

THE COSMO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF HEAVEN'S MANDATE

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太史公曰：自初生民以來世主曷嘗不曆日月星辰？

The Grand Historiographer said: Ever since the people have existed, when have successive rulers not followed the movements of sun, moon, stars, and asterisms?¹

In China by the early second millennium B.C. there was already firmly established a mindset characterized by a self-conscious dependence on regularly scrutinizing the sky for guidance.² Not only the calendar, but

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1. *Shiji* 史記, "Tian guan shu" 天官書 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 27.1342. All subsequent references to the standard histories are to this series.

2. That this was true to a significant degree at a much earlier date is shown by the orientation of graves and the doorways of dwellings as early as the fifth millennium B.C. The consistent pattern of cardinal orientation of graves among certain Neolithic cultures along the middle and lower course of the Yellow River as well as the lower course of the Yangtze River shows clearly that these peoples had already formed a concept of East and West based on the location of sunrise and sunset and had devised a method of determining the cardinal, and in some cases, intercardinal directions. Research has also shown that the entrances of early Yangshao 仰韶 dwellings at Banpo 半坡 were deliberately oriented toward the location of the mid-afternoon winter sun when at its warmest a month or so after the solstice. Some minority peoples of south-west China to this day call the month corresponding to this time "House-building month" (*gai fang yue* 蓋房月); see Lu Yang 盧央 and Shao Wangping 邵望平, "Kaogu yicun zhong suo fanying de shiqian tianwen zhishi" 考古遺存中所反映的史前天文知訊, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu lunji* 中國古代天文文物論集 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), 1-16. Retrospective computation shows the asterism corresponding to the sun's location at this time in 4,000 B.C. was that known as Yingshi 營室 "Lay out

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the correct orientation of any consecrated space, the scheduling of religious ceremonial, and the proper conduct of seasonal occupations all depended on the king's competent performance of his cosmo-magical role of theocrat. The ability to comprehend the celestial rhythms and to maintain conformity between their changes and human activity was a fundamental qualification of early Chinese kingship.³ This suggests why, as early as the second millennium B.C., the correlation with the first dynastic transitions of unusually dense clusters of all five naked-eye planets was thought to signify the conferral of legitimacy on the dynastic power currently in ascendancy. Such a conception is consistent with the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy (event B occurs after event A, therefore A is the cause of B) underpinning the theory of omens in much of the ancient world. What is remarkable in the earliest Chinese cases is the degree to which these extraordinary celestial portents actually influenced political and military behavior.

The objective of this essay is to set out in one place the evidence for remarkably early coordination of celestial portents and formative political and military events long remembered in the scriptural traditions of the Chinese. Beyond this, I will offer an account of the ancient Chinese politico-religious imagination according to which macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondences legitimated the social order. The argument will be developed in three parts: first, a brief survey of the state of our knowledge of early astronomical observation in China, especially correlations between celestial and political events; second, a discussion of the formative role played by such knowledge in the emergence of astrology,

the Hall" in Warring States and Han times. Some centuries earlier it was also referred to as Ding 定 in the *Odes* (#50 定之方中) where this same structural planning function is alluded to: "When (the constellation) Ding was on the meridian, he started work on the Ch'u Palace; when he had measured it by the sun, he started work on the Ch'u Hall"; see Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), 33.

3. This was also the view of Xu Fuguan 徐復觀: "We need only think of the astronomical achievements of ancient Babylon for it to seem not the least surprising that in the age of Tang 唐 and Yu 虞 there had already accumulated a certain knowledge of the order of the heavens, and that in government there were specific individuals who handed this knowledge down so that it was not affected by dynastic change, in that way being preserved for posterity"; see Xu, *Yin yang wu xing guannian zhi yanbian ji ruogan youguan wenxian de chengli shidai yu jieshi de wenti* 陰陽五行觀念之演變及若干有關文獻的成立時代與解釋的問題 (Taipei: Minzhu pinglunshu, 1961), 14. For a recent, comprehensive account of the cross-fertilization between astronomy and government in ancient China, see Jiang Xiaoyuan 江曉原, *Tian xue zhen yuan* 天學真原 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu, 1991). For the cosmization of the institution of kingship, see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1990), 36 and notes 44–45 below.

cosmology, and the management of religious time as central concerns of the bureaucratic state; and lastly, a discussion of the linkage between ancient Chinese notions of universal sovereignty and the high gods Shangdi 上帝 and Tian 天, especially as manifested in the concept of Heaven's Mandate (*tianming* 天命) and in the rhetoric of early Chinese politico-religious discourse.⁴

Early Astronomical Observations and their Correlation with Political Dynasties

In the predawn hours of late February, 1953 B.C., and again at dusk in late May, 1059 B.C., the two densest gatherings of planets in the past 5,000 years took place. These exceptionally close encounters of the "five pacers" (*wubu* 五步) would have captivated even casual observers throughout the world for several days, if only because of the extreme rarity of such spectacular conjunctions.⁵ Both clusters were certainly witnessed, and more importantly, remembered by the ancient Chinese, who must have gazed in amazement as they strove to comprehend their significance. Still another curious planetary "dance" in 1576 B.C. at the beginning of the Shang 商 dynasty was remembered for its association with the transformation of the political landscape of North China then

4. Despite the ambiguity of the term "Heaven" as a translation for Chinese *tian* "sky; day; transcendent deity," and despite the non-Chinese theological baggage associated with it, for practical reasons I am disinclined to attempt an idiosyncratic substitute for the well-established "Heaven's Mandate." The context will, I hope, enable the informed reader to find his or her bearings among the range of historical meanings of the term *tian*, from archaic sky divinity to anthropomorphized interventionist sky god to abstract cosmic power, over the span of time encompassed by this essay.

5. The phrase "the five planets gathered in one lodge" (*wu xing ju yu yi she* 五星聚于一舍) generally used to denote a massing of planets (see e.g., *Shiji*, "Tian guan shu," 27.1312) should be understood to refer to a clustering of planets within a span of at most 15° in longitude. The Mawangdui ms. "Prognostications of the Five Planets" (*Wu xing zhan* 五星占) clearly implies this by describing Venus's ca. 15° of retrograde motion as "travel in the opposite direction for one lodge" (*fan xing yi she* 反行一舍); see Xi Zezong 席澤宗, "Mawangdui boshu zhong de 'Wu xing zhan'" 馬王堆帛書中的《五星占》, in *Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu lunji*, 49. In contrast, Huang Yi-Long 黃一農 ("A Study of Five-Planet Conjunctions in Chinese History," *Early China* 15 [1990], 97) simply assumes a definition of 30° for *yi she* and then proceeds to generate an impressive number of supposedly qualifying planetary events. On this basis he then questions the rarity and purported significance of observable planetary massings. When the narrower 15° definition is applied instead, however, only four of twenty-four planetary clusters from the first two millennia B.C. computed by Huang are actually found to qualify, for an average of one every 500 years. In fact, the spectacular massings of 1953 and 1059 B.C. were much denser, spanning less than 4° and 7°, respectively.

already underway. An abundance of literary and chronological evidence drawn from numerous Zhou 周 and Han 漢 sources suggests that these celestial events were taken from the start to signal the high god's recognition of the legitimacy of a new regime, first Xia 夏 in 1953 B.C., followed by Shang in 1576 B.C., and then Zhou in 1059 B.C.⁶

The three celestial events to which I have drawn attention, in February, 1953 B.C. in lunar mansion Yingshi (Aqr/Psc) (Fig. 1), in December, 1576 in Wei 尾 and Ji 箕 (Sco/Sgr) (Fig. 2), and in May, 1059 in Yugui 興鬼 (Cancer) (Fig. 3), are the earliest verifiable planetary events which the Chinese demonstrably witnessed, remembered, and interpreted as signs of the high god's intentions. These massings of planets, which persisted for days and even weeks, would surely have impressed observers throughout the world, though to my knowledge no other ancient records of their sighting from either Egypt or Mesopotamia have as yet been discovered.⁷

TABLE I: *Conjunctions Marking the Founding of Xia, Shang, and Zhou*

	Sun	Me	Ve	Ma	Ju	Sa	Mansion
1953 Feb 26	321°	295°	295°	295°	292°	296°	Yingshi (Aqr/Psc)
1576 Dec 20	255°	234°	279°	236°	234°	238°	Wei-Ji (Sco/Sgr)
1059 May 28	56°	79°	82°	75°	77°	82°	Yugui (Cancer)

The latest, best documented, and perhaps most illustrative of the three events is the massing of planets in 1059 B.C. which occurred just west of the vast constellation known as the Vermilion Bird (Zhu Niao 朱鳥), a constellation that extends from lunar mansion Willow (Liu Su 柳宿; δ Hya) to Axletree (Zhen Su 軫宿; β Crv) (Fig. 4). The account of the event in the *Bamboo Annals* 今本竹書紀年, recorded under the reign of Di Xin

6. See David W. Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates in Shang and Western Zhou," *Early China* 7 (1981-82), 2-37; "Mozi and the Dates of Xia, Shang, and Zhou: A Research Note," *Early China* 9-10 (1983-85), 175-183; Ban Dawei 班大為 (David W. Pankenier), "Sandai de tianwen guancha he wuxing jiaoti lilun de qiyuan" 三代的天文觀察和五行交替理論的起源 *Yinxu bowuyuan yuankan* 殷墟博物苑苑刊 1 (1989), 183-188; Ban Dawei, "Tianming he wu xing jiaoti lilun zhong de zhanxingxue qiyuan" 天命和五行交替理論中的占星學起源 (Astrological Origins of Heaven's Mandate and Five Elements Theory), in Sarah Allan & Wang Tao ed., 中國古代陰陽五行說探源與思維模式 *Yin Yang, Wuxing and Correlative Modes of Thought in Early China* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996).

7. For evidence that they were certainly looking, see John D. Weir, *The Venus Tablets of Ammizaduga* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1972), for historical analysis and dating of a cuneiform text which preserves a two-decade long sequence of precise observations of the planet Venus from the first half of the second millennium B.C.

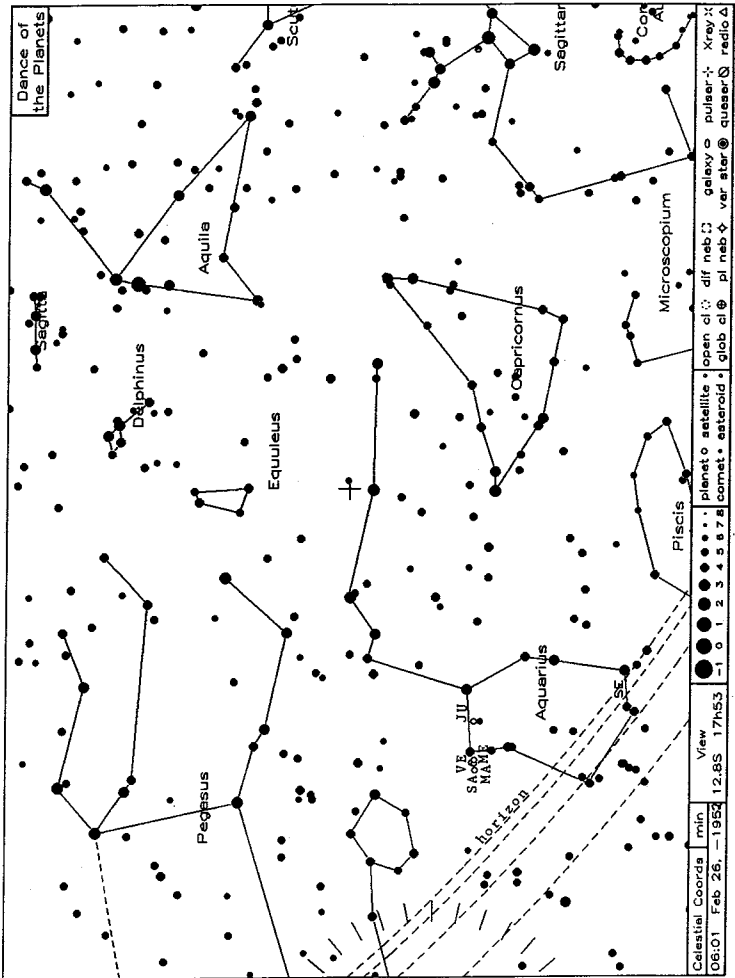


Fig. 1. Planetary massing of 1953 B.C. in Aqr/Psc (Ying shi)

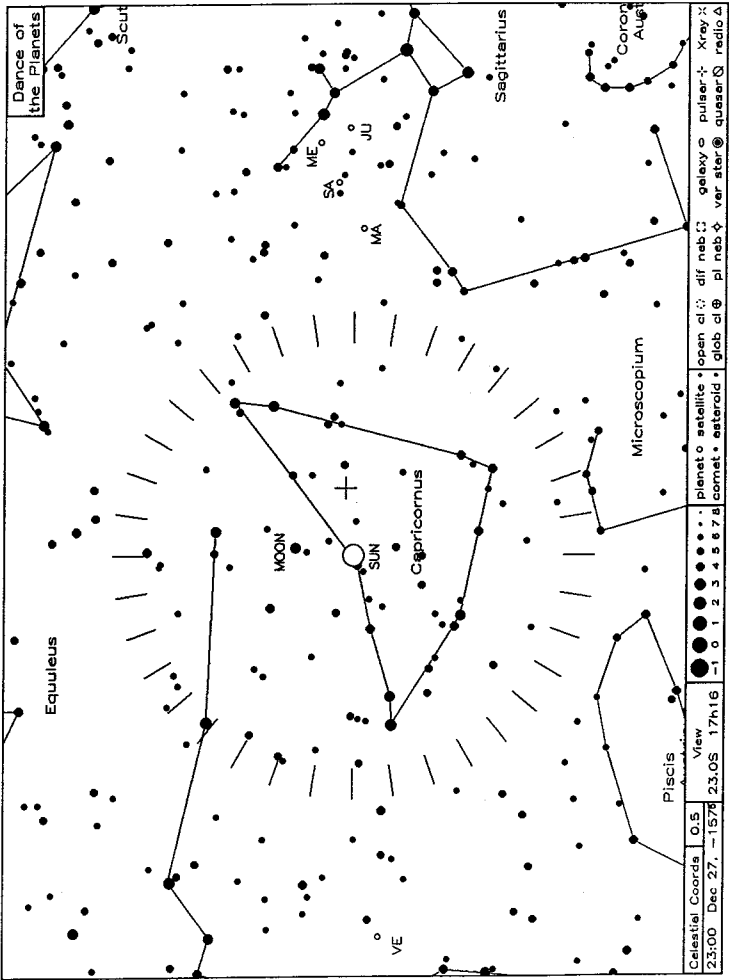


Fig. 2. Planetary positions after reversing horizons in late 1576 B.C.

