked a notion of transcendent principles—one of the characteristics that Weber saw as limiting China—pervades Granet's analysis. According to Granet, the Chinese had no sense of a transcendent Law or God and no notion of abstraction (pp. 476, 479). Indeed, the Chinese assumed a fully monistic cosmos: "Man and nature did not form two separate realms, but one unique society" (p. 25).

10. Granet, *La pensée chinoise*, p. 26 (hereinafter cited in the text).

11. I will deal here only briefly with Granet's overall approach. For a more detailed discussion of Granet's work, see Chapters 4 and 6.

To make this argument, Granet worked primarily from those Han texts devoted to building complex correlative systems based on yin-yang, five phases, and microcosmic/macrocosmic relations. However, he read these cosmological notions not as a particular historical development during the Han but as indications of Chinese thinking in general. Indeed, this viewpoint is evident in the organization of the book. The first three quarters are devoted to working out these cosmological systems in detail. Then, in the final quarter of the book, Granet looks at individual thinkers, beginning with Confucius. Each thinker is presented as building on a particular aspect of this "Chinese" cosmology. In other words, instead of presenting cosmology as a late development building on or reacting against earlier figures like Confucius, Granet reads correlative thinking as the guiding principle of all Chinese thought.

Like Granet, Fung Yu-lan was interested in arguing for the value of Chinese thought. But his method of doing so was quite different. Instead of defining a distinct logical system that underlay its seeming strangeness, Fung Yu-lan's main move was to place Chinese thought within the evolutionary framework that dominated contemporary studies of Western philosophy and to read the history of thought in early China in the same terms as was then commonly done for Greece.¹² He presented early Chinese philosophy in terms of a shift from religion to philosophy, from theistic views to rationality, and argued that humanism, rationalism, and naturalism were indigenous to Chinese philosophy and emerged at the same time in China as they purportedly had in ancient Greece. And, although the resulting philosophical tradition in China did not develop in logic and epistemology to the degree found in Greece, it excelled in the study of self-cultivation.¹³

In order to demonstrate this common evolution, Fung Yu-lan began by reconstructing the "primitive" period that China shared with all other civilizations. For Fung, the defining feature of primitive thought was a theistic cosmology: "In the time of primitive man the belief was general, not only in China but in other parts of the world, that natural phenomena and human affairs are all under a divine and supernatural control" (p. 22). In having such a cosmology in the Bronze Age, Fung argued strongly, the Chinese were no different from the Greeks: "The Chinese of that time were superstitious and

12. See, e.g., Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*.

13. Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1: 1–3 (hereinafter cited in the text).

ignorant; they had religious ideas but no philosophy; so that the religion and spirits which they believed in were exactly like those of the Greeks" (p. 24). Fung reiterated this same point several times, repeatedly emphasizing the degree to which these "superstitions" are common among all early peoples—including, most important, the early Greeks. For example, in discussing the "political and social regulations instituted by Shang Di [the high god],"¹⁴ Fung argued, "The ancient Greeks similarly supposed that the institutions of their city-states had been created by divine beings, a belief probably general among early peoples" (p. 34). This superstitious worldview was replaced by a humanistic one in the Chunqiu period (771–481 BC): "With the coming of the Chunqiu period in China, however, or perhaps even before, there were men who tried to give a human interpretation to the laws and statutes, which they declared were established wholly by human beings for man's own benefit" (p. 34). For Fung, this was part of a crucial shift toward the rise of humanism, naturalism, and "rationalism" (p. 33).

Thus, in Fung's view, the emergence of correlative thinking was a step away from theistic views and a step toward a naturalistic conception:

The attempt to explain the phenomena of the universe through the yin-yang theory, though still primitive, is a step forward compared with explanations based on a Tian [Heaven], a Di, and a multitude of spirits. The "heaven" described in this last quotation [from the *Guoyu*] is a naturalistic one bearing strong resemblance to that of Laozi, and seems to be a forerunner of Daoist philosophy. (p. 35)

Unlike Granet, who presented yin-yang cosmology as based on a distinctively Chinese mode of logic, Fung placed it on an evolutionary scale: although still primitive, it was a step toward a fully rationalistic way of thinking.

The differences between these studies by Granet and Fung, published at almost the same time, exemplify two of the poles of analysis that would dominate twentieth-century studies of Chinese thought. For the first few decades after the publication of these two works, the evolutionary model was more influential, although the past two decades have seen a decided shift toward the cultural-essentialist model. I will continue to follow these arguments in roughly chronological order.

14. Here and in all the quotations throughout this book, I have substituted pinyin romanizations.

Perhaps the most influential study within the evolutionary framework was undertaken by Karl Jaspers, in *The Origin and Goal of History*. Jaspers's argument was that between roughly 800 and 200 BC, Greece, India, and China all experienced a philosophical revolution that he termed the "Axial Period."¹⁵ For Jaspers, this period was defined by the emergence of transcendence—the point at which man for the first time "experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence" (p. 2). It further involved a struggle of "rationality" over myth and an "ethical rebellion" against "the unreal figures of the gods" (p. 17). Like Fung, but very much unlike Granet, the emphasis here is on the universal evolution of consciousness rather than on the growth of different cultural assumptions. Jaspers does admit some cultural differences (for example, he feels that China did not produce a "tragic consciousness"; p. 19), but he views these as irrelevant to a proper understanding of universal history: "Really to visualise the facts of the Axial Period and to make them the basis of our universal conception of history is to gain possession of something common to all mankind, beyond all differences of creed" (p. 19). According to Jaspers, China and India underwent the same transcendental breakthrough as Greece. Indeed, this transcendence created a universal form of consciousness. Unlike Weber, then, Jaspers asserts that China did, in this early period, undergo a shift toward transcendence. And also unlike Weber, Jaspers is largely uninterested in culture.