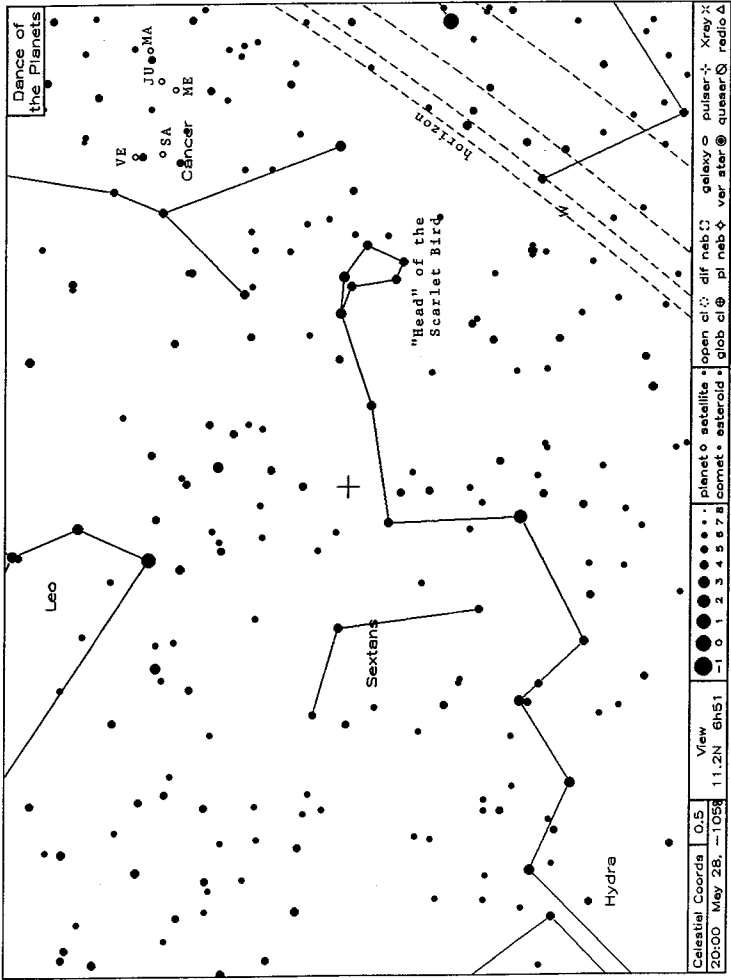


Fig. 3. Planetary massing of 1059 B.C. in Cancer

帝辛 of Shang and his rival King Wen 文王 of Zhou a few years before the Zhou overthrow of the Shang dynasty, currently reads *wu xing ju yu fang, you da chi wu ji yu Zhou she* 五星聚于房 有大赤鳥集于周社, "the five planets gathered in Room; a great scarlet crow alighted on the Zhou altar to the soil."⁸ Furthermore, an independent record in the "Xiao kai" 小開 chapter of *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 of a second astronomical event, a total lunar eclipse, precisely dates that eclipse to the thirty-fifth year of King Wen of Zhou, first month, day *bingzi* 丙子. This dating has proven correct to the day (March 12, 1065 B.C.).⁹ The accuracy of this latter record strongly corroborates the dating of the planetary massing associated with the scarlet bird exactly seven years later in 1059 B.C. to King

8. A parallel account in *Mozi* 墨子, "Fei gong xia" 非攻下 chapter expands on this: *chi wu xian gui jiang Zhou zhi qi she yue, tian ming Zhou Wen Wang fa Yin you guo* 赤鳥銜珪降周之岐社曰天命周文王伐殷有國 "a scarlet crow clasping a jade scepter in its beak descended on the Zhou altar to the soil at Mt. Qi saying, 'Heaven commands King Wen of Zhou to attack Yin and take possession of the State.'" The location lunar mansion "Room" (Scorpio) assigned to the planetary massing in the *Bamboo Annals* is a demonstrably late interpolation into the text, after the damaged bamboo slips on which the chronicle was written were recovered from a looted tomb in 281 A.D. and painstakingly reconstructed by scholars at the court of Emperor Wu of Jin 晉武帝. The planetary massing of 1059 B.C. actually occurred in Cancer just west of the Vermilion Bird asterism (see Fig. 2). The reasons for the interpolation of the erroneous location Scorpio are discussed in Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates," 7-8, and in further detail in "The *Bamboo Annals* Revisited: Problems of Method in Using the Chronicle as a Source for the Chronology of Early Zhou, Part 1," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55.2 (1992), 279ff; see also n. 20 below.

9. See Zhu Youzeng 朱右曾, *Yi Zhou shu jixun jiaoshi* 逸周書集訓校釋 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940), 3.31. This dating of the eclipse was independently proposed both in China and the U.S. in 1981; see Li Changhao 李昌顥 ed., *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi* 中國天文學史 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1981), 21; and Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates," 7. Another significant astronomical observation dating from this period is the probable record of a cometary apparition at the time of the Zhou Conquest. An earlier study by Zhang Yuzhe 張鈺哲 identifying this as Comet Halley and dating the apparition of the comet to 1057 B.C. has been used by several Chinese scholars to date the Zhou Conquest to that year. Subsequent more rigorous analysis of Comet Halley's orbit correcting for gravitational perturbations using all recorded Chinese positional observations later showed Zhang Yuzhe's result to be in error by some two years. Comet Halley actually appeared in late 1059 B.C., some seven to eight months after the planetary massing the previous May announced the transfer of the Mandate of Heaven to King Wen. See Zhang Yuzhe, "Halei huixing de guidao yanbian de qushi he ta de gudai lishi" 哈雷彗星的軌道演變的趨勢和它的古代歷史, *Tianwen xuebao* 天文學報 19.1 (1978), 109-118; and esp. Donald K. Yeomans & Tao Kiang 江濤, "The long-term motion of comet Halley," *Mon. Not. R. astr. Soc.* 197 (1981), 633-646; also David W. Pankenier, "Early Chinese Astronomy and Cosmology: The Mandate of Heaven as Epiphany" (Ph.D. diss.: Stanford University, 1983), 185ff.

Wen's forty-first year.¹⁰ The cluster of five planets was clearly visible for many days after full darkness had fallen as the "great scarlet crow" set in the northwest "clasping in its beak" a "scepter" which we now recognize as a description of the planetary formation (Fig. 3).

From the historical accounts in *Shijing* 詩經, *Bamboo Annals*, *Guoyu* 國語, *Shiji*, and elsewhere we know that King Wen promptly undertook political and military actions which clearly revealed his intention to challenge the Shang king. But King Wen did not live to see the Shang regime overthrown, instead dying in 1050, the ninth year of the new calendar which he inaugurated in 1058, the First Year of the Mandate (*shou ming yuan nian* 受命元年). Not until Jupiter returned again to the heart of the Vermilion Bird constellation in early 1046 B.C. did King Wen's son and heir King Wu actually launch the successful campaign which culminated in the conquest of Shang on 20 March 1046 B.C. (second month of the calendar for that year, on the first day of the sexagenary cycle *jiazi* 甲子). During the march from Zhou and the decisive battle, Jupiter remained stationary within 3° to 4° of the Bird Star, α Hya (*Qi xing su yi* 七星宿一), as stipulated by "Zhou yu" 周語 chapter of *Guoyu*: "When King Wu attacked King Zhou (of Shang), Jupiter was in Quail Fire . . . our astrological space, the Zhou people" *Wu Wang fa Zhou sui zai Chunhuo* . . . *wo you Zhou zhi fenye* 武王伐紂歲在鶉火 . . . 我有周之分野).¹¹

10. The *Yi Zhou shu* and the *Bamboo Annals* both consistently indicate that King Wen died in his fiftieth year of rule, nine years after receiving the mandate and nine years after the planetary portent; see David W. Pankenier, "The Bamboo Annals Revisited: Problems of Method in Using the Chronicle as a Source for the Chronology of Early Zhou, Part 2: The Congruent Mandate Chronology in *Yi Zhou shu*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 55.3 (1992), 498–510.

11. Close scrutiny of the planet Jupiter's behavior the next previous campaign season shows that after steadily advancing eastward since summer, in late 1048 Jupiter suddenly ceased its forward motion toward the Bird Star α Hya, reversed direction, and began to retreat. This presumably unexpected development explains why the first Zhou campaign was called off at the last minute after the armies had already reached the Yellow River ford at Mengjin 盟津. According to the *Zhou benji* 周本記 account, it was at this point, after the Zhou allies had declared the time to be right ("all said, [Shang] Zhou can be attacked" [*jie yue Zhou ke fa ye* 皆曰紂可伐也]), that King Wu announced to his anxious comrades-in-arms "you do not know Heaven's Mandate, it may not yet be done" *ru wei zhi tian ming, wei ke* 汝未知天命，未可 and retreated from Mengjin to the Zhou homeland in the Wei Valley; see Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates," 15–16. Relating to this aborted campaign is a passage from the lost Zhou text *Liu Tao* 六韜 which is preserved in Wang Yi's 王逸 commentary on the *Tian wen* 天問 lines "On the morning of the first day we took our oath. How did we all arrive in time? When the geese came flocking together, who was it made them gather? (cf. David Hawkes tr., *Ch'u tz'u: The Songs of the South, an Ancient Chinese Anthology* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959]); *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (Sibu beiyao ed.), 3.19a. The answer to the first questions, clearly, appears to be "they followed what was happening

Further study of the events surrounding the Zhou conquest of Shang and reconstruction of the chronology of the Zhou conquest period has confirmed the ancient astrological traditions and revealed new facts about the Zhou founders' claim to have acted at the instigation of Heaven and to have received Heaven's Mandate. The epoch-making events surrounding this singularly impressive planetary portent confirm the early Chinese preoccupation with revealed wisdom in the form of bright manifestations (*tianxian* 天顯 or *tianwei* 天威) displayed by Heaven;¹² the appearance of an auspicious "phoenix" (*fenghuang* 鳳凰, *luanhuang* 鸞凰) in conjunction with the rise of Zhou, the association of the space occupied by the Vermilion Bird constellation with the fate of Zhou in the *fenye* 分野 "field allocation" astrological scheme that correlated asterisms with temporal regimes; the astrological practice in Zhou times of predicting the fate of rulers of states, outcome of battles, etc. based on Jupiter's location;¹³ and last but not least, the obligatory asso-

in the sky!" For more light as shed by *Liu Tao* on the circumstances of the aborted campaign, see Pankenier, "Astyronomical Dates," 30, n. 79.

12. For *tianxian* and *tianwei*, see below n. 47. Here it is worth pointing to such statements in early sections of *Shangshu* 尚書 such as "Da gao" 大誥 chapter, "Heaven brightly manifests its awesome majesty and supports our very great foundation" (*tian ming wei bi wo pi pi ji* 天明畏 (威) 弼我丕丕基); "Duo fang" 多方, "Heaven then searched in your numerous regions and greatly shook you by its severity; it would spare those who had regard for Heaven, but in your numerous regions there were none who were able to have regard for it" (*tian wei qiu er duo fang, da dong yi wei, kai jue gu tian, wei er duo fang wang kan xian zhi* 天惟求爾多方大動以威開厥顧天, 惟爾多方罔堪顧之); "Duo shi" 多士, "Their successor in our time (i.e., Di Xin) greatly lacked a clear manifestation in Heaven . . . He had no consideration for Heaven's manifestations, nor for what the people revere" (*zai jin hou si wang dan wang gu yu tian . . . wang gu yu tian xian min zhi* 在今後嗣王誕罔顯于天 . . . 罔顯于天顯民祗); cf. n. 65 below. That the early texts should refer only obliquely to the phenomena is not, in itself, remarkable. A similar reticence has been observed by John S. Justeson in classic Mayan texts: "[A]s Maya astronomy concerned the behavior of the sky gods, 'deities whose activities vitally influenced human affairs' . . . astronomical correlates of historical events have begun to be recognized in the essentially historical narratives. Classic texts almost never mention these correlates; seldom do they make any explicit astrological statements, referring instead to associated human events. As in the interpretation of structure alignments, these unstated correlates must be inferred from distinctive patterns and demonstrated by statistical argumentation"; see "Ancient Maya Ethnoastronomy: An Overview of Hieroglyphic Sources," in *World Archaeoastronomy*, ed. A.F. Aveni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 76. Justeson also discusses (p. 104) how particular celestial events (e.g., stationary episodes of Jupiter and Saturn) were used to schedule human affairs "ostensibly as sacred mandates for elite decision-making," and concludes (p. 115): "So the features that may correlate with specific astronomical events generally are not reflected by direct textual statements; if their presence is marked at all, it is in accompanying scenes."

13. See, for example, the account of the future Duke Wen of Jin, Chong Er's 重耳,

ciation of five-planet massings with dynastic transitions in the portentology of the early imperial period.

From One to Three—From History to “Prehistory”

Using the 1059 B.C. date of the Zhou Mandate conjunction as a benchmark, it became possible to interpret similar accounts in pre-Han sources such as *Mozi*, where the precedent-setting portents associated with all three dynastic foundings in the second millennium B.C. are cited in chronological order.¹⁴ With the help of the *Bamboo Annals* relative date placing the Shang founding 517 years before the Zhou event, the curious behavior of the planets recorded at that juncture, *wu xing cuo xing* 五星錯行, became comprehensible as a description of planetary behavior in the fall of 1576 as the planets reversed horizons and times of visibility from dusk to dawn and dawn to dusk. Moreover, the description in *Mozi* of a still earlier bestowal of a jade sceptre of authority on the founder of the Xia dynasty in a *xuangong* 玄宮 “Dark Palace”¹⁵ matched that of the Zhou portent. This led to the confirmation of Chinese observation of the densest massing of planets in over 5,000 years, that of 1953 B.C.—once again the jade sceptre bestowed by a supernatural agency referred to an extraordinary planetary event (Fig. 1).¹⁶ With that the three planetary clusters associated with the founding of the Three Dynasties emerged from the obscurity of millennia.

For some time now I have argued that these discoveries confirm the historicity, and indeed the great antiquity, of chronological and astronomical data in the *Bamboo Annals*, *Mozi* and other Zhou and Han works, and they explain why such planetary phenomena later came to be viewed as definitive confirmation of a change of mandate to rule.¹⁷

restoration in “Jinyu” 晉語 chapter of *Guoyu* (Sibu beiyao ed.), 10.11a–12a, where prognostication based on the passage of precisely one twelve-year Jupiter cycle plays a crucial role, perhaps as a reflex of the Zhou Conquest precedent.

14. See Pankenier, “*Mozi* and the Dates of Xia, Shang, and Zhou.”

15. This was identified by the late Zhou astrologer Shi Shen 石申 as lunar mansion *Yingshi*; see *Jinshu* 晉書, “*Tianwen zhi*” 天文志, 11.301 where Shi Shen’s pre-Han astrological nomenclature is preserved.

16. See Pankenier, “*Mozi* and the Dates of Xia, Shang, and Zhou”; also R.B. Weitzel, “Clusters of Five Planets,” *Popular Astronomy* 53 (April, 1945), 159–161.

17. In criticizing the use of planetary conjunctions in chronological studies Huang Yi-Long opts to treat such events in isolation, virtually ignoring the plethora of historical and chronological evidence adduced in verifying the recorded observations. Instead Huang offers his own unexamined assumption that later textual accounts, if not wholly correct, must be entirely spurious. Hence, even though the densest massing of the planets in nearly a thousand years in either direction demonstrably occurred in

They also suggest that a concept ancestral to the Zhou "Mandate of Heaven" existed prior to the founding of Shang in the mid-second millennium B.C., just as implied in *Shangshu* "Duoshi": "You know that the earlier men of Yin had documents and records of how Yin superseded the mandate of Xia" (*wei er zhi wei Yin xian ren you ce you dian Yin ge Xia ming* 惟爾知惟殷先人有冊有典殷革夏命).¹⁸ Furthermore, the 517-year period of the planetary phenomena of 1576 and 1059 (actually 516.33 years) confirms the accuracy of Mencius' 孟子 (fourth century B.C.) assertion that *wu bai you yu sui* 五百有餘歲 "slightly more than 500 years" separated Cheng Tang 成湯 from King Wen and King Wen from Confucius (551–479 B.C.), and his conviction that *wu bai nian bi you wang zhe*

1059 B.C., because the actual planetary event occurred in Cancer rather than in Scorpio as most later textual sources state, Huang concludes the whole report of the observation must be dismissed as a late invention. Even though he admits the recorded date in *Han shu* of Liu Bang's much less impressive "mandate" conjunction in 205 B.C. was manipulated for political reasons, Huang finds it impossible to imagine that an authentic account of the 1059 event could have been similarly adapted to conform with Han period Five Elements speculations. Huang dismisses the fact that the true location of the 1059 event in the beak of the Vermilion Bird asterism is implicated in the authentically pre-Qin account in *Mozi* and disregards that the relative chronology of the *Bamboo Annals* for the period can be shown to yield the true date, if one simply recognizes the location "Fang" for what it is—a late interpolation arising from Han portentological revisionism (for which, see n. 20 below). To reduce a corroborating chronological datum to its simplest terms: if one merely adds 8 years to the 509-year span separating the two planetary events as recorded in the *Bamboo Annals* to account for the true location of the Zhou event in Cancer rather than Scorpio, one arrives at the figure 517 years (i.e., *Bamboo Annals* 1580–1071=509; 509+8=517), precisely the period separating the actual astronomical events to which I called attention (i.e., 1576–1059=517). Given the scholarly consensus that the Zhou Conquest occurred in the mid-eleventh century, there is no possibility here of picking and choosing among a variety of less impressive planetary phenomena as Huang implies in his misrepresentation of the situation. Jiang Xiaoyuan (*Tian xue zhen yuan*, 115, 242), simply follows Huang Yi-Long in rejecting the authenticity of the early records of planetary massings without examining the historical evidence. Both Jiang and Huang ignore the record of the *bingzi* lunar eclipse in King Wen's thirty-fifth year recorded in *Yi Zhoushu*, "Xiaokai" chapter mentioned above; see Huang, "Five-Planet Conjunctions," 96–112.

18. For the Shang evidence, see David N. Keightley, "Akatsuka Kiyoshi and the Culture of Early China: A Study in Historical Method," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (1982), 272, 296, where Keightley concludes: "... I believe that Akatsuka is correct in discerning a tension, finally resolved in Western Chou in favor of Ti (or T'ien), between the worship of an impartial Ti and the worship of the partial ancestors ... and in suggesting that Shang Ti did not restrict his assistance to only the Yin court ... so that one may indeed conceive of a 'Mandate of Ti,' precursor to the Chou 'Mandate of Heaven,' which could inflict such disasters as crop failures and enemy attacks on the Shang. ..."

xing 五百年必有王者興 "after 500 years a true King must arise."¹⁹ Small wonder then that, from at least Confucius' time on, Heaven was expected to intervene at any moment to raise up a new sage ruler and dynastic founder to bring an end to the political chaos and incessant warfare of the Warring States period.

Remarkably, even the apocryphal *chenwei* 讖緯 or "weft" commentaries of mid-Han date contain recognizable accounts of the same celestial observations, though as a rule they also exhibit traces of manipulation to conform with contemporary portentological speculation.²⁰ Given the

19. In his *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 123, Derk Bodde notes that Joseph Needham "points out that conjunctions of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars recur every 516.33 years, which, he thinks, could be the basis for Mencius's belief"; see Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 408. Actually, Needham was merely following Herbert Chatley in this matter (see Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates," 24), but it is worth noting here that, although neither Bodde nor Needham makes this plain, the *only* way the Zhou Chinese could have surmised the existence of a 517-year period would be if both the 1576 and 1059 B.C. planetary massings had been observed and recorded in a chronicle such as the *Bamboo Annals*, from which their relative chronological relationship could later be deduced. I know of no record of the potentially observable but less impressive clustering of all five planets in the same 517-year series which occurred in November/December of 543 B.C. (when Confucius was presumably a youngster). The next in the cycle, in April of 26 B.C., was observed and recorded in *Hanshu*, but as a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars only (see *Hanshu*, 3.1310), since, unlike the three previous occasions, Mercury and Venus remained at some distance.

20. A particularly striking example which bears repeating here is the account of King Wen's receipt of the Mandate found in Huan Tan's 桓譚 (d. A.D. 28) *Xin lun* 新論 (quoted in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, 84.5b):

其後有鳳凰銜書於郊。文王曰殷帝無道，虐亂天下。皇命已移，不得復久。乃作鳳凰之歌曰翼翼翔翔鸞鳳兮銜書來遊以命昌兮瞻天案圖殷將亡兮蒼蒼皓天始有萌兮五神連精合謀房兮

... afterward there was a Phoenix in the suburbs that grasped a 'Writing' in its beak. King Wen said, 'The Yin Lord does not act according to the Way, [he] tyrannizes and disorders all under Heaven. The August Mandate has already shifted, [he] will not persist for long.' Thereupon King Wen composed the 'Song of the Phoenix,' which goes:

The Phoenix soars [down] on spreading wings; Clasping a 'Writing' it comes gamboling, thereby to command Chang (i.e., King Wen).

I gazed up at Heaven and examined the Diagram; Yin is about to expire [it portended].

Great Heaven is azure, azure; First there (sc. in the heavens) was a presage (lit. 'sprouting').

The linked essences of the Five Spirits (i.e., the planets in Han usage) met in (lunar mansion) Fang (Scorpio) to deliberate.

ideological significance of celestial portents at the time it is surprising that, although the planetary portent of 205 B.C. is mentioned several times, nowhere in *Shiji* (c. 100 B.C.) nor in *Hanshu* 漢書 (c. A.D. 100) is there specific mention of the precedent-setting planetary massings explicitly associated elsewhere with the transfers of Heaven's Mandate during the Three Dynasties period.²¹ It is evident, therefore, that the apocrypha and other late Zhou and Han texts preserve the remnants of ancient traditions which are inadequately represented in the standard historical sources. Their survival is probably attributable to their transmission as components of popular constellations of beliefs concerning the interventionist role of an archaic sky god (whether Heaven or Shang-di) which bestowed esoteric revelations by means of "signs" (*xiang* 象) or "patterns" (*wen* 文) displayed in the sky.

In the past, in spite of the seminal work by Hu Houxuan,²² Xu Fuguan, Gu Jiegang,²³ and others, the relative scarcity of concrete evidence for this kind of religious and cosmological conception in the second millennium B.C. has made some of the assertions outlined above seem somewhat audacious. In particular, the claim that a record of the planetary

Although obviously composed at a late date, around the time the planetary massing was being assigned to lunar mansion Fang 房, there is no mistaking the identities of the Five Essences. The element associated with Zhou was first changed from "Fire" to "Wood" during the Han dynasty as a consequence of debates about the element by whose virtue Han ruled; hence from the apocrypha of mid-Han date on the location of the Zhou conjunction began to be reported as "Fang"; see, for example, in *Wen xuan* 文選 (59.28), the gloss on the line "the three humane [officials] deserted the [Shang] state and the five luminosities entered Fang" (*san ren qu guo wu yao ru fang* 三仁去國五曜入房);

《春秋元命苞》曰：殷紂之時五星聚房。房者蒼神之精，周據而興

Chunqiu yuan ming bao says: 'In the time of Zhou of Yin the five planets gathered in Fang. Fang is the essence of the azure spirit, based on it the Zhou arose.'

In addition, specific allusion to the curious behavior of the planets during the transition from Xia to Shang can also be found among the astronomical portents cited in the voluminous official correspondence surrounding the abdication of the last Han Emperor Xiandi 獻帝 in favor of Cao Pi 曹丕 in A.D. 220; see *San guo zhi* 三國志, 2.74, where *wu wei cuo xing* 五緯錯行 is listed as a portent of the transfer of the Han mandate to the new dynasty. For mention of the Five Essences in *Yilin* 易林 in connection with Heaven's Mandate, see Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "Zhouyi gua yao ci zhong de gushi" 周易卦爻辭中的故事, in *Gu shi bian* 古史辨, vol. 3 (rpt., Taipei, n.d.), 27, 34.

21. For the planetary massing of 205 B.C.E. in Gemini/Cancer that was taken as a sign of the transfer of the mandate to Han, see *Shiji*, 27.1348 and 89.2581, and also *Hanshu*, 26.1301 and 36.1964.

22. Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, "Yin dai zhi tianshen chongbai" 殷代的天神崇拜, in *Jia-guxue Shang shi luncong* (*chuji, shang*) 甲骨學商史論叢 (初集上), 1-29.

23. See Gu Jiegang, "Wude zhongshi shuo xia de zhengzhi he lishi" 五德終始說下的政治和歷史, in *Gu shi bian*, vol. 5, 425.

cluster of 1953 B.C. could have been transmitted for centuries before the appearance in the archaeological record of Chinese writing, at first blush appears to require a leap of faith.²⁴ Admittedly, the lack of contemporaneous written records from Xia and early Shang poses difficult historiographical problems, but they may not be insurmountable. Chinese writing probably predates the earliest oracle bone inscriptions by a considerable time: the maturity of the script alone tells us as much. We also know from archaeological as well as epigraphic evidence (e.g., graphic shape of the oracle bone characters for "record" [*dian* 典] and "document" [*ce* 冊]) that the Shang Chinese were writing with brush and ink on perishable materials such as bamboo or wood which have not survived. Then too, there is explicit testimony in *Shangshu*, *Zuo zhuan*, and elsewhere that certain Xia archives could still be consulted in late Shang and early Zhou, and substantial scholarship attesting to the fidelity of oral transmission in pre-literate cultures. In what follows, however, I intend to survey other avenues by which to approach the cosmological and religious thinking of the Three Dynasties period, in an effort to establish something of the cosmo-political context in which the astronomical observations were made. Recent evidence bearing on cosmological conceptions of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age together with comparative and theoretical approaches to the study of the history of religions may help bridge troublesome historiographical gaps.

Early Antecedents of "Five Elements" Correlations

Although the idea of correlations between the natural and the human worlds, particularly as they relate to the cycle of seasons and the alternation of light and dark, no doubt arose quite spontaneously in antiquity,²⁵ the linkage between the rise and fall of political entities and a sequence of elemental forces is by no means equally self-evident. Hence it has

24. For some of the methodological issues involved, see Noel Barnard, "Astronomical Data from Ancient Chinese Records: The Requirements of Historical Research Methodology," *East Asian History* 6 (Memorial Volume for Prof. C.P. Fitzgerald; December, 1993), 47–74, esp. 69–72; also Barnard, "A Discussant's Thoughts," prepared for the AAS panel "Astrology and Chronology in Shang and Zhou," April 8, 1995.

25. Above (n. 2) I cited the example of an acute awareness of directionality in the orientation of burials and houses. For further discussion, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 261; also Xu Fuguan, "Yin yang wu xing guannian," 12: "Everywhere in ancient times conspicuous terrestrial phenomena were employed to speak of heavenly phenomena. The functions of water and fire are different, but they are two things whose uses are also mutually implicated. Appropriation of the two in astronomy to speak about analogous heavenly phenomena is probably very ancient."

always seemed that the “mutual production” *xiangsheng* 相生 order of elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) expounded in the majority of late Zhou and Han texts stood on firmer ground as an interpretive scheme, since it corresponds to the seasonal order in which the elemental forces exhibit their influence, starting with spring (earth of course being later identified with the center).²⁶ The speculative theories of Zou Yan 騶衍 (fl. mid-third century B.C.) and the Warring States school of Naturalists, on the other hand, according to which the recurring sequence of five cosmic forces directly influenced dynastic fortunes, have seemed just that—speculations with no sound basis in fact, historical or otherwise.

But the discovery of a consistent correlation of a sequence of three remarkable planetary observations in successive quadrants—winter, autumn, and summer “palaces” of the heavens, respectively—with the conferral of Heaven’s Mandate on successive dynastic founders, as well as their association in the sources with specific colors and elements (black/water, white/metal, red/fire), offers compelling evidence that cosmological speculation and dynastic politics were intimately linked. This sequence of elemental correlations, implicit in the accounts cited by Mozi and others, and achievable only through *contemporaneous observation* of the actual locations of the planetary events, is precisely that given by the “regulation colors” (*zhengse* 正色) said to have been adopted by Xia, Shang, and Zhou in *Lunyu* 論語, in “Tan gong” 檀弓 chapter of *Liji* 禮記,²⁷ in *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露,²⁸ and in the “Basic Annals” (*benji* 本記) in *Shiji*, not to mention various Han apocrypha.

26. Zhu Kezhen 竺可楨 demonstrated early on that the disparate sizes of the celestial palaces exactly matches the duration of the corresponding seasons, so that the division of the heavens into palaces would have closely followed the identification of the seasons; see “Ershiba xiu qiyuan zhi shidai yu didian” 二十八宿起源之時代與地點, *Sixiang yu shidai yuekan* 思想與時代月刊 34 (1944), 12. On the Fire Calendar, *huoli* 火曆, and use of the Fire Star, *dahuo* 大火 (α Sco), as a fundamental seasonal benchmark in Shang and earlier times, see Pang Pu 龐樸, “Huoli chu tan” 火曆初談, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 1978.4, 131–137; I. Ecsedy et al., “Antares Year in Ancient China,” in *World Archaeoastronomy*, 183–186; and Feng Shi 馮時, “Yinli sui shou yanjiu” 殷曆歲首研究, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1990.1, 19–42, esp. 28ff; and “Zhongguo zaoqi xingxiangtu yanjiu” 中國早期星象圖研究, *Ziran kexueshi yanjiu* 自然科學史研究 9.2 (1990), 109ff; and “Henan Puyang Xishuipo 45 hao mu de tianwenxue yanjiu” 河南濮陽西水坡 45 號墓的天文學研究, *Wenwu* 文物 1990.3, 55.

27. The regulation colors are also mentioned individually in the chapters “Jiao te sheng” 郊特牲 and “Ming tang wei” 明堂位, however, the most complete statement is found in *Liji*, “Tan gong shang” 檀公上; see *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (rpt. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, nd), 6.12.