In the China field, the "Axial Period" thesis was adopted most famously by Benjamin Schwartz, who opened his study of Chinese philosophy, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, with a reference to Jaspers:

I must confess that my own interest in ancient Chinese thought has also been much stimulated by the type of "world-historical" observations which we find in the chapter on the "axial age" in Karl Jaspers' book *The Origin and End of History*. In this small volume Jaspers highlights the fact that in many of the high civilizations of the world—the civilizations of the ancient Near East, Greece, India, and China—we witness over the period of our "first millennium B.C." the emergence of certain "creative minorities" who relate themselves in reflective, critical, and what one might even call "transcendental" ways to the civilizations from which they emerge.¹⁶

15. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, p. 1 (hereinafter cited in the text).

16. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, pp. 2–3.

In an earlier study, Schwartz discussed this notion of transcendence in greater detail:

If there is nonetheless some common underlying impulse in all these "axial" movements, it might be called the strain towards transcendence. . . . What I refer to here is something close to the etymological meaning of the word—a kind of standing back and looking beyond—a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond.¹⁷

Although Schwartz himself downplayed the evolutionary aspects of Jaspers's argument, he supported the notion that transcendence should be seen as a valid term to compare the changes that occurred in these civilizations in the middle of the first millennium bc.

The next issue for Schwartz was to define the particular types of transcendence that occurred in each major civilization. Unlike Jaspers, then, Schwartz was interested in cultural analysis—in discovering the unique forms of transcendence that arose in each civilization. For China, he argued, the dominant tendency was "to associate the transcendent with the notion of an immanent cosmic and social order." Transcendence, then, occurred in China even within its immanentist cosmology. Thus, Schwartz characterized transcendence in China as being of a "this-worldly" sort.¹⁸

In making this argument, Schwartz explicitly appealed to Weber. Indeed, Schwartz's consistent move was to largely accept Weber's description of Chinese cosmology but to argue that this cosmology should be considered "rational" and "transcendental." This for Schwartz explains the "rational" cosmology found in texts like the *Shangshu* and *Shijing*, but it is a rationalism based on different principles from those seen in Greece, and thus it did not result in a Weberian "disenchantment of the world":

To the extent that the word "rationalism" refers to the primacy of the idea of order, we can already speak here of the emergence of a kind of Chinese rationalism. It is, however, a rationalism that is radically different from many varieties of rationalism in ancient Greece. What we have is the image of an all-embracing and inclusive order which neither negates nor reduces to some one ultimate principle that which is presumed to exist. Like the rationalism of bureaucracy, it classifies and subsumes the existent reality. It is a synthetic rather than an analytic conception of order. The

17. Schwartz, "The Age of Transcendence," p. 3.

18. Schwartz, "Transcendence in Ancient China," pp. 67, 59–60.

spirits of nature and the ancestral spirits are not banished. Indeed, Chinese thought has never seriously attempted to carry out the "disenchantment" of the world.¹⁹

Schwartz further contrasted China with other ancient civilizations in terms of one of the basic points emphasized by Weber: the lack in China of a strong tension between the human and divine realms. In other ancient civilizations, most notably Mesopotamia, Egypt, Vedic India, and Greece, the human and divine realms are, according to Schwartz, viewed as contestatory: "On both the human and the divine level, attention is called to those aspects of life in which gods and humans confront each other as somewhat unpredictable individuals and groups rather than in terms of fixed 'role behavior.'"²⁰ In China, according to Schwartz, one finds a familial order of ancestor worship that led to a philosophical emphasis on a linkage between the divine and the human realms:

Another possible implication of ancestor worship for the religious and even "philosophic" development of China involves the relation between the divine-numinous realm and the human world. The ancestral spirits dwell in the world of the divine or numinous. . . . Thus the line dividing the "divine" from the human is not sharply drawn, and it seems that humans may possess or take on qualities which are truly numinous.²¹

Overall, then, Schwartz accepted much of Weber's framework of comparing civilizations with reference to the notion of rationalization, and he even accepted Weber's basic reading of Chinese culture as being dominated by an immanentist cosmology, a this-worldly orientation, and a lack of a tension between the human and divine realms. The only difference is that Schwartz wanted to follow Jaspers in arguing that China did shift to transcendental thinking in the early period. Schwartz thus maintained a delicate balance between the two paradigms discussed in this chapter. Although clearly working within a Weberian framework, he emphasized that a shift toward transcendence had occurred in China.

However, whereas Schwartz emphasized some degree of similarity between the early Chinese tradition and other early philosophical traditions, the most dominant paradigm over the past two decades has gone in the opposite direction. Several scholars have built on Granet's work to argue that China had a radically different cosmology from that seen in the West.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

20. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 25.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Indeed, it is not going too far to suggest that, with a few exceptions noted below, the evolutionary framework has largely been rejected in recent scholarship in favor of the cultural-essentialist model that so defined Granet's work. Although many of the supporters of this cultural-essentialist model explicitly claim to be studying the "Axial Age,"²² they in fact strongly oppose the evolutionary sides of Jaspers's argument.