28. Su Yu 蘇輿, *Chunqiu fanlu yi zheng* 春秋繁露義證 “San dai gaizhi zhi wen” 三代改制質文 (rpt. Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1974), 7.10b. In yet another strong

What is remarkable about this association of the three colors with the three dynasties is not merely the fact of the astronomical accuracy of the correlation, which can hardly be coincidental, but also what this suggests about the nature of cosmological thinking in the second millennium B.C. and continuity with popular traditions many centuries later. We are well informed about the state of astronomical knowledge in late Zhou and Han when many traditions concerning the mandate portents first made their appearance in writing, and we know for certain that such complex planetary phenomena could not possibly have been retrospectively calculated with any precision at that time. The conclusion, therefore, must be that basic concepts and terminology contained in the Zhou accounts to some degree reflect the state of cosmological knowledge at the time the *original* observations were made.²⁹ This argument in favor of a continuity of fundamental conception between Three Dynasties period cosmology and later Five Elements theorizing is beginning to appear a good deal less startling since the 1987 discovery of the Yangshao culture site at Puyang and other equally spectacular finds.³⁰

confirmation of Zhou traditions concerning the Shang, Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 has demonstrated the accuracy of the traditional attribution to the Shang of a preference for the color white in ritual contexts; see "Cong Yinxu jiagu buci kan Yin ren dui bai ma de zhongshi" 從殷墟甲骨卜辭看殷人對白馬的重視, *Yinxu bowuyuan yuankan* 1 (1989), 70–72. More recently, Li Ling 李零 reached a similar conclusion: "The Five Elements are one category of divinatory techniques whose connection with astronomy is most intimate"; see "Shitu yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi" 式圖與中國古代的宇宙模式, Part 1, *Jiuzhou xuekan* 九州學刊 4.1 (1991), 22.

29. The possibility of an astronomical origin for the Five Elements was alluded to some time ago by Xu Fuguan, who nevertheless held that there was no direct connection between archaic astrological notions and the later Five Elements theory; see Xu, *Yin yang wu xing guannian*, 12.

30. In the now famous Puyang burials, which appear to be of shamans or religious figures of high social status, the archetypal figures of a tiger and a dragon were carefully laid out using shells and placed, with cosmological accuracy, to the west and east of the corpse, the latter being oriented along the north-south axis. For a recent assessment of the find, see David N. Keightley, "Chinese Religions – The State of the Field, Part I, Neolithic and Shang Periods," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.1 (February 1995), 130. For a speculative study of the find's purported astronomical significance, see Feng Shi, "Henan Puyang Xishuipo 45 hao mu de tianwenxue yanjiu," 52–60, 69; and especially his "Zhongguo zaoqi xingxiangtu yanjiu," 108–118. Equally astonishing, from a cosmological point of view, was the discovery of the jade model of a turtle with inscribed plaque found together in 1987 in a neolithic tomb dating from 2,500 B.C.E. at Hanshan Lingjatan 含山凌家灘 in Anhui; see Chen Jiujin 陳久金 and Zhang Jingguo 張敬國, "Hanshan chutu yupian tuxing shikao" 含山出土玉片圖形試考, *Wenwu* 1989.4, 14–17. This remarkable find confirms the turtle's archaic role as a sacred simulacrum of the cosmos, for which see Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991). The rectangular jade plaque found sandwiched

The dynastic successions from Xia to Shang, and then Shang to Zhou, are now generally regarded as marking successive shifts of hegemony among more or less coexisting polities. In the process, the cultural and political center of gravity in central Henan was staked out by successive relocations of ritual and civil administration to that area, first by the Shang who moved in from the east after deposing the Xia, then by the Zhou who rose to preeminence on the western margins of the Hua-Xia world.³¹ By the time of the overthrow of Shang by the Zhou in 1046 B.C., the powerful attraction of the ancient Xia heartland near the confluence of the Yellow and Luo Rivers was irresistible, for cosmological as well as practical reasons. Following the example of the Shang, who had earlier relocated from their homelands nearer the Shandong peninsula and the east coast, the Zhou moved to a new dynastic capital near the present Luoyang 洛陽 from the Wei 渭 River valley in the extreme west of the territory nominally under Shang tutelage. In doing so immediately after the conquest, and by reporting this fact to Heaven, the first Zhou rulers affirmed their desire to govern the civilized world from the center located in the former Shang domain. In this way the Zhou set about legitimizing and consolidating their rule by governing from the ancient homeland of the Xia with whom they claimed affiliation by descent and culture.

In seeking Heaven's blessing on the new dynasty the Zhou King Wu conducted the most sacred of inaugural state sacrifices at a location called the "Hall of Heaven" (*tianshi* 天室), a reference to Mt. Sung 嵩山, the "Central Peak" (*zhongyue* 中岳) or *axis mundi* which rises impressively from the yellow earth plain just southeast of Luoyang.³² This loca-

between the upper and lower shells of the turtle bears an incised design that resembles nothing so much as a compass rose (which, needless to say, it is not). This clearly suggests a very early conceptualization of the world as a center from which influence radiates outward toward the eight cardinal and intercardinal directions. For a detailed discussion tying this graphic representation to subsequent cosmological conceptions and artifacts, see Li Xueqin 李學勤, "A Neolithic Jade Plaque and Ancient Chinese Cosmology," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 故宮通訊英文雙月刊 27.5-6 (Nov/Dec 1992-Jan/Feb 1993), 1-8. Feng Shi has also studied the stone altars of the Hongshan 紅山 culture dating from 3,000 B.C., concluding that they were used for sacrifices to a sky god and/or heavenly bodies such as the sun and moon; see "Hongshan wenhua san huan shi tan de tianwenxue yanjiu" 紅山文化三環石壇的天文學研究, *Beifang wenwu* 北方文物 33.1 (1993), 9-17, and Tian Changwu 田昌五, "On the Legends of Yao, Shun, and Yu and the Origins of Chinese Civilization," in *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 19.3 (1988), 21-68.

31. For documentation of Xia contacts with other peoples, see Louisa Fitzgerald-Huber's article in this volume.

32. In a recent paper presented to the International Conference on Western Zhou

tion was associated with the pole of the heavens where the celestial deity dwelt and about which all the heavenly minions (*tianguan* 天官) revolved.³³ When the notion of a "central kingdom" (*zhong guo* 中國) is first made explicit in early Western Zhou inscriptions, we recognize this as a continuation of the Shang concept that the heart of their domain was the center of the universe, as well as the physical center of the world.³⁴ Thus, in the earliest Zhou inscriptional record of state worship of Heaven reference is made to surveying the four cardinal directions from the vantage point of the *axis mundi*, indicating that one of the first official acts of the Zhou king was to establish ceremonially the legitimacy of Zhou authority over the four quarters. Here we again encounter the archaic conception of the Chinese world, already familiar from the Shang oracle bone inscriptions, as a self-contained cosmological

Civilization (Xi'an, July 1993), Lin Yun 林沅 established that the inscription *wang you da li, wang pan si fang, wang si yu tian (da) shi, jiang* 王有大禮，王凡四方，王祀于天(大)室，降 on the *Tian wang gui* 天亡簋 from the reign of King Wu refers to a grand *fengshan* 封禪 sacrifice conducted on Mt. Song by King Wu on his way back from the victory over Shang at Muye. 天室 as a reference to Mt. Song is also found in *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zhao 昭 4). The inscription corroborates accounts of the event found in both *Yi Zhou shu*, "Du yi" 度邑 chapter (*Yi Zhou shu jixun jiaoshi*, 5.70-72) and the "Basic Annals of Zhou" in *Shiji* (4.129); see Lin Yun, "*Tian wang gui 'si yu tian shi' xin jie*" "《天亡簋》'祀于天室'新解."

33. Sima Qian implies that supernatural influence emanates from the pole by calling the Big Dipper "Di's chariot" and by portraying the Dipper's movements as the efficient cause of transformations of yin and yang, the five elemental forces, the seasons, and all natural periodicities; see "*Tian guan shu*," 27.1291; cf. John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 107. Given the polar-equatorial orientation of Chinese astronomy from the outset and the obvious cosmological correspondence between heaven and earth from the earliest times, it is probable that this conception of the high god's dwelling place harks back to the Neolithic. It is, of course, by analogy with the pole that the ideal temporal ruler is supposed simply to occupy his place facing south, while his minions revolve about him doing his bidding. This is the basis of Confucius' famous analogy between the temporal ruler and the pole in *Lunyu*, 2/2/1:

爲政以德，譬如北辰居其所而衆星共之

Govern by means of virtue, like the Northern Dipper which occupies its place while the myriad stars revolve about it.

34. See Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn M. Linduff, *Western Zhou Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 98; for Shang cosmography, see Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle* and the discussion of "centrality" by David N. Keightley in "Time, Space, and Community: The Imposition of World Order in Late Shang Divination" (forthcoming); for the principle of axial centrality in Han, see John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 37. For an anthropological perspective, compare Clifford Geertz's discussion of the "exemplary center" model of political organization in traditional Indonesia in "Ideology as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 222-223.

whole over which the royal charisma ideally extended centrifugally from the center to the four quarters—*sifang* 四方—just as did that of the ruler in the sky.

Although color coordination in a ritual or cosmological context is supposed to have made its earliest appearance in 770 B.C. when Duke Xiang 襄公 of Qin 秦, on achieving the status of defender of Zhou, initiated sacrifices to the "White Emperor" (*bai di* 白帝),³⁵ and despite Joseph Needham's skepticism about the division of the heavens into five celestial palaces as early as the second millennium B.C.,³⁶ the picture that is now emerging points to the existence of such symbolic correlations during the Three Dynasties period, just as suggested in "Hong fan" 洪範 and "Gao Yao mo" 皋陶謨 chapters in *Shangshu*. Here, perhaps, we have a less speculative basis for the later theory of a cyclical correlation of elemental "virtues" (*de* 德) with political destinies: the linkage between cosmic virtue, supramundane agency, and dynastic virtue was established, not by subsequent events, but "astrologically" at the start of each dynasty.

While A.C. Graham expressed doubts that the five materials and the five processes were already prime correlates of the colors as early as the second millennium B.C., he underscored the importance of identifying the underlying empirical relations between phenomena which Chinese correlative thinking strove to account for: "From a modern viewpoint Chinese proto-science can be discovering significant connexions between phenomena only when there are indeed parallel causal relations between things contrasted as Yin and Yang, or there are causal relations with the seasons or the directions, the two strong correlates of the Five Powers."³⁷ What I have argued is that just such relations exist between the planetary phenomena, the cardinal directions, the seasons of observation, and their associated colors. Take, for example, the fact that the total lunar eclipse of 1065 and the planetary cluster of 1059 B.C., both of which occurred in the Vermilion Bird asterism, were also both taken to

35. *Shiji*, "Feng shan shu" 封禪書, 28.1358. See also Max Kaltenmark, "Religion and Politics in the China of the Ts'in and the Han," *Diogenes* 34 (1961), 20 ff.

36. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, 246.

37. See A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 346. As Karl Löwith has pointed out, the belief in antiquity that future events can be foretold by special means such as divination and astrology implies a presupposition that the future is in some sense preordained. Divination and portent astrology, therefore, were methods of "reading" the dispositions of supernatural forces as if they were accomplished facts or knowledge, hence the revealed character of portents and omina from this early date; see Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 10.

have direct application to the fortunes of Zhou. In the former case the omen was apparently thought to portend the king's demise, so that on witnessing the "untimely" eclipse King Wen ordered his subordinates to begin "deliberating about the succession" (*shi bu shi . . . ru kai hou si mou* 食不時 . . . 汝開后嗣謀). This suggests that this particular region of the sky was already astrologically linked with the Zhou by the mid-eleventh century B.C., just as the Fire Star was already linked with the fortunes of Shang.³⁸

If such a precursor to the later *fenye* "field allocation" astrological schema were already in place by this time, it would certainly help to justify the traditional accounts which tell of desertions by advisors and officials close to Di Xin prior to the Conquest and by elements of the Shang army at the Battle of Muye 牧野 in 1046, since the locations of the planetary portent in May of 1059 and the baleful apparition of Comet Halley near the Fire Star Antares eight months later would have been observable throughout the Shang domain. King Wen's overtly seditious activity from the first year of the Mandate 1058 on, directly challenging the Shang king's authority, indicates that he strove fully to exploit his advantage, both militarily and psychologically.³⁹ When, therefore, the Duke of Zhou 周公 is quoted in the "Great Announcement" (*Da gao* 大誥) in *Shangshu* as saying:

38. Witness the myth of E Bo 閼伯 and Shi Chen 實沈 in *Zuozhuan* (Xiang 襄 9): 古之火正，或食於心，或食於昧，以出內火。是故昧爲鶉火，心爲大火。陶唐氏之火正閼伯居商丘，祀大火，而火紀時焉。相土因之，故商主大火。商人閱其禍敗之變，必始於火

The ancient Regulator of Fire was offered sacrificial nourishment either in the asterism Heart (α Scorpio) or in the asterism Beak (α Hydra) in order (for the people) to take out and bring in their fires. For this reason Beak is Quail Fire and Heart is Great Fire. Tao Tang's (i.e., Yao's) Regulator of Fire, E Bo, dwelt at Shang-qiu and sacrificed to Great Fire, using Fire to mark the seasons there. Xiang Tu (grandson of Xie and father of the Shang people) continued in like manner and so the Shang principally focus on Great Fire. The Shang observed that the signs of their calamities and defeats inevitably had their inception in Fire;

and the declaration in *Guoyu*, "Jinyu":

大火閼伯之星也實紀商人

Great Fire is the star of E Bo; in truth it marked the periods of the Shang people;

see Pankenier, "Astronomical Dates," 7, 21.

39. For example, according to Jiang Xiaoyuan, King Wen's hurried construction of a ritual astronomical observing platform or "spirit tower" (*lingtai* 靈台) in the eighth year of the Mandate, or 1051 was just such a rebellious act, since this was exclusively a royal prerogative already in Shang times; see "Tianwen, Wu Xian, Lingtai—tianwen xingzhan yu gudai Zhongguo de zhengzhi guannian" 天文、巫咸、靈台——天文星占與古代中國的政治觀念, *Ziran kexue bianzhengfa tongxun* 自然科學辨證法通訊 1991.3, 56.

天休于寧王興我小邦周。寧王惟卜用，克綏受茲命…嗚呼，天明畏弼我不丕基

Heaven gave its grace to the serene (dead) king (i.e., King Wen), and raised our small state Zhou. The serene king followed only the oracle, and was able tranquilly to receive this mandate. . . . Oh, Heaven brightly manifests its majesty, and supports our very great foundation,

such language can no longer be discounted as simply hyperbole. Rather, it is a clear example of the tendency of the ancients "to understand what happened to them as caused by supernatural agencies, gods, and demons. . . . [A]s the ancients experienced and recorded things, the gods were the very *nodes* of the causal network that gave events coherence and meaning."⁴⁰

Given, therefore, the likely historical basis of a kind of nascent cosmopolitical thinking as it applies to the early dynastic succession in the Three Dynasties period, and given the remarkable vitality of popular astrological traditions attesting to its validity in late Zhou and Han, it is less surprising than previously thought that Zou Yan's proto-scientific theorizing won him such a sympathetic hearing in the courts of Warring States rulers. A major reason for this striking success in Zou's case, no doubt, was that in the minds of his elite audience his synthesis conferred intellectual respectability and order on an otherwise somewhat disorganized assortment of popular religious beliefs about Heaven which were still common knowledge. Once the traditional pieces were fitted together in his dynamic theory, the rational implications of the cycle became self-evident.⁴¹

In the words of Sima Qian, who succinctly restored the forgotten linkage between Five Elements cosmology and the astrological origins of the

40. See Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Historian and the Sumerian Gods," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114.2 (1994), 46. Jacobsen's discussion, although focused on ancient Sumerian religious thinking, is entirely relevant to the conceptual world of the Shang and early Western Zhou. To this characteristic way of experiencing the world and causality Jacobsen gives the name the "theocratic mode of experiencing." Of course, an essential facet of this mode of experiencing was a reliance on the efficacy of divination. As Karl Löwith has remarked: "What separates us most deeply from the ancients is that they believed in the possibility of foreknowing the future, either by rational inference or by the popular means of questioning oracles and of practicing divination, while we do not"; see his *Meaning in History*, 10.

41. See also Xu Fuguan, *Yin yang wu xing guan*, 52: "Zou Yan's theory of the succession of Five Virtues represents a revival in another form of primitive religion. The Virtues of the Five Elements, in their sequential alternation, are a concretization of the *ming* 'mandate' of Heaven's Mandate *tianming*."

theory nearly a millennium after the Zhou founders first articulated the doctrine of Heaven's Mandate:

五星合，是爲易行。有德受慶，改立大人，掩有四方，子孫蕃昌。無德受殃若亡

When the five planets consort, this is a *change of element/phase*: the possessor of proper virtue is rewarded, a new Great Man is set up to possess the four quarters, and his descendants flourish and multiply; but the one lacking in virtue suffers calamities to the point of destruction.

The significance of this statement has not previously been well understood; but to Sima Qian at least it seems the correspondence between the heavenly phenomena and temporal events was self-evident, and so he says:

自初生民以來，世主曷嘗不曆日月星辰？及五家三代，紹而明之，內冠帶，外夷狄，分中國爲十有二州，仰則觀象於天，俯則法類於地。天則有日月，地則有陰陽。天有五星，地有五行。天則有列宿，地則有州域

Ever since the people have existed, when have successive rulers not followed the movements of sun, moon, stars and asterisms? Coming to the Five Houses and the Three Dynasties, they continued by making this knowledge clear, they distinguished wearers of cap and sash from the barbarian peoples as inner is to outer, and they divided the Middle Kingdoms into twelve regions. Looking up they observed the instructive patterns in the heavens, looking down they modeled themselves on the categories of earth. Therefore, in heaven there are sun and moon, on earth there are *yin* and *yang*. In heaven there are the Five Planets, on earth there are the Five Elements. In heaven are arrayed the lunar mansions, and on earth there are the terrestrial regions.⁴²

Thus it seems that the eventual absorption of Five Elements correlative thinking into the Han ideology and the recrudescence of popular and subversive millenarian movements in the Han dynasty are both ultimately attributable in no small measure to the same benchmark observations of those Three Dynasties astrologers and cosmologists.⁴³

42. See *Shiji*, 27.1321, 1342. Phenomena involving the five planets above signal corresponding operations of the Five Elements here below. Therefore, *yi xing* 易行 in Sima Qian's statement above must mean "change, alteration (*bianyi* 變易) of element/power" in a direct reference to Five Elements theory. "Lacking in virtue" 無德 in this context no doubt refers to the consequences of being out of step with the prevailing "virtue" of the times.

43. See also the conclusion reached by Li Ling in his recent study of ancient cos-

Three Dynasties Cosmology and Calendrical Science

In his study of the origins of urbanization in the ancient world, Paul Wheatley characterized the "cosmo-magical" mode of thinking in this period as follows:

Underpinning urban form not only in traditional China but also throughout most of the rest of Asia, and with somewhat modified aspect in the New World, was a complex of ideas to which Rene Berthelot has given the name astro-biology. . . . This mode of thought presupposes an intimate parallelism between the mathematically expressible regimes of the heavens, and the biologically determined rhythms of life on earth, (as manifested conjointly in the succession of the seasons and the annual cycles of plant regeneration). . . .⁴⁴

mology: "Such [Yin Yang Five Elements] theories reached their greatest efflorescence in late Warring States, Qin, and Han. Although one encounters new turns of thought and they contain many superfluous embellishments as a result of efforts to regularize and systematize, still they absolutely cannot be subsumed under the queer talk of Zou Yan and his ilk. Rather, they are the legacy of numerous 'hemerologists' and those who devised theories based on the past, deriving their material from high antiquity. With primitive thought as their backdrop, these ideas flowed straight from exceptionally archaic sources, their influence yielding nothing to the mainstream thinking comprising the theories of the various philosophical schools"; see Li Ling, "Shitu yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi," Part 2, *Jiuzhou xuekan* 4.1 (1991), 75. Compare John Major's discussion of the cosmological chapters of *Huainanzi* 淮南子 in the light of the Huang-Lao School's dominant idea that "knowledge of the natural world translates into political power": "cosmogony, cosmography, astronomy, calendrical astrology, and other features of cosmology form a seamless web, the principles of which a ruler would ignore only at his peril. . . . The credibility of the Huang-Lao School in the early Han may have rested in part on the degree to which it was grounded in widely-shared assumptions that went back to the foundations of Chinese civilization"; see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 43.

44. Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1971), 414-416. Compare this with David Carrasco's characterization of the ancient locative view of the world which parallels in important respects that of New World cultures: "This locative view, which has been discerned in the traditional societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt, in which everything has value and even sacrality when it is in its place, is an imperial view of the world designed to ensure social and symbolic control on the part of the king and the capital. It is informed by a cosmological conviction consisting of 5 facets which dominated human society for over 2,000 years in the Near Eastern world, including (1) there is a cosmic order that permeates every level of reality; (2) this cosmic order is the divine society of the gods; (3) the structure and dynamics of this society can be discerned in the movement and patterned juxtaposition of the heavenly bodies; (4) human society should be a microcosm of the divine society, and the chief responsibility of priests and kings is to attune human order to the divine order"; see "The King, the Capital and the Stars: the Sym-

The goal implicit in this mode of thought was to achieve a universal order, a perfect congruence between the natural and human rhythms, for which the ideal paradigm was found in the heavens. The constancy and regularity of certain celestial motions and their phenomenal manifestation in the seasonal rhythms initially provided patterns of permanence and timeliness to contrast with the constant flux of more mundane events which insistently evoked the irregularity and capriciousness of nature. As I suggested at the outset, 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" (*xiangtian* 象天), was a fundamental qualification of kingship.⁴⁵ This theme is reiterated again and again in the early literature. In "Yao dian" 堯典, for example, there is the famous passage in which Yao delegates responsibility for certain of these crucial heavenly observations to the archetypal pair Xi 羲 and He 和: "(Yao) commanded (the brothers) Xi and He, in reverent accordance with the august heavens, to compute and delineate (*xiang* 象) the sun, moon and stars, and the celestial markers, and so to deliver respectfully the seasons to be observed by the people" (*nai ming Xi He qin ruo hao tian, li xiang ri yue xing chen, jing shou ren shi* 乃命羲和欽若昊天曆象日月星辰敬授人

bolism of Authority in Aztec Religion," in *World Archaeoastronomy*, 49. Carrasco's authority for this locative view "that guarantees meaning and value through structures of conjunction and conformity" is Jonathan Z. Smith's *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978). For a sociological analysis of the microcosm/macrocosm mythos as the most ancient form of religious legitimation, see Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 24, and esp. 34 ff.

45. See Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 38: "Where the microcosm/macrocosm understanding of the relationship between society and the cosmos prevails, the parallelism between the two spheres typically extends to specific roles. These are then understood as mimetic reiterations of the cosmic realities for which they are supposed to stand. All social roles are representations of larger complexes of objectivated meanings." In discussing the history of Chinese astronomy from the Han period on, Yabuuchi Kiyoshi makes the point that, "there are two sorts of celestial phenomena. One was cyclical in a simple way, and its regularity or periodicity could be discovered with relative ease; the other could not be predicted by human effort, but only observed. The former was systematized within the framework of calendrical science, while the latter became the object of astrological interpretation. Since they were complementary, they were equally important to the Chinese administrators. . . . The breadth of the Chinese ephemerides reflected the grave concern of Chinese rulers constantly to expand the demonstrable order of the sky, while reducing the irregular and ominous. The parallel with the ruler's responsibility in the political realm is obvious." Though Yabuuchi is writing here about a later period, the general point he makes is equally applicable to the Bronze Age; see "Chinese Astronomy: Development and Limiting Factors," in Shigeru Nakayama and Nathan Sivin ed., *Chinese Science: Explorations of an Ancient Tradition* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 93-94.

時). Following this there is the much studied catalog of seasonal constellations that were to be observed in order to establish the approach of the solstices and equinoxes, universally observed junctures of great practical and religious significance. Again, in "Shun dian" 舜典, Shun on his accession is said to have used the astronomical indicators *xuanji* 璿璣 and *yuheng* 玉衡 (portions of Ursa Major which served as stellar "pointers") to bring the seasons, months, and days into conformity with the movements of the seven "Regulators"; i.e., the sun, moon, and five planets. Such reverence for the normative patterns of heaven is also attributed to the "former wise kings" of both Xia and Shang, who, together with statesmen officials like A Heng 阿衡 and Fu Yue 傅說, E Bo 閼伯 and Shi Chen 實沈, and the legendary consort of Di Ku 帝嚳, Zou Zi 咎訾 (alias Chang Yi 常儀 or Chang Xi 常羲), as well as the venerable Emperor Zhuan Xu 顓頊, Yu the Great 大禹, and Gun 鯀, all were immortalized by becoming identified with particular asterisms or chronograms.⁴⁶

In "Jiu gao" 酒誥, a pointed contrast is drawn between the pious rectitude of early Shang rulers and their irresponsible heirs: "I have heard it said that anciently Yin's former wise kings in their conduct stood in awe of Heaven's brightness (*tianxian* 天顯) and of the small people. They practised virtue and held on to wisdom."⁴⁷ These were clearly individuals who knew the value of watching closely what transpired in the heavens. The rationale for this close observation of the skies is expressed most succinctly in the "Hong fan" chapter of *Shangshu*: "What the king scrutinizes is the year, the dignitaries and noblemen the months, the many lower officials the days. When in years, months and days the seasonableness has no changes, the many cereals ripen, the administration

46. Deborah Porter's recent article "The Literary Function of K'un-lun Mountain in the *Mu T'ien-tzu Chuan*," (*Early China* 18 [1993], 74-106), while focusing on the latter three legendary figures, contains a wealth of groundbreaking insights on the relationship between asterisms, astronomical phenomena, ancient cosmological myths and history, literature, and culture in early China.

47. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 45/9; modified. Karlgren translates *tianxian* 天顯 "heaven's clear laws" on the strength of parallel passages in which *xian* 憲 is substituted for *xian* 顯. I am uncomfortable with his use of "laws" here, though I agree that the instructive or normative function of heavenly displays is implied. It is also likely that "Heaven's bright manifestations" (*tianxian*) also includes "Heaven's awesome displays" (*tianwei* 天威), i.e. more unpredictable demonstrations of Heaven's awesomeness. In the "Jin teng" 金縢 chapter of *Shangshu*, *tianwei* refers explicitly to disastrous meteorological phenomena, while the "Jun shi" 君奭 chapter dwells on how Kings Wen and Wu came to know "Heaven's awfulness" and to wield it in decimating their enemies (e.g., 武王誕將天威威劉厥敵). For the intimate connection between revealed wisdom and the legitimate application of martial force in Warring States thought, see n. 97 below.

is enlightened, talented men of the people are distinguished, the house is peaceful and at ease."⁴⁸

The level of observational and calendrical expertise reflected in texts such as these harks back to the stage characterized as "observing the patterns and delivering the seasons" (*guan xiang shou shi* 觀象授時) by historians of Chinese astronomy, and marks the beginning of purposeful observation of specific heavenly bodies. The first stellar configurations about whose function we have historically had detailed information, the four cardinal asterisms mentioned in "Yao dian"—Mao 昴 (Pleiades), Niao 鳥 (α Hya), Huo 火 (α Sco), and Xu 虛 (β Aqr)—could have usefully served the functions described during much of the second millennium B.C., though their history probably goes back far earlier.⁴⁹ Their use, and the recognition of the seasonal orientation of the Dipper's handle, give evidence of a transition in progress by the late Neolithic to an astronomically based calendar from an annuary based primarily on indications (*wuhou* 物候) derived from the plant and animal kingdoms, meteorology, etc. To the extent this transition was marked by conversion to a luni-solar calendar it may well have been connected with the change from a nomadic to an increasingly sedentary socio-economy, since solar observations for the purpose of establishing the tropical year depend on staying in one place to be useful.⁵⁰ Traces of the earlier annuary type of calendar still survive in sources such as the "Lesser Annuary of Xia" (*Xia xiao zheng* 夏小正), in *Yi Zhou shu* "Shi xun" 時訓 chapter, and in passages like the following from *Guoyu*:

When the constellation Ch'en Ch'ueh 辰角 [α Vir] appears, the rain stops. When the constellation T'ien Ken 天根 [Vir/Lib] appears, the rivers dry up. When the constellation Pen 本 [Libra] appears, the

48. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 33/29; modified.

49. For a concise review of the literature on the astronomical portions of "Yao dian," see Li Changhao ed., *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi*, 8–12.

50. This point is elegantly made in Mary Barnard's *Time and the White Tigress* (Portland, Oregon: Breitenbush Books, 1986), 23: "Sun worship, someone has said, goes with kingship. Rather, the solar year goes with kingship, with organization, with agriculture and irrigation and towns. The folk, wherever they are—whether following game or herding cattle, on plains, in valleys, on mountains—can see the moon, its phase, its attendant stars. But to name the day when the sun turns ageyneward—the solstice, summer or winter—the calendar-priest needs a temple or simply a gnomon enclosed for its own protection in sacred precincts; and that will turn into a temple. After the sun-watching priest has found out for certain the length of his gnomon's shadow at midsummer noon, and measured the angle between the two solstice points—if he then moves north or south, his labor is wasted. His work is all to do over. Reason enough why calendars pegged to the sun are useless to nomads."

plants shed their leaves. When the constellation Ssu 駟 [π Sco] appears, frost falls. When the constellation Huo [α Sco] appears, the clear winds warn of cold. Thus the teachings of the former kings said, 'When the rains stop, clear the roads. When the rivers dry up, complete the bridges. When the plants shed their leaves, store the harvest. When the frost falls, get ready the fur garments. When the clear wind comes, repair the inner and outer defense walls and the palaces and buildings.'⁵¹

Even though the modern phrase *xing yi dou zhuan* 星移斗轉, "the stars move and the Dipper revolves," is now merely a trope for the passage of time, it evokes an epoch when the circumpolar stars were everyman's timepiece.⁵²

From earliest times the patterns and rhythms displayed by the sky were as normative and meaningful as the rest of one's natural surroundings and social existence. But the process of cosmization, through which the institutional order came to be seen as directly reflecting the divine structure of the cosmos, also entailed the monopolization of cosmological knowledge by the ruling elites, the "former kings" credited above in the quote from *Guoyu*. Ultimately this led to a narrowing of the acceptable channels through which everyman's relationship to the sacred could legitimately be mediated, a process which came to be encoded in myth.