One of the more influential works based on this approach was roughly contemporary with Jaspers's book: the second volume of Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China*. Working closely from Granet, whom he quoted frequently,²³ Needham sought to develop an understanding of the fundamental cosmology of the Chinese:

The key-word in Chinese thought is Order and above all Pattern (and, if I may whisper it for the first time, Organism). The symbolic correlations or correspondences all formed part of one colossal pattern. Things behaved in particular ways not necessarily because of prior actions or impulses of other things, but because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such that they were endowed with intrinsic natures which made that behaviour inevitable for them. . . . They were thus parts in existential dependence upon the whole world-organism. And they reacted upon one another not so much by mechanical impulsion or causation as by a kind of mysterious resonance.²⁴

Within this organismic conception of the world, all things spontaneously harmonize with each other, creating an "ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer."²⁵ In contrast to a harmony of wills, Needham claimed, European thought is characterized by a "schizophrenia or split-personality. Europeans could only think in terms either of Democritean mechanical materialism or of Platonic theological spiritualism."²⁶ Just like Weber, Needham argued that China did not possess the radical dualism that was so important for the West. But Needham reversed the formula and clearly sympathized with the Chinese side of the contrast.

Frederick Mote has similarly based his argument on what he calls the general "world view"²⁷ of early China. Like Granet, Mote begins by describ-

22. See, e.g., Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, p. xiii; and Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. i.

23. See, among other places, Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 2: 216-17, 280.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

26. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 302.

27. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China*, p. 16.

ing this worldview and then discusses how the various schools of thought were guided by such a shared cosmology. Mote further builds on Needham to make an argument for the absolute uniqueness of Chinese cosmology:

Needham, analyzing that Chinese model, calls it "an ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer." As he describes the organismic Chinese cosmos, it emerges to our full view as one in striking contrast to all other world conceptions known to human history. It differs from other organismic conceptions, such as classic Greek cosmologies in which a logos or demiurge or otherwise conceived master will external to creation, was regarded as necessary for existence.²⁸

If such a cosmology were indeed an assumption in early China, then it would follow that both humans and spirits would be conceptualized as part of a larger monistic system. As Mote argues: "This is an essentially naturalistic conception, in that it describes 'spirit' as having the same qualities and as being subject to the same processes as all other aspects of nature."²⁹ In contrast to Western conceptions, in other words, humans and gods were seen as similar in nature.

K. C. Chang expanded on these ideas and argued that this difference in the cosmologies of the West and China derived from a different orientation toward shamanism:

Men and gods, animate and inanimate things, the living and dead members of the clans—all of these beings existed in the ancient Chinese world within the same universe, but that universe was layered and subdivided. The most important divisions were the Heaven and the Earth, and the ancient Chinese could be seen as particularly preoccupied with the Heaven and Earth intercommunication. The shamans—religious personnel equipped with the power to fly across the different layers of the universe with the help of the animals and a whole range of rituals and paraphernalia—were chiefly responsible for the Heaven-Earth communication.³⁰

As intermediaries who maintain a proper linkage between the human and the divine realms, Chang argued, shamans occupied positions of great importance.³¹

For Chang, China and the West diverged because the Near East experienced what Chang calls a "breakout" from this earlier, shamanistic past,

28. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

30. K. C. Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, p. 415.

31. The argument is developed in full in Chang's *Art, Myth, and Ritual*.

whereas China (along with Mesoamerican civilizations) maintained its shamanistic culture. Thus, the West developed, among other things, "a cosmology that emphasized the separate existence of gods," while Chinese culture was built on an assumption of an "interlinked world continuum." Once again, Chinese thought is distinguished by a purported assumption of continuity between the human and divine realms.

Similar arguments, although developed in different ways, underlie the work of A. C. Graham, one of the most philosophically acute scholars to study early China. Like Granet, Needham, Mote, and Chang, Graham was committed to distinguishing Chinese and Western ways of thinking. In a move reminiscent of Granet, Graham built this contrast on a distinction between analytic thinking (dominant in Western thought) and correlative thinking (more dominant in China). However, Graham's construction of this contrast differed in some ways from Granet's.

To begin with, Graham argued that both correlative and analytic thinking are universal modes of thought. Correlative thinking is the precognitive mode common in most daily life and is the basis for analytical thinking, a second-order mode.³² Graham therefore opposed Granet's attempt to read late Warring States and Han correlative models as representative of a uniquely Chinese way of thinking. Instead, Graham argued, the attempt by figures in the third and second centuries BC to build complex, cosmological systems should be read as simply a particular development of a universal mode of reasoning: "What Granet saw as the difference between Chinese and Western thought may nowadays be seen as a transcultural difference between proto-science and modern science. Correlative cosmos-building is most conveniently approached as merely an exotic example of the correlative thinking used by everyone, which underlies the operations of language itself."³³ Instead, therefore, of building a contrastive framework between China and the West on the purported distinctiveness of correlative thinking, Graham pointed instead to the relative weight that each philosophical tradition placed on correlative and analytic thinking. China embraced correlative thinking; the West ultimately divorced analytic thinking from correlative thinking and came to value analytical thinking more highly.³⁴

32. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 322.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 320. See also Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*, pp. 8-9.

34. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 323.

The consequence of Graham's argument is that Chinese thought is presented as fully distinct from Western thought but based on the same universal types of thinking. Accordingly, although Graham continued to distinguish "China" and the "West," he could argue that the West could learn from and accept fully the traditions of China. The overall argument is thus a variant of the cultural-essentialist paradigm. Graham was committed to a Chinese philosophical tradition based on correlative thinking, but he based it on a universal claim concerning correlative thinking in order to emphasize the general applicability of the Chinese model.

Graham's arguments have been developed in the collaborative work of David Hall and Roger Ames, which represents the most extensive attempt in recent decades to contrast the cultures of early China and the West. Indeed, they describe their work as an attempt to "illuminate the contrasting assumptions shaping classical Chinese and Western cultures."³⁵ And, like Granet, the sympathies of Hall and Ames lie fully with China.

Indeed, Hall and Ames strongly defend Granet's argument that correlative thinking is a defining feature of Chinese thought:

Our view, however, is that Marcel Granet was essentially correct in identifying what we are here calling correlative thinking with a fundamental commitment of the Chinese sensibility. This implies that even among those thinkers such as Confucius and the philosophical Daoists who were not so concerned with physical speculations, the mode of correlative thinking dominates. Our argument here is that Han exercises in correlative thinking are not anomalous, but are rather signal instances of correlative thinking in a tradition replete with such instances. (p. 257)

Like Granet, and unlike Graham, Hall and Ames wish to read the Han correlative texts as representative of all early Chinese thought. Thus, Hall and Ames explicitly critique Jaspers's argument: "If comparative philosophy has anything to say about Chinese culture during the so-called Axial Age, it is certainly this: notions of 'absoluteness,' 'transcendence,' and 'subjectivity' were of doubtful significance" (p. xiii). They also fault Schwartz for following Jaspers in using terms such as "transcendence" and in assuming a commonality among early civilizations (pp. 148, 186-87). But, unlike Weber, Hall and Ames do not criticize China for its lack of transcendence but, like Granet, celebrate it.

35. Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, p. xviii (hereinafter cited in the text).

In formulating the contrasting assumptions of China and the West, Hall and Ames invoke a fundamental distinction between what they call "first" and "second problematic thinking." First problematic thinking, which Hall and Ames see as dominating Chinese thought, is based on "analogical or correlative thinking" (p. xvii). "This mode of thinking accepts the priority of change or process over rest and permanence, presumes no ultimate agency responsible for the general order of things, and seeks to account for states of affairs by appeal to correlative procedures rather than by determining agencies or principles" (p. xvii). In contrast to this, Hall and Ames claim, is second problematic thinking, or "causal thinking" (p. xvii)—the mode that has dominated the West. Among the characteristics of causal thinking is "the belief that the order of the cosmos is a consequence of some agency of construal . . . [and] the tacit or explicit claim that the states of affairs comprising 'the world' are grounded in, and ultimately determined by, these agencies of construal" (p. xvii). Theistic systems, therefore, in which divine agencies are seen as causative forces in shaping the world, are based on a Western, rather than a Chinese, way of thinking, as would be, of course, any kind of transcendental or foundational thought.

Like Graham, Hall and Ames see each of these ways of thinking as existing to some degree in both Chinese and Western cultures, and they are thus able to argue that Chinese thought is something that can be fully assimilated into contemporary Western thinking. But, their sympathies are clearly with the correlative mode, and they not surprisingly oppose any attempt to present these types on an evolutionary line, with correlative thinking as a more primitive or lesser stage of consciousness: "Such a claim challenges the viability of the Enlightenment reading of cultural development, which argues that the movement from mythos to logos or 'from religion to philosophy,' or from analogical to causal thinking, ought to serve as the norm for the civilizing of human experience" (p. xviii). Hall and Ames would thus reject Fung Yu-lan's "religion to philosophy" argument. Indeed, they would question Fung's narrative of an evolution in China from theism to humanism and rationalism. For Hall and Ames, all of these are distinctively Western modes of thinking—not found in the correlative thought of China.

Although the cultural-essentialist model has dominated the study of early Chinese thought in recent decades, the evolutionist paradigm has recently been resurrected with great force by Heiner Roetz. Roetz explicitly picks up on Jaspers's notion of an Axial Period, arguing against Weber that China

did undergo a transcendental breakthrough in the early period.³⁶ He quotes Schwartz's definition of transcendence for all Axial Period civilizations with approval (p. 273), but, unlike Schwartz, Roetz maintains the evolutionary aspects of Jaspers's argument. Indeed, he explicitly uses Jaspers's framework to reject the culturalist approach: "This should provide us with a universalistic conception of understanding, which avoids the ethnocentric implications or relativistic consequences of recourse to native language and culture specific forms of thought" (p. 23).

In opposition to culturalism, Roetz seeks to provide "a yardstick for measuring and evaluating in its specific variations the cultural evolution of mankind" (p. 30). Clearly, Roetz's image of measuring cultures according to a yardstick of universal development is directly reminiscent (even to the point of using the same metaphor) of the evolutionary sides of Weber's analysis. And, indeed, despite his strong rhetoric, Roetz is strongly indebted to the Weberian paradigm, although Roetz places China higher on the yardstick than did Weber. Roetz's recurrent move is thus to try to show that China did in fact attain the very forms of transcendence and rationality Weber found in the West.