51. *Guoyu* (Sibu beiyao ed.) 2.9a; tr. James A. Hart, "The Speech of Prince Chin: A Study of Early Chinese Cosmology," in Henry Rosemont Jr. ed., *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, JAAR Thematic Studies L/2 (Chico: Scholar's Press, 1984), 49. For examples from *Xia xiao zheng*, see Zheng Wenguang 鄭文光, *Zhongguo tianwenxue yuanyou* 中國天文學史源流 (Beijing: Xinhua shuju, 1979), 44. Note that in the *Guoyu* passage cited here only the first five lunar mansions are adduced in sequence by way of illustration. Similar seasonal and behavioral correlations would certainly have existed for the remainder as well.

52. Cf. *He guan zi* 鶡冠子 (ch. 5, "Huan liu" 環流): "When the handle of the Dipper points to the east (at nightfall), it is spring to all the world. When the handle of the Dipper points to the south, it is summer to all the world. When the handle of the Dipper points to the west, it is autumn to all the world. When the handle of the Dipper points to the north, it is winter to all the world. As the handle of the Dipper revolves above, so affairs are set below . . ."; see A.C. Graham, "A Neglected Pre-Han Philosophical Text: *Ho-Kuan-Tzu*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 52.3 (1989), 517. See also James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 3, *The Shoo King or The Book of Historical Documents*, *Prolegomena* (rpt. Taipei: Wen shi zhe, 1972), 93. This was the age, according to Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), "before the Three Dynasties [when] everyone knew astronomy"; see *Ri zhi lu* 日知錄 (Sibu beiyao ed.), 30.1a.

The Separation of Heaven and Earth

One of the most frequently cited traditions bearing on the relation between ancient Chinese religion and the expanding power of the centralized state is found in *Guoyu* "Chuyu" 楚語.⁵³ The passage in question is of singular importance both because it contains the earliest use of the terms "shamaness" (*wu* 巫) and "shaman" (*xi* 覡) and because it is the source of the myth concerning the separation of heaven and earth accomplished by Zhuan Xu, the legendary emperor who appointed Chong 重 and Li 黎 to have charge of the affairs of heaven and earth:

Anciently, men and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were so perspicacious, single-minded, and reverential that their understanding enabled them to make meaningful collation of what lies above and below, and their insight to illumine what is distant and profound. Therefore the spirits would descend into them. The possessors of such power were, if men, called *hsi* (shamans), and if women, *wu* (shamanesses). It is they who supervised the positions of the spirits at the ceremonies, sacrificed to them, and otherwise handled religious matters. As a consequence, the sphere of the divine and the profane were kept distinct. The spirits sent down blessings on the people, and accepted from them their offerings. There were no natural calamities. In the degenerate time of Shao-hao 少皞 . . . , however, the Nine Li 九黎 (a troublesome tribe . . .) threw virtue into disorder. Men and spirits became intermingled, with each household indiscriminately performing for itself the religious observances which had hitherto been conducted by the shamans. As a consequence, men lost their reverence for the spirits, the spirits violated the rules of men, and natural calamities arose. Hence the successor of Shao-hao, Chuan-hsu, charged Ch'ung, Governor of the South, to handle the affairs of Heaven in order to determine the proper places of the spirits, and Li, Governor of Fire, to handle the affairs of Earth in order to determine the proper places of men. And such is what is meant by 'cutting the communication between Heaven and Earth.' Subsequently, the Three Miao 三苗 revived the (disorderly) virtue of the Nine Li. Yao again raised up the descendants of Ch'ung and Li. He caused those who had not forgotten the old ways to again have charge of the offices of Heaven and Earth. From then on, down to the Hsia and Shang, accordingly, for generations the Ch'ung and Li were

53. *Guoyu*, 18.1a ff.

the ones who ordered Heaven and Earth and kept their jurisdictions separate.⁵⁴

K.C. Chang has written that "this myth is the most important textual reference to shamanism in ancient China, and it provides the crucial clue to understanding the central role of shamanism in ancient Chinese politics. Heaven is where all the wisdom of human affairs lies. . . . Access to that wisdom was, of course, requisite for political authority. In the past, everybody had had that access through the shamans. Since heaven had been severed from earth, only those who controlled that access had the wisdom, hence the authority—to rule. Shamans, therefore, were a crucial part of every state court; in fact, scholars of ancient China agree that the king himself was actually head shaman."⁵⁵ Chang's assessment, to which a number of other scholars subscribe, is colored by his view of the central role of "state" shamanism and of the king as head shaman, a view that may have led him to pay too little attention to exactly what sort of wisdom was sought in Heaven, and whether in fact there is any necessary connection between such closely held knowledge and that customarily associated with shamanism. I suggest that the "Chuyu" passage, rather than providing a clue to the central role of shamanism in ancient Chinese politics, actually accounts for the co-optation and subsequent decline of actual shamanistic practices among the ruling elite as a consequence of the development of a new kind of esoteric and highly specialized knowledge of heaven perhaps more commensurate with centralized state formation—the kind of knowledge associated with calendrical astronomy, of which archetypal incumbents of the hereditary office of court astrologer-cum-calendar specialist like Chong, Li, and Wu Xian became the exclusive custodians.⁵⁶

54. Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in Samuel N. Kramer ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 390–91; cited by K.C. Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 162; cf. also David N. Keightley, "Shamanism in *Guo yu*? A Tale of Xi and Wu," paper prepared for the Center for Chinese Studies Regional Seminar, 7–9 April 1989, UC Berkeley; "Royal Shamanism in the Shang: Archaic Vestige or Central Reality?" Workshop on Chinese Divination and Portent Interpretation, Berkeley, 20 June–1 July, 1983.

55. K.C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 44. On this point, see also the remarks in reference to this passage by Lothar von Falkenhausen elsewhere in this volume.

56. For the relationship between astronomical observation, astrology, and government in ancient China, see Jiang Xiaoyuan, "Tianwen, Wu Xian, Lingtai," 53–58; and especially his *Tian xue zhen yuan*, 83 ff. The *Shiji* "Who's Who" of heaven-observing functionaries from the dawn of history lists all of the above "shaman/astrologers" and

No further mention of shamans is made in the passage after the description of the revolution brought about by Zhuan Xu and his appointment of Chong and Li, the officers who were charged with the same duties as the astronomers Xi and He in "Yao dian." This new knowledge, for which Chong and Li were responsible, apparently so crucial to the exercise of political authority, is clearly differentiated here from the sort of direct communication with the supernatural previously accessible to "everyman." Instead, such knowledge becomes the preserve of the king and specialist hereditary offices charged with its collection and transmission.⁵⁷ Consider the judgment of Sima Qian, who discussed the same political and religious developments in tracing the ancient origins of calendrical astronomy:

It was Huangdi 黃帝 who first examined into and determined the calendrical constellations, established the five elemental forces, began the (alternation of) repose and activity, and regulated the intercalary epact. Thereafter there were the offices in charge of heaven

more in chronological order. Interestingly, Zhuan Xu, Chong, and Li all figure prominently in the legendary genealogy of the Chu royal house; see "Tian guan shu," 27.1343, and "Chu shi jia," 楚世家, 39.1689. Significantly, the famous Chu silk manuscript (ca. 300 B.C.) deals at considerable length with calendrical and astrological themes, exemplifying in the process the perennial preoccupation with the ominous consequences of neglecting the calendar, thereby offending the high god and incurring disaster; see Li Xueqin, "Lun Chu boshu zhong de tianxiang" 論楚帛書中的天象 *Hunan kaogu jikan* 湖南考古輯刊 1982.1, 68-72; and esp. Li Ling, "The Chu Silk Manuscript," in *Defining Chu*, ed. Constance A. Cook and John S. Major (forthcoming).

57. This was also the conclusion of Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎: "The kings severed the communication between heaven and the people, and they took as their monopoly the great right of communicating with God"; quoted in K.C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 164. See Yang Xiangkui, *Zhongguo gudai shehui yu gudai sixiang yanjiu* 中國古代社會與古代思想研究, vol. 1, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1962), 164; cf. also Jiang Xiaoyuan, *Tian xue zhen yuan*, 91. Given the cosmic bailiwick of figures like Chong and Li, perhaps it is also possible to see in this account a rationalization of the consequences for the sky divinity of what Mircea Eliade has denoted the "progressive descent of the sacred into the concrete," a regular historical process whereby "the supreme divinities of the sky are constantly pushed to the periphery of religious life where they are almost ignored; other sacred forces, nearer to man, more accessible to his daily experience, more useful to him, fill the leading role"; see Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian, 1958), 43. Often, the leading role comes to be occupied by the cult of the dead ancestors, with the supreme divinity of the sky being relegated to a more specialized role such as that of guarantor of the harvest, seasonable weather and the like. In Eliade's words, "men only remember the sky and the supreme deity when they are directly threatened by a danger from the sky; at other times, their piety is called upon by the needs of every day, and their practices and devotion are directed towards the forces that control those needs"; *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 50.

and earth, spirits and people, and the categories of (sacrificial) objects; these were called the Five Offices. Each attended to ordering its own affairs without interfering with the other. In consequence, the people were able to have their beliefs, and the spirits were able to have their efficacious virtue. The people and the spirits had their separate tasks, each respecting the other without encroachment, therefore the spirits sent down excellent harvests, and the people offered up things (*wu* 物, i.e., ritually appropriate victims and foodstuffs) in sacrifice; disasters and calamities did not arise, and what each sought was not lacking. During the degenerate time of Shao hao, the Nine Li brought virtue into disorder, the people and spirits intermingled and interfered with each other and could not count on the (sacrificial) objects; disasters and calamities arrived in concert, and none lived out his allotted span of years. When Zhuan Xu succeeded him (Shao hao) he mandated that Chong, Regulator of the South, should manage the affairs of Heaven in order to take charge of the spirits, and also that Li, Regulator of Fire, should manage the affairs of Earth in order to take charge of the people, and to restore to those affairs the constant order of the past when there was no mutual encroachment. Subsequently, the Three Miao [again] emulated the [disorderly] virtue of the Nine Li, whereupon the two offices [of Chong and Li] completely neglected their duties. The intercalations were mislocated, the first month of spring was misidentified, the Assistant Conductors (*sheti* 攝提) lost their periodic function,⁵⁸ and the calendrical calculations became disordered. Yao again contacted those successors to [the offices] of Chong and Li who had not forgotten the old [methods] and had them once again take charge, and [for this purpose] he set up the offices of Xi and He to make clear the correct measure of the seasons, whereupon the yin and yang became moderated, the wind and rain timely, an abundance of *qi* 氣 arrived, and there were no unnatural afflictions among the people. In his dotage [Yao] abdicated in favor of Shun, and in the Temple of Cultured Ancestors warned and admonished [Shun] saying, 'The calendrical calcula-

58. On the significance of this indication of the obsolescence of Arcturus as a seasonal marker due to precession, see Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 3, 251-252. Liu Xin 劉歆 identifies this and other calendrical dislocations as portents of dynastic change in *Hanshu*, 36.1964 (my thanks to Juri Kroll for this latter reference). For an account in Hesiod (700 B.C.) of Arcturus's use as a seasonal signpost in the second millennium B.C. Greece and its obsolescence there, see Thomas D. Worthen, *The Myth of Replacement: Stars, Gods, and Order in the Universe* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 210.

tions of Heaven reside in your person.' Shun [in his turn] also charged Yu [with the same words]. From this may be observed what rulers have judged of the greatest import.⁵⁹

Even if Sima Qian's discussion is framed in terms of late conceptions of the unified nature of the political order in the second millennium B.C., his general description of early difficulties in achieving mastery of the calendar and its promulgation throughout the region under Xia and Shang tutelage has the ring of truth. Inevitably, there would have been setbacks of the kind described, in part due to the recalcitrance of peoples reluctant to submit to authority, in part due to periodic rivalry, decline or disorder at the center, and in part as a result of the obsolescence of time-honored celestial markpoints due to the effects of precession.⁶⁰

Sima Qian's main point is clear, however: the revolution alluded to in the passage in *Guoyu* "Chuyu," has less to do with the role of shamanism in ancient Chinese politics than with the emergence of bureaucratic control of religious time and the knowledge of Heaven as preeminent concerns of the state.⁶¹ What is being described in this passage is per-

59. Shiji, "Li shu" 曆書, 26.1257.

60. For another version of the cosmic conflict and subsequent disaster seen as marking the end of the Urzeit of cosmogony, see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 26, 44 ff. The version given here parallels that found in the "Lüxing" 呂刑 chapter of *Shangshu* where the breaking of the communication between heaven and earth was an act of volition on the part of Huangdi, the Yellow Thearch: "The charge was given to Chong and Li to break the communication between earth and heaven so that there was no descending or ascending." A chief difference between the two versions, apart from the etiology of the rupture, lies in the different methodologies admitted by each for resolving the resulting dilemma, the one quasi-mystical or religious and the other, that presented here, fundamentally cosmo-political or bureaucratic. For an insightful analysis of the cosmic disaster and its cultural legacy, see Deborah L. Porter, *From Deluge to Discourse: Myth, History, and the Generation of Chinese Fiction*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), Chapter 2, "See Yu Later: A New Interpretation of Chinese Flood Myths."

61. After study of this passage and related issues, Jiang Xiaoyuan reached a similar conclusion: "The early astrologers evolved out of those ancient shamans and shamanesses who communicated with Heaven"; see *Tian xue zhen yuan*, 98. In *Stolen Lightning: A Social Theory of Magic* (New York: Vintage, 1983), Daniel O'Keefe has argued for the co-existence of astronomy and shamanism as sub-cult formations that took shape in reaction to dominant religion, however this does not appear to account adequately for the Chinese evidence. Even allowing for the distinctively Han retrospective flavor of Sima Qian's portrayal of Three Dynasties developments, the ascendancy among the ruling elite of a fundamentally cosmological world view and of the doctrine of Heaven's Mandate, together with a positive lack of evidence of shamanistic practice in the strict sense, indicates that astrological and shamanistic diagnostics probably did not, in fact, coexist at that level. (I am grateful to Lionel Jensen for calling my attention to O'Keefe's work.)

haps the late Neolithic/Bronze Age juncture when those charged with the responsibility of interpreting the heavens began instituting schemes of human devising like the calendar, itself a concrete manifestation of the impulse to domesticate the phenomena.⁶² The calendar's introduction, along with other sacred technologies like writing and the keeping of records, accelerated the process of nibbling away at the frontiers of the unknown, by definition the domain of the chaotic and unmanageable. For the elite who manipulated such knowledge, though the potential for untoward irruption of "irreality" into the sphere of the mundane was an ever-present threat, by increasingly 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.

Essential Time Management

As I noted at the outset, there is every reason to believe that by the early second millennium B.C. there was firmly established in China a mindset characterized by a self-conscious dependence on regularly scrutinizing the patterns of heaven for guidance. Of the various royal roles perhaps this was the most crucial, for on its competent performance depended all the others. A clear indication of this is given in the remainder of the "Hong fan" passage quoted above: "... When in days, months and years the seasonableness has changed, the many cereals do not ripen, the administration is dark and unenlightened, talented men of the people are in petty positions, the house is not at peace." In other words, when there is a failure in this bellwether function of the theocrat,

62. As Thomas Worthen writes: "Culture seeks to bring nature into its own sphere, which is always regular and always prescriptive. Rituals are performed not to imitate the regularities in nature but to induce nature to imitate a culturally effected regularity"; see *The Myth of Replacement*, 16. As has been noted by Guy Swanson, "We begin to see in the connection between sovereign groups and spirits a direct empirical link connecting the independent decision-making structures in a society—the structures by which goals are chosen and responsibilities allocated—and the supernatural"; see Swanson, *The Birth of the Gods: The Origin of Primitive Beliefs* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960), 190. Of particular relevance for the period in question are Swanson's findings (*The Birth of the Gods*, 20, 55–81) that there is a strong correlation between deities and the constitutional structure of sovereign groups. According to Swanson, high gods are present, almost invariably, in societies where there are three or more types of such sovereign groups ranked in hierarchical order (e.g., household, clan-village, chiefdom). The model of a powerful, centralized government may be a sufficient condition for the appearance of a high god, but Swanson's extensive data show it is not a necessary one, as some have argued; cf. e.g., K. C. Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization*, 190.

not only are the direct economic consequences severe, but this very breakdown is symptomatic of a more generalized decline in leadership and competence at all levels. This order of things is virtually paradigmatic in traditional accounts of the dynastic cycle.

In response to a question put to him by his father, King Ling 靈王 of Zhou, in what purports to be a conversation dating from 549 B.C., Prince Jin 晉, speaking of failed regimes of the past in a wide-ranging monologue says:

Those who were destroyed—how was it that they were without blessings, for they were all descendants of the Yellow Emperor or Yen Ti 炎帝? . . . It is just because they did not follow the measures of heaven and earth, did not accord with the order of the four seasons, did not take as models the principles of living creatures: it was for these things that they were destroyed, and had no posterity, so that today their sacrifices are not performed.⁶³

Though this explanation has a familiar ring reminiscent of innumerable passages in the early texts, there may be more to the particulars of the indictment than a superficial reading might suggest. In the "Duo shi" chapter of *Shangshu*, the Duke of Zhou cites precedent in berating the now subject former officers of Shang for recalcitrance:

I have heard it said that Shangdi would guide the idly-sportive, but the lord of Xia did not moderate his idle sports. Then Di descended and ascended and approached that Xia (king), but he did not care about Di. He was greatly licentious and dissolute and had (ill) fame. Then Heaven did not care about or listen to him. And when he neglected its great mandate, it sent down and applied punishment. And so it charged your ancestor Cheng Tang to depose the Xia, and through talented men of the people regulate the four quarters. From Cheng Tang to Di Yi 帝乙 there were none who did not make bright their virtue and carefully attend to the sacrifices. Heaven also grandly established them, and protected and directed the lords of Yin. Of the Yin kings also none dared neglect Di. There were none who were not counterparts to Heaven in benefiting (the people). Their successor in our time greatly lacked a bright manifestation in Heaven (*wang xian yu tian* 罔顯于天). Still less was he willing to think of how the earlier kings toiled for the house. He was greatly licentious in his dissoluteness. He had no consideration for what Heaven manifests (*tianxian*), nor for what the people respect. Then

63. Hart, "The Speech of Prince Chin," 40.

Shangdi did not protect him, and sent down destruction as great as this.⁶⁴

What is particularly noteworthy in this revealing passage is that the final rulers in the dynastic line, Xia Jie 夏桀 and Di Xin, are indicted specifically for their inattention to the sacrifices directed toward Heaven (or Shangdi), and for a lack of consideration for "Heaven's (bright) manifestations." Further, they failed to benefit the people or to show proper consideration for "what the people respected."⁶⁵ Now, for the most part, sacrifices to Heaven are thought to have been seasonally related rituals intended to reinforce the cosmo-magical role of the king in maintaining correspondence between the natural and human realms, the regularizing congruence referred to above. The chief instrument for regulating such rituals is a calendar that maps out the seasons of the tropical year. Neglect of the sacrifices to Heaven therefore seems to imply an indifferent, or at least ineffective, approach toward keeping track of this facet of religious time. Of course, it was only by regularly scrutinizing the bright features of Heaven that such timekeeping was possible at all.

Consider yet another example. Here is the more specific charge of negligence Sima Qian levels at the royal astronomers of the Xia king: "In the time of Emperor Zhong Kang 仲康, Xi and He were drunken and dissolute: [they] disregarded the seasons and confused the days. Yin 胤 proceeded to punish them and composed the 'Yin zheng' 胤征 [chapter of *Shangshu*]."⁶⁶ So not only was the calendar allowed to get out of synchronization with the seasons, even the most basic reckoning of all, the count of the days, may have been disrupted. As I have already suggested, in this early period the count of the days, months, and years, and time-honored calendar customs, those "cultural offshoots of time," would have provided the pre-eminent experience of control over the

64. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 55/5–10; modified.

65. Karlgren translates *tianxian* 天顯 as "Heaven's clear laws" and *minzhi* 民祗 "the respect due the people"; however, if I am correct in taking *tianxian* to mean something like "what Heaven brightly manifests above," then parallelism would seem to demand that *minzhi* be taken here to denote "what the people revere," i.e., popular beliefs, rituals, or festivals of the people which have not been respected by the elite. This passage is also noteworthy for the equivalency typically posited in early Zhou texts between Di of the Shang and Tian of the Zhou.

66. *Shiji*, "Xia benji" 夏本記, 2.85. In *Zuozhuan* (Zhao 17) the specific failing of the astronomers that led to their punishment is quoted from "The Books of Xia": "The Dipper [handle] did not alight on the [proper] quarter/stellar abode" (*chen fu ji yu fang* 辰弗集于房). For a criticism of the traditional interpretation of this phrase as a veritable record of a solar eclipse, see my contribution to "Early China Forum," *Early China* 15 (1990), 124 ff.

temporal dimension and its phenomenal manifestations in the natural rhythms. The calendar, and its proper calibration by the sun, moon, and stars, would have constituted the secure lifeline connecting the present with the past, just as it supplied the cultural template with which an ambiguous future could be made to fit a pattern of human devising.⁶⁷ To have it otherwise, to contemplate time unmeasured and undifferentiated save by the virtually inscrutable forces governing the natural world, would have been profoundly unsettling, even unthinkable.⁶⁸ Thus it is not surprising that a mismanagement of religious time caused by a failure to conform with the images displayed in the heavens should figure prominently among the shortcomings of deposed dynasties, though not as mere portents, as traditional interpretations of accounts like those in *Mozi* would suggest, but conceivably as precipitating causes.

Calendrical Misreckoning and Dynastic Transition

The Prince of Wei 微子 spoke thus . . . Yin will not be likely to govern well the four quarters. What our ancestor achieved and accomplished was signalized above (sc. in Heaven); but we availing ourselves of this are plunged in wine, and thereby overturn and destroy his virtue here below.⁶⁹

The evidence is clear in the oracle bone inscriptions of a major shift in the magico-religious theology of the Shang, one important aspect of which was a drastic reduction in temporal flexibility.⁷⁰ In the final

67. This is perhaps the most concrete aspect of the meaning of the "Gao Yao mo" passage: "You (sc. the sovereign) should not set an example of laziness or desires to the possessors of states; it is fearsome, it is awe-inspiring, in one day, in two days, there are ten thousand first signs of happenings (sc. which you should be prepared for). Do not empty the various offices. *The works of Heaven, it is man who carries them out on its behalf*" [*tian gong ren qi dai zhi* 天功人其代之]; Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 9/5; modified; emphasis mine.

68. For an analysis of the myth of the flood as a symbolic response to the disruption of established cosmological verities and the threatening irruption of chaos, see Porter, "The Literary Function of K'un-Lun Mountain," 82 ff., 92. Nature is first brought into the sphere of culture by observing patterns and regularities, and the causal relations among phenomena, which is the beginning of science. But, as Worthen reminds us (*The Myth of Replacement*, 74): "Ritual and science regularize things, but . . . [o]ur science and our rituals and religions do not really satisfy all of our doubts about the mysteries of life and the beyond. There is still the tension of the unknown, and chaos lurks behind every formula." Cf. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 23, 26, 27.

69. *Shangshu* "Weizi," tr. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 27/1; modified.

70. According to David Keightley, a "concern with timeliness was characteristic of the divinations of Wu Ting, who reigned when the sacrificial schedule was still being

period, by which time the ritual year approximated 360–370 days in length and the sexagenary cycle became tied to the lunar months, the sacrificial schedule provided continuity and stability by substituting a temporal dimension of its own for a “timeliness” contingent on external factors; that is, “uncertainty had been replaced by pattern and order”.⁷¹ At the same time, it is no doubt also indicative of a major theological change that the Shang kings by this same period had ceased completely divining about sacrifices to the various nature powers and had arrogated to themselves the title *Di* 帝, previously reserved for the supernatural governor of phenomena, including, of course, the celestial arbiters of time: sun, moon, and stars. During this interval, too, references to intercalary thirteenth months disappear from the inscriptional record, suggesting a significant deviation in calendrical practice that cannot reasonably be attributed to a shift to mid-year intercalation.⁷²

In Sima Qian’s view, the decline of Shang was ultimately traceable to changes detrimental to the dynastic fortunes that arose during the reign of King Zu Jia 祖甲 (in Dong Zuobin’s period II), the very period during which the regular ritual schedule of the New School began to take effect.⁷³ Significantly, Sima Qian also faulted the Shang for allowing their early attention to ‘pious reverence’ (*jing* 敬) to degenerate “until mean men had made it a superstitious concern for the spirits of the dead ancestors (*gui* 鬼).”⁷⁴ Taken together, these various developments appear to suggest a less than reverential attitude toward the high god and the spirits of the natural order in late Shang, and the possibility that, at the very least, a perfunctory approach was taken toward the calendar and its non-cult-related ritual observances. This, I submit, is the thrust of the Duke of Zhou’s accusation that the Shang king “despised Heaven’s command, and did not perpetually and reverently think of the sacrifices.”⁷⁵ In *Shangshu* “Wei zi” the Prince of Wei is even more explicit in his indictment: “Now the Yin people steal the auspicious and faultless

formulated, when the date of each sacrifice might still be submitted for spiritual approval. By period V temporal flexibility had been lost. The ritual schedule was now rigidly formulated; the day on which a particular ancestor would receive sacrifice was already established; the divination was no longer concerned with determining the auspicious time, but only with announcing that the sacrifice would take place as scheduled”; see Keightley, “Late Shang Divination,” 18.

71. Keightley, “Late Shang Divination,” 14.

72. Li Changhao, *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi*, 13–15.

73. *Shiji*, 2.104; cf. also *Guoyu*, 3.21a.

74. *Shiji*, 8.324. Compare this conception with that cited above from *Shangshu*, “Jiu gao.”

75. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 63/3.

sacrificial animals of the Spirits of Heaven and Earth, and use them to make fine their repasts, without (fear of) disaster."⁷⁶

Thus it is not surprising that the signs given by Mozi of Heaven's displeasure with Xia—"the sun and moon were untimely, and cold and heat came irregularly (*ri yue bu shi, han shu za zhi* 日月不時，寒暑雜至) . . . the five grains were malformed and people were greatly agitated," and with Shang—"the sacrifices were not according to the seasons" (*si yong shi shi* 祀用失時)⁷⁷—suggests that periodic obsolescence of the calendar (i.e., of the celestial markpoints used to calibrate it with the seasons), or more precisely in this case its reckless disregard, had far-reaching religious and political implications as failings offensive to the high god. Since the record of contemporaneous planetary observation has proven correct, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Mozi's statements may also reflect the actual situation with regard to the sacrifices (apart from those directed to the Shang royal ancestors), which were properly pegged to the calendar. Therefore, it is likely that the last Shang king Di Xin's alleged impiety in connection with the sacrifices consisted of a willful negligence tantamount to sacrilege. His religious posture appears to have been characterized by punctilious adherence to the late Shang cycle of ancestral sacrifices, but by gross negligence when it came to conforming to the patterns of heaven, respect for the natural spirits, and for the time-honored seasonal customs and festivals of the general populace ("what the people respected" as opposed to the elite ancestral cult).⁷⁸ This seems to be the implication of the contrast that is repeatedly drawn between the early Shang "wise kings" and the depravity of the final ruler. Whatever the justice of this indictment, it is a fact that rectification of the calendar, redefinition of the "correct" beginning of the year, and "getting straight with Heaven" by restoring the seasonal sacrifices were all accorded great symbolic importance in connection with the Zhou founding and every subsequent dynastic transition or new beginning.⁷⁹

76. Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 27/6; modified.

77. *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒詁 (Zhuji jicheng ed.), vol. 4, 39.

78. In this connection it is also worth recalling the traditional accounts of the late Shang king Wu Yi's 武乙 deliberate sacrilege in shooting full of arrows a blood-filled leather sack said to represent "Heaven," and Di Xin's contemptuous dismissal of the risk of usurpation in light of his divine appointment to rule; see *Shiji*, 3.104.

79. Nevertheless, such reform seems not to have gone beyond the symbolic. In *Yi Zhou shu*, "Zhou yue" 周月 chapter (6.87) there is the passage: "When it came to our Zhou kings, [they] were brought to attack the Shang, and to change the First Month of the year and the royal regalia, to make manifest the Three Fundamentals. But as for respectfully delivering the seasons to the people (*jing shou min shi* 敬授民時), royal

With what suddenness the calendrical misreckoning described in *Mozi* would have manifested itself we have no way of knowing, though the Xia King, Zhong Kang's difficulties mentioned above suggest a perennial problem.⁸⁰ Such mismanagement would no doubt have been exploited by rival contenders for power as exemplifying the incompetence of the royal or priestly lineage, including the king, who were charged with the sacred task of scheduling ritual observances and promulgating the calendar. Of course there would have been other proximate political causes of the decline in dynastic prestige, but in the case of the Zhou conquest in particular, this would help to account for the demonstrative piety in these matters of the successful usurpers. I submit, therefore, that lapses in managing religious time of the kind described, whether due to persistent negligence or the cumulative effects of precession, may well have figured prominently among the actual failures of rulers during the final reigns of both Xia and Shang.

The Rhetoric of Religion

The Zhou dynastic founders forcefully reasserted the centrality of their concept of a 'Mandate of Heaven' (*tianming*) both as a justification for their usurpation of Shang power and as a theory of history. Their pronouncements concerning the supreme deity Tian (or Shangdi) and its relations with them, together with the divination records of the Shang elite before them, constitute our most authentic, if incomplete, record of the religious and political motives being played out in the historical events of the period. Up to now there has largely prevailed a consensus among scholars that the Zhou conception, though perhaps prefigured to some degree in Shang divination texts, was largely an original formulation devised by Zhou ideologues in response to historical exigency. Now, however, the discovery of accounts of verifiable astronomical phenomena dating from the Three Dynasties period strongly suggests

progresses and sacrifices, [they] still followed the Xia." There appears to be a long-standing distinction here between the officially-disseminated civil calendar, with all its cosmo-political symbolism, and a more primitive calendar of seasonal festivals, market days and the like, like the Xia annuary, which the common folk continued to follow irrespective of the changes at the top. This distinction is also apparent in the same "Hong fan" passage quoted above, where the traditional observational habits of the people are distinguished from those of the elite: "What the common people (scrutinize) is the stars. There are stars which favor wind, there are stars which favor rain. (Owing to) the course of sun and moon there is winter and summer. According as the moons follow the (various) stars, there is wind and rain"; Karlgren, *Book of Documents*, 33/32. See, too, Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 91.