For the purposes of this chapter, the most significant of Roetz's discussions is his explanation of how nature came to be seen as an object of human conquest. Since Weber connected the rise of a "disenchanted" notion of nature in the West to belief in a transcendent god, Roetz needs to explain how this notion could have arisen in a culture without such a belief: "How, unless by means of the concept of an otherworldly god, can nature be 'disenchanted' (Weber) in such a way that it becomes the profane object of systematical transformation and conquest by man?" (p. 21). For Roetz, the shift occurred with the "catastrophe" of the fall of the Western Zhou, which resulted in the "the loss of dignity of Heaven." This "failure of the divine power led man to direct his attention to himself. Religion lost ground to new speculations" (p. 39). Roetz thus offers a variation on the "religion to philosophy" argument: a theistic worldview dominated the early period, but, with the fall of the Western Zhou, theism was destroyed. This led to a de-emphasis on divine powers and a re-emphasis on humans. Roetz thus feels he has proved that, contrary to Weber's view, China did indeed see the rise of ethical rationalization in the early period (p. 274).

36. Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, p. 23 (hereinafter cited in the text).

But, since Roetz sees this rationalization as necessarily involving the disenchantment of nature and the making of nature into a profane object of conquest by man, how does he deal with the emergence of correlative cosmology—one of the very things that Weber saw as limiting rationalization in China? As Roetz notes, in a reference to Weber, “cosmological, holistic reasoning often counts as an indication that a breakthrough toward enlightened thought has not taken place” (pp. 226–27). Roetz’s defense of the Chinese tradition thus consists of denying the importance of cosmology, and he therefore opposes Granet’s attempts to read correlative thinking as dominant in early China (p. 227). He argues, for example, that Xunzi’s cosmological terminology is simply “rhetoric” (p. 230).

But what about Han texts? Even Roetz cannot deny that cosmology becomes important in the Han. Perhaps not surprisingly, he has nothing but derision for figures like Dong Zhongshu who embraced correlative cosmology. For Roetz, Dong Zhongshu “discards the rational view of nature which Zhou philosophy had developed and Xunzi had brought to completion” (p. 231). As a consequence, Dong Zhongshu marks the point at which Confucianism returns to “superstition”: “Ethically as well as cognitively it [Confucianism] falls back on a level which the axial age philosophers had once overcome” (p. 231). Like Weber, Roetz defines correlative cosmology in terms of a lesser form of rationalization—a lower position on the yardstick. The only difference is that since Roetz argues that a transcendental breakthrough occurred earlier, he sees the resurgence of correlative thinking as a regression.

Why did the Chinese lapse? Or, when put in terms of the entire history of China, why did China not achieve the full rationalization that Roetz, following Weber, thinks occurred in the West? Roetz concludes with an explanation of this “discrepancy between the original potential and the actual historical development of China” (p. 275). Ultimately, the problem, as Roetz sees it, is that Confucianism failed to develop because the tension it posited between convention and morality (*li* and *ren*) was “not expressed in a trenchant manner” (p. 277). What is amazing about this argument is how similar it is to Weber’s. In essence, Roetz is arguing that the problem with Confucianism is that it failed to maintain as extreme a tension between morality and convention as it should have. Moreover, since Roetz agrees that correlative cosmology is nonrational, he argues that once correlative cosmology becomes dominant in the Han, cognition fell to a lower, nontranscendental level. Thus, despite all his discussions of transcendence, Roetz is still com-

mitted to claiming the same comparative point we have seen repeatedly (even if valued differently by different thinkers) since Weber: the Chinese tradition failed to achieve the motivating tensions so important to the West.

Method of Analysis

At the center of much of the secondary literature sketched above stand the cosmological texts of the Warring States and Han. The question is how to read these texts. Weber, as well as those who advocated a generally evolutionist framework, present cosmological models as part of an attempt to rationalize an existing magical, theistic, animistic worldview. Correlative cosmology was thus a shift toward rationality and naturalism, even if it unfortunately retained many of the earlier magical notions. In Roetz’s variant of this model, rational naturalism (with a cosmological “rhetoric”) developed in early China, but then correlative cosmology arose in a throwback to an earlier, nonrational stage of development. However, the emphasis within this paradigm is on the shift from theism to naturalism.

The advocates of the cultural-essentialist model, on the other hand, hold that these cosmological texts are indicative of a set of underlying assumptions in early China. Figures as diverse as Granet, Mote, Chang, Graham, and Hall and Ames hold that even if cosmological systems did not emerge until the third century BC, they are nonetheless representative of a general “Chinese” way of thinking. In this view, theism never existed in China—even in the Bronze Age. According to these interpretations, China and Greece (indeed, all of the West) are distinguished by radically different cosmologies—the Western tradition being defined in terms of (among other things) a disjunction between man and god, and the Chinese assuming an inherent correlation and linkage.

As I will argue below, some of the material on self-divinization may force us to rethink both these frameworks. The complex issues concerning the word spirit (*shen* 神) in early Chinese texts are an example.³⁷ As I discuss at length in this book, the term is used to describe both spirits who reside

37. Willard Peterson (“Making Connections,” p. 104) has suggested translating *shen* as “numinosity,” a word that does capture the adjectival sense of *shen* quite well. However, the nominal form “numen” works poorly to describe *shen* when it refers to spirits. In this work, I will therefore continue to utilize the common translations of *shen* as “spirits” or “divinities,” when used in the nominal form, and “spiritual” and “divine” when used in the adjectival. Such translations allow one to more easily convey the shifts that appear in the early texts.

above and possess direct powers over natural phenomena and refined forms of *qi* within humans.

On the question of how to account for these two meanings of the term *shen*, Hall and Ames have argued that "with the appearance of any given character in the text, the full seamless range of meanings is introduced." Our task as readers is "to reconstitute the several meanings of any term as an integrated whole."³⁸ This means that we must strive to understand the implications of a worldview in which *shen* can simultaneously contain both meanings:

Shen, for example, is a complex notion, meaning as it does both "human spirituality," and "divinity." *Shen* does not *sometimes* mean "human spirituality," and *sometimes* "divinity." It always means both of these, and moreover, it is our business to try and understand philosophically how it can mean both. What are the implications of this particular range of meanings where humanity and divinity are continuous?³⁹

In other words, the dual meaning of the term reveals a way of thinking in which humanity and divinity are continuous, and the job of the analyst is to reconstruct that way of thinking. Their argument continues: "How does this factor into the familiar formula, *tianren heyi*—the continuity between *tian* [Heaven] and the human world?"⁴⁰ Or, as they put it elsewhere: "We may wonder what the fact that the single term *shen* can mean both 'divinity' and 'human spirituality' in the classical Chinese language reveals about Chinese religiousness."⁴¹

In contrast, I argue in the chapters that follow that the term *shen* does *not* mean both "human spirituality" and "divinity." The term *shen* was used exclusively in the Bronze Age to refer to divinities. It was not until the Warring States period that the term came to be applied to substances within humans, and this was part, I will argue, of an attempt to redefine the term for specific purposes. It did not, therefore, represent an assumption that "humanity and divinity are continuous." Rather, it involved a claim to that effect—a claim that was strongly contested throughout the entire early period. I am not sure what the dual meanings of the term would in themselves tell us about "Chinese" religiousness. But if, instead of trying to reconstruct a "Chinese" viewpoint, we see the existence of different meanings as indicative

38. Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, pp. 236–37.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

41. Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, p. 226.

of specific arguments advanced within a particular historical context, then they may reveal a great deal. In other words, instead of trying to "reconstitute the several meanings of any term as an integrated whole," I will work to reconstruct the debate within which these various meanings were developed and contested.

I emphasize this point to underline one of the central dangers of contrastive approaches such as that of Hall and Ames. Building such a contrastive framework requires taking particular texts out of context and reading them as assumptions of the entire cultures being compared. And, in this particular case, restoring that context allows us both to provide a historical account of why such statements were made and to restore the provocative power that such statements would have held at the time. To reduce them to being simply examples of a common Chinese way of thinking makes it impossible for us to recover the cultural potency that such claims possessed.

In short, I want to restore the historical power of such statements by asking Why would humans claim they could become spirits? How were such claims read at the time? And what is the cultural history of such claims—What happened when people said such things, and what happened when others opposed them? As we will see, these questions became major issues of state policy and practice by the early imperial period.

Similarly, an evolutionary perspective on the changing meaning of *shen*—as a shift from a magical to a naturalistic/rationalistic/humanistic worldview—creates problems as well. Unlike a cultural-essentialist approach, the evolutionary perspective recognizes that a significant shift did occur in the perceived relations between humans and spirits over this period. But ignoring the contexts in which specific claims were made in favor of a universal yardstick risks the same kind of misunderstanding as the cultural-essentialist model. Even if one wanted to assert a universal yardstick of rationality, it would be meaningless to assess the rationality or lack thereof of a given text unless one first, at the minimum, ascertained the contemporary meaning of the text.

Moreover, the advocates of this model see the emergence of a correlative cosmology that links humans with divine forces as a development *toward* a fully rationalistic perspective, but one unfortunately too mired in the earlier magical worldview to mark a complete breakthrough toward rationality. Even Roetz, who argues that a transcendental breakthrough did occur in Warring States China, believes that Chinese thinkers failed to develop the

kind of tension with the world that occurred in the West. Accordingly, a full development of rationality was hindered. Beyond the obvious dangers of reading another culture according to a universal yardstick of rationality, one of the immediate implications of such an approach is that it binds the analyst to de-emphasizing tensions in the early texts: claims about the continuity between humans and divinities in Warring States texts are explained away as too mired in an earlier magical view of continuity. The analyst is thus committed to finding an assumption of continuity between humans and divinities in the Bronze Age as well, for only in this way can one explain the inability of later thinkers to move further toward a more rational worldview. Like the cultural-essentialist approach, then, the framework again forces the analyst to see a lack of tension between humans and divinities as a guiding theme in early China, even if the analyst does see a shift from an earlier "animistic" or "magical" worldview to a correlative one.

Both frameworks, then, rest on remarkably similar foundations. Both rest on seeing a fundamental dichotomy between China and the West, and both define that difference in very similar ways. Either (in negative terms) China did not manifest the tensions found in the West, or (in positive terms) it maintained a notion of continuity between humans and divine powers lost in the West. The differences simply come down to whether this distinction is worked out on a contrastive model (with China and the West holding opposing assumptions) or on a developmental line (with China and the West occupying different positions on the yardstick).

In contrast to both these frameworks, I will attempt to provide a full historical study of the relations of humans, spirits, and the cosmos from the Bronze Age to the early Han. I will read the texts in question as claims, and my goal will be to reconstruct the contexts in which these claims were meaningful. I will argue that we cannot understand early Chinese cosmology until we understand why certain figures presented cosmological arguments, what they were reacting to, and what impact their claims had at the time. I thus build on the recent, important work of Nathan Sivin, John Henderson, and Wang Aihe to argue for a historical understanding of cosmology.⁴²

In short, I am recommending that we dispense with both of the frameworks discussed above—both the contrastive and the evolutionary models.

42. See Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C."; Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology*; Wang Aihe, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*.

We should instead work toward a more nuanced approach in which we make no *a priori* assumptions regarding single statements made in single texts and the significance of individual claims. Once this is done, and once we move away from a commitment to seeing a lack of tension between humans and divinities as a guiding theme in early China, we may discover a rich, and perhaps more troubled, world of debate concerning humans, divinities, and sacrificial practice than previous analyses have accustomed us to expect from Chinese texts.

This methodological point is relevant as well to the question of how we should organize the analysis of these texts. As should be clear from the recurrent references in the secondary literature to "schools of thought" in early China—such as Confucianism or Daoism—many scholars have organized their studies in terms of such categories. I would argue, in contrast, that the attempt to categorize texts in terms of schools is usually unhelpful and often misleading; rather, our concern should be to explicate the claims of each text within the debates of the time.⁴³ Discussion of these claims in terms of a "school" is seldom helpful.⁴⁴ Even when dealing with a text that explicitly posits itself within a defined textual tradition, the analyst should seek to understand how such a textual tradition is being posited and what claims are being made through that positing.

All these interpretive strategies—reading in terms of schools, essentialized definitions of culture, evolutionary frameworks—have the consequence of erasing the unique power that particular claims had at the time. My strategy is, instead, to contextualize through a different approach: to ask why statements are made in particular situations, to understand the cultural significance they would have had at the time, and to work out the historical consequences of the ensuing debates.

But my goal is not to discredit the use of comparative terminology by simply pointing out the obvious lack of fit between the indigenous categories

43. For an excellent critique of the use of the category "Daoism," see Sivin, "On the Word Taoism as a Source of Perplexity." Sivin makes a related, and equally powerful, critique of the category of "Naturalists"; see "The Myth of the Naturalists," in his *Medicine, Philosophy, and Religion in Ancient China*, pp. 1–33.

44. With the exception of Confucianism and Mohism, many of the "schools" into which early Chinese thought is often categorized first appear in our received texts in the essay "Yaozhi," by Sima Tan (d. 110 BC). As Kidder Smith ("Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' et cetera") has convincingly shown, many of these "schools" were invented by Sima Tan and are therefore of questionable applicability for discussions of pre-Han texts.

and the comparative terms—a point that could of course be made for any culture. On the contrary, I think comparative work can be very helpful, and I see my work as helping to develop a comparative framework. Ultimately, I hope to show that an alternative form of cultural analysis than has heretofore been practiced with these texts will aid in developing better comparative methodologies. In particular, I will build on a number of recent works in anthropology to argue for a somewhat different approach to the study of early China; in turn, the material on early China may help us to rethink issues in the anthropological literature as well.

Outline

In Chapter 1, I utilize paleographic materials and received texts to discuss the complexities of ritual practices in the Bronze Age dealing with divinities. I analyze changes in notions of the nature of spirits and ancestors, as well as the rituals relating to both groups. I question several of the dominant models for analyzing this material and argue that, contrary to most interpretations, these documents reveal a highly agonistic world, in which divine powers were perceived to be capricious and in which humans were in the position of trying, within their limited abilities, to utilize sacrifices and divinations to understand and influence the spirit world. More specifically, I argue that there is an overriding concern in these materials to anthropomorphize the divine. Building on the work of David Keightley, I trace the attempts, through ritual practices, to make the spirits into ancestors who could then be arranged into a hierarchy and directed to work on behalf of the living to obtain support for the non-ancestral spirits as well.

Chapter 2 focuses on the emergence, during the Warring States period, of numerous attempts to bypass the dominant modes of orientation toward the world of spirits (involving, among other things, divination and sacrifice) through practices of self-cultivation. The advocates of these practices began articulating new definitions of the nature of spirits and of humanity and the relationship between the two. More precisely, these articulations were attempts to reduce the distinction between humans and spirits and to argue that, through proper practices, one can attain powers comparable to those possessed by spirits and that one could dispense with divination and sacrifices. Instead of anthropomorphizing the divine, humans, through self-cultivation, could themselves become *ru shen*—"like spirits."

I also critique in detail the argument, made for both China and Greece, that such movements—which I refer to as "self-divinization movements"—arose through a re-reading of earlier shamanistic practice. I develop a comparison with early Greece and argue for an approach to analyzing relations between humans and divine powers in early Greece and China different from the ones that have thus far been influential in sinology.

In Chapter 3, I look in detail at the rise of so-called naturalistic philosophy in Mencius and Zhuangzi. I argue against a reading of these texts as representing either an assumption concerning the inherent continuity between humans and Heaven in early China or a shift from an animistic religion to a more rational worldview. On the contrary, as I hope to show, these texts should be read as statements in the contemporary debate over the potentially divine powers of humans, and both texts contain attempts to think through the implications of such claims for the relations of humans and Heaven. If humans can indeed become spirits and can indeed gain divine powers, then should they still accept the commands of a potentially capricious Heaven? Both Zhuangzi and Mencius answer this question in the affirmative, although in different ways. In opposition to the way these figures are usually read, I argue that the texts of Mencius and Zhuangzi reveal the tremendous tensions emerging at this time between Heaven and man.

In Chapter 4, I turn to a study of correlative cosmology. I argue that the emergence of correlative systems in the late Warring States period was directly related to the emergence of much stronger claims of self-divinization. In contrast to the statements in fourth-century BC texts that humans can attain powers comparable to those possessed by spirits, by the third century BC numerous figures began to claim to possess techniques that enable them to become spirits.

In making this argument, I propose an alternative approach to reading early Chinese correlative thinking. If, as discussed above, Granet sought to explicate Chinese correlative thinking through a reconstruction of "Chinese thinking," Graham tried to do so by positing correlative thinking as a universal mode of human thought. They disagree, in other words, on the relationship of early Chinese correlative thinking to contemporary observers: Granet emphasized difference, Graham similarity. But both Granet and Graham hope to explain why cosmology would have seemed natural in early China. And my disagreement with both of their approaches begins here. I argue, building on the points discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, that cosmology was in

fact *counterintuitive* in early China. Not only did it arise late (as Graham correctly points out), it arose in direct opposition to the sacrificial practices dominant at the time. Correlative thinking emerged as a language of critique against the dominant notions of the time, and it remained a language of critique and opposition throughout the early imperial period.

To develop this argument, I analyze numerous late Warring States texts in full. I also review the anthropological literature on sacrifice and cosmology that has been so influential in sinological discussions of Chinese correlative thinking and argue that a somewhat different reading of that literature, particularly of Granet and Claude Lévi-Strauss, will allow for an alternative, and in my opinion more convincing, understanding of Chinese correlative thought.

Chapter 5 is a study of the large literature on spirit journeys and ascension from early China. Although this literature has usually been read as a survival of shamanism, I argue in contrast that it makes sense only when placed within the historical contexts sketched in Chapters 2 through 4. In particular, several of the texts represent an attempt to develop self-divinization claims to argue that humans not only can become spirits but also can leave their body altogether and ascend to the heavens. The goal of Chapter 5 is to analyze these claims in depth and see precisely why they were being advanced at the time.

Chapter 6 turns to Qin and early Han court practices. I reconstruct aspects of the sacrificial system and imperial ideology of the Qin and early Han courts and analyze the reasons for the prominence of *fangshi* (masters of formulas) at the courts of the First Emperor and Emperor Wu of the Han. My main interest in this chapter is to investigate the emergence during this period of theomorphic claims of rulership and the resulting debates that arose concerning the emperor's proper relationship to the world of spirits. I reconstruct the historical complexity of these various stances over the course of the Qin and early Han empires to show both the rise of theomorphic forms of rulership and the reaction against it.

I also trace the intensification of efforts by various officials to develop correlative models during this period. I focus in particular on Lu Jia, who strongly advocated following the transmitted texts of the ancient sages. Lu Jia turned to correlative models to critique both the dominant imperial ideology and the various self-divinization claims that were becoming increasingly popular among the early Han elite: by arguing that the cosmos consists

of spontaneous processes and patterns, not directed by spirits at all, Lu Jia and others like him could deny the theistic underpinnings of much of early Han elite culture. If spirits do not control natural phenomena, then both the theomorphic pretensions of the emperors and the claims of autonomy made by some practitioners of self-divinization could be opposed.

Chapter 7 is an in-depth study of the cosmologies presented in several chapters of the *Huainanzi*, which build on the ascension and self-divinization literatures to argue for a cosmos populated by theomorphic humans and anthropomorphic gods. I analyze why these cosmologies were being presented and what claims were being made. I also discuss the continuing proliferation of self-divinization movements during the early Han and trace the various appeals that were made for such powers, explicating why they became so prominent during this period.

Chapter 8 studies the shifts in the imperial sacrificial system from the time of Emperor Wu to the late first century BC in response to the contemporary debates over how the system should operate. I analyze Emperor Wu's creation of a new sacrificial system based upon *Taiyi* (the Great One), as well as Dong Zhongshu's and Sima Qian's critiques of the emperor. I then investigate why, in 31 BC, the imperial court embraced the arguments of the *ru*-ists, abolished significant portions of its sacrificial system, and put in place a new set of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. These new sacrifices were based in part on a particular reading of documents concerning the sacrificial system of the Western Zhou. I seek to discern the significance that had come to be associated with these various sacrificial rites and to explain the reasons for this shift in sacrificial practice. I argue that the shift was in part a reaction to the claims of autonomy that had developed in the self-divinization movements. Although these movements had themselves flourished in reaction to the theomorphic presentations of the early Han court, the claims of autonomy that came to be associated with these movements were seen as highly dangerous and ultimately provoked a strong shift in court policies.

The new sacrificial system put in place at the end of the first century BC involved a rejection of any claims to self-divinization or theomorphism on the part of humans. Humans and Heaven were posited as normatively correlated with each other, but they were also distinguished, with each given its proper sphere of activity. Divine kingship was rejected; the ruler was defined as human. Thereafter, self-divinization and ascension came to be associated with millenarian movements opposing the imperial court.