80. See Pankenier, "Early China Forum," *Early China* 15 (1990), 132.

the existence of a belief in a species of interventionist sky god centuries before the Zhou conquest of Shang, a conclusion that is also supported by traditional accounts of the period and by Eliade's comparative studies.⁸¹ This evidence of a connection between celestial events and the founding of the earliest dynasties makes a closer examination of the theological motives expressed by those ancient Chinese all the more timely.

In the view of philosopher Kenneth Burke, there is present in all remarks about the deity a rhetorical element that provides us with clues to how the use of language predisposes religious thinkers, early and late, to think thoughts of ultimate purpose in particular ways.⁸² The Zhou belief in heavenly intervention, which they represented as the motive for their successful conquest, can be understood as a working out in temporal terms of the implications of a logical relation among the coeternal realms of Heaven and the natural order, on the one hand, and the human socio-political order on the other. The Zhou founders did not express themselves this way, of course. At most they exhibited self-consciousness about proposing legitimations fundamentally at variance with the ideology of the Shang theocratic state. But the analogical use of language borrowed from the socio-political realm by which they characterized their relationship with the supernatural, like that of the earliest Shang records, speaks volumes about their theology and about how their conceptualization of problems of meaning was self-motivating in important respects.

81. Mircea Eliade's comparative researches suggest that the "notion of universal sovereignty . . . owes its development and its definition of outline largely to the notion of the sky's transcendence." According to Eliade, "even before any religious values have been set upon the sky it reveals its transcendence. The sky 'symbolizes' transcendence, power and changelessness simply by being there. It exists because it is high, infinite, immovable, powerful . . . the whole nature of the sky is an inexhaustible hierophany. Consequently anything that happens among the stars or in the upper areas of the atmosphere—the rhythmic revolution of the stars, chasing clouds, storms, thunderbolts, meteors, rainbows—is a moment in that hierophany. When this hierophany became personified, when the divinities of the sky showed themselves, or took the place of the holiness of the sky as such, is difficult to say precisely. What is quite certain is that the sky divinities have always been supreme divinities . . . that their hierophanies, dramatized in various ways by myth, have remained for that reason sky hierophanies; and that what one may call the history of sky divinities is largely a history of notions of 'force,' of 'creation,' of 'laws' and of 'sovereignty'; see *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 39, 40.

82. Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), esp. 1–42. For a classic sociological study of religion which, as well as being more ecumenical, reinforces that of Burke in many respects, see Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, esp. 1–51.

The following discussion, which is much indebted to Burke's analysis, will sketch out some of the implications of the logical relations between the temporal and the eternal realms discernible in Shang and Zhou thinking, in an attempt to adumbrate how certain features of that theology are implicated in the evolution of the concept of Heaven's Mandate. In order to do so it will first be necessary to consider briefly how it happens that the realm of language can itself be implicated as a source of theological motive. In essence, this "rhetoric of religion" as Burke has characterized the analogical use of language in theology, concerns the implications arising from the use, for example in myth, of "quasi-narrative terms for the expressing of relationships that are not intrinsically narrative, but 'circular' or 'tautological'."⁸³ A most important consequence of this terminological ambiguity, for our purposes, is the blurring of the distinction between the temporal and eternal realms and the resultant transference of motives from the one to the other.

The supernatural being by definition the realm of the ineffable, all words for 'God' and for human relationships to God must be used analogically. That is to say, all language about the supernatural is borrowed from among our words for the kinds of things we can talk about literally. As a result the stuff from which our language for the supernatural can be analogically constructed is limited to three empirical sources: (i) natural objects and processes (the "sweep and power of the natural" in Burke's apt phrase), including structural consistencies and symmetries; (ii) the socio-political order, that is, "the dignities and solemnities of office—and the intimacies of the familial"; (iii) the verbal, including meta-linguistic terminology, or words about words, and the symbolical in general.⁸⁴

Since 'God' by definition transcends all symbol-systems, we must begin, like theology, by noting that language is intrinsically unfitted to discuss the 'supernatural' literally. For language is empirically confined to terms referring to physical nature, terms referring to socio-political relationships and terms describing language itself. Hence, all words for 'God' must be used analogically—as were we to speak of God's 'powerful arm' (a physical analogy), or of God as 'lord' or 'father' (a socio-political analogy) or of God as the 'Word' (a linguistic analogy). The idea of God as a 'person' would be derived by analogy from the sheerly physical insofar as persons have bodies, from the socio-political insofar as persons have status

83. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 258.

84. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 37.

and from the linguistic insofar as the idea of personality implies such kinds of 'reason' as flower in man's symbol-using prowess (linguistic, artistic, philosophic, scientific, moralistic, pragmatic).⁸⁵

Although Burke chiefly concerns himself with the Western religious tradition, empirical categories are represented in much the same way in the theological vocabulary of ancient China: one need only call to mind Shang usage like "Most High Lord" (*Shangdi* 上帝), who "commands" (*ling* 令), "approves" (*nuo* 諾), "sends down" (*jiang* 降), "bestows" (*shou* 授), supervises "ministers" (*chen* 臣), or Zhou usage like "Heaven" (*Tian* 天), which "decrees" (*ming* 命), "punishes" (*fa* 伐), "brightly manifests" (*xianxian* 現顯), "overawes" (*wei* 威), "inspects" (*jian* 監), "ascends and descends" (*zhi jiang* 陟降), "protects and directs" (*bao yi* 保乂), "hears" (*wen* 聞), has an "eldest son" (*yuanzi* 元子), and so on. Thus in Shang and Zhou China as well we can identify a variety of analogies typically drawn from the socio-political and linguistic realms.⁸⁶

The distinction between the temporal and the supernatural (or eternal) realms when treated in linguistically analogous form may be compared to "the distinction between the unfolding of a sentence through the materiality of its parts and the unitary, non-material essence or meaning of the sentence."⁸⁷ Thus, in much the same way as the meaning arising from a narrative structure of language can present itself as "transcending," or as logically prior in some sense to the temporal arrangement of the words themselves, in their use of language to characterize *Shangdi* in a particular way, the ancient Chinese were unconsciously "discovering" the logical priority of the supernatural realm. Burke provides another classic example: "We can see this more clearly when thinking of the relation between the practical use of a language and a book on the theory of its grammar and syntax. Under natural conditions, people learn languages long before the rules of grammar and syntax are explicitly formulated. These rules are 'discovered' relatively late in the development of linguistic sophistication, and sometimes not at all. Yet there is a sense in which they 'have been there' from the start, implicit in the given symbol-system. In this sense, to 'discover' them is

85. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 15.

86. The use of writing to communicate with the supernatural world is itself implicated here; indeed, the "revealed" nature of the writing system attests to its sacred function. On the evolution of writing in ancient China from its sacred origin as "chiffres magiques," see Léon Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou la voie royale: Recherches sur l'esprit des institutions de la Chine ancienne*, vol. 2 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1977), 473-488.

87. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 3.

but to formulate what one somehow knew before one ever began to ask about such 'forms.'"⁸⁸

In the analogical use of language lies a paradox, Burke explains, which arises from the fact that once a theological terminology has been derived from everyday experience to express ideas about the supernatural, the order can be reversed and the same terminology can be borrowed back again or "resecularized." But in the process these terms inevitably bear with them the additional freight arising from their supernatural connotations: "They are thus 'technically prior' in a way that would be quite analogous to the Platonic view of 'archetypes' already existing in the 'memory' that vaguely 'recalls' them in their ideal 'perfection'."⁸⁹

We saw above a number of examples of Shang and Zhou expressions for divine activity as it impinged on human consciousness, much of which language implicitly ascribes human-like motives to Tian or Shangdi. These could easily be multiplied by examples of attributes like "anger," "benevolence," "mildness," "pleasure," etc. The result of such usage is again illustrated by Burke as it relates to the understanding of personality:

... personality as an empirical concept, is composed of ingredients distributed among the three empirical orders (words about nature, words about the socio-political, words about words). And personality as a term for deity is extended by analogy from these empirical usages ... at this stage a theological dialectic strategically reverses its direction. That is, it conceives of personality here and now as infused by the genius of the analogical extension ... empirical personality can be looked upon as sharing in the spirit of the supernatural personality. ... [the supernatural] is thus treated as in essence 'prior' to the other three, and as their 'ground' ... The terms for the supernatural, themselves derived by analogy from the empirical realm, can now be borrowed back, and reapplied—in analogy atop analogy—to the empirical realm, as when human per-

88. Similarly, according to Berger: "Whenever the socially established nomos attains the quality of being taken for granted, there occurs a merging of its meanings with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe. Nomos and cosmos appear to be co-extensive. In archaic societies, nomos appears as a microcosmic reflection, the world of men as expressing meanings inherent in the universe as such. ... Whatever the historical variations, the tendency is for the meanings of the humanly constructed order to be projected into the universe as such"; see *The Sacred Canopy*, 24. Cf. also Swanson's discussion of the origin of the supernatural in *The Birth of the Gods*, 27.

89. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 238.

sonality here and now is conceived in terms of 'derivation' from a transcendent super-personality.⁹⁰

One of the most consistent activities of the deity in the early period of particular relevance is that of "commanding" (*ling*) or "decreeing/mandating" (*ming*), the earliest and most significant usage quite obviously deriving from the socio-political realm. Because the two graphemically indistinguishable words come from the exercise of sovereign power in the realm of human socio-political experience, they carry with them connotations of "ruler", "hierarchy", "authority", "obedience" and perhaps "sanction", "covenant" and so on from their very earliest attested use in the oracle bone inscriptions. Thus in the oracle bone inscriptions, besides being used to denote verbal charges issued by the king to his subordinates, *ling* is also used to denote the analogous interaction between Shangdi and natural phenomena, and between Shangdi and his Minister-Regulators (*chen zheng* 臣正). Considerably less otiose is Heaven in the Zhou conception, which by all accounts issues non-verbal commands (*ming/ling*) not just to natural entities but also to humanity, that is, to the dynastic leadership (as did Tian, in the Zhou recounting of history, to Xia and Shang dynasts as well). However, the distinctive medium of such non-verbal "commands" remains, as with the Shang, via particular phenomena of nature, whether unpredictable or regular.

In both Shang and Zhou, therefore, we have the projection into the supernatural realm of a socio-political model of sovereignty and hierarchical order. And, as Burke points out, by a strategic ambiguity the term "Order" comes to apply both to the realm of nature in general and to the special realm of human socio-political organizations. This process whereby ideas of the natural order become infused by characteristics of the socio-political order carries with it the implication that phenomena in nature are in some sense actualizations of the will of the divine person-

90. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 36. In China this process proceeded in stages culminating in the late Warring States Confucian conception of human nature or personality as essentially "endowed" by Heaven, by which formulation Confucians implicitly affirmed the derivation of human personality from that of the supernatural power. For example, there is the famous passage in *Zhongyong* 中庸 "The Doctrine of the Mean" which says: "What is mandated by Heaven is called [human] nature" (*tian ming zhi wei xing* 天命之謂性). In this same vein, Peter Berger points to the transformation in classical China of the preexisting macrocosm/microcosm scheme legitimating the social order, typical of archaic societies, beyond a strictly mythological worldview: "In China, for instance, even the very rational, virtually secularizing, demythologization of the concept of *tao* (the 'right order' or 'right way' of things) permitted the continuing conception of the institutional structure as reflective of cosmic order"; see *The Sacred Canopy*, 35 (emphasis mine).

ality. Things do not simply occur of themselves. As Kenneth Burke has so aptly put it: "Although the concept of sheer "motion" is non-ethical, "action" implies the ethical—the human personality. . . . 'Things' can but move or be moved. 'Persons' by definition can 'act.'"⁹¹ It is this view of the phenomena of nature as in some sense the manifestation of divine order that also imbues the phenomena with an ethical quality.⁹²

Once the high god was conceived as "commanding" by analogy with the empirical theocratic hierarchy, the stage was set for the theological dialectic to reverse direction, whereupon the conclusion was drawn that the socio-political realm known to human experience, in which such "commanding" prominently figures, was in fact divinely enjoined. In other words, the very model of "commanding/decreeing" with all its socio-political implications was thought to be as much an actualization of the divine will in the empirical realm as are manifestations in the natural realm such as rain or thunder, or for that matter, planetary phenomena.⁹³ Verbal *ling* "commands" as were issued by the temporal Shang king thus acquired an implicit "spiritual" quality or sanction, their legitimacy deriving from their "prior" supernatural source. Conversely, by conceiving of Shangdi as issuing "commands" the ancient Chinese hit upon a vision of a natural order now "infused with the genius of the verbal and socio-political orders."⁹⁴

This process has important consequences for understanding the development of the concept of Heaven's Mandate. For if it is true that Shangdi is represented as rather aloof in the earliest Shang documents, it is nevertheless also true that the dialectical transformation hinging on the

91. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 41, 187.

92. As Marcel Granet so perceptively observed about the use of metaphor and allegory by Chinese writers: "Imagery is not employed merely to simplify the idea or to make it more attractive: in itself it has a moral value. This is evident in the case of certain themes. For example, the picture of birds flying in couples is, in itself, an exhortation to fidelity. If, then, metaphors borrowed from Nature are used to give expression to the emotions, it is due not so much to a consciousness of the beauty of Nature as to the fact that it is moral to conform to Nature"; *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China* (London: Routledge, 1932), 50. See also A.C. Graham's discussion of the synthesis of fact and value in Chinese correlative thinking: "a cosmos of the old kind has also an advantage to which post-Galilean science makes no claim; those who live in it know not only what is but what should be"; *Disputers of the Tao*, 350.

93. Thus, "the sheerly natural order contains a verbal element or principle that, from the purely empirical point of view, could belong only in the socio-political order. Empirically, the natural order of sheerly astro-physical motion depends upon no verbal principle for its existence. But theologically, it does . . ."; see Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 185.

94. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 185.

ambiguous relation between the temporal and supernatural realms had by then already occurred in Shang theology.⁹⁵ Just as in early Judeo-Christian tradition, Shang "standard usage bridges [the] distinction between the realms of verbal action and non-verbal motion when it speaks of sheerly natural objects or processes as 'actualities.' Here . . . we can discern a trace of the theological view that sees nature as the sign of God's action – and thus by another route we see the theological way of merging the principle of the natural order with the principle of verbal contract or covenant intrinsic to legal enactment in the socio-political order. . . . If, by 'Order,' we have in mind the idea of a command, then obviously the corresponding word for the proper response would be 'Obey.'"⁹⁶ What better way to express this merging of disparate orders than the symbolic identification between exceptional planetary phenomena and the jade sceptre of office which signified the delegation of legitimate authority to rule. It is no accident, therefore, that the historical record of this sort of communication, when translated into the linguistic realm of "writings" or "diagrams" such as revealed to dynastic founders, begins with celestial observations.⁹⁷

95. For the developmental continuum of legitimations ("socially objectivated knowledge that serves to explain and justify the social order") according to historical circumstances, from pre-theoretical through theoretically self-conscious, see Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 29, 31–32.

96. Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 186.

97. It is noteworthy that the prefaces to the "Monograph on Astrology" (*Tianwen zhi*) in both the *Jin shu* and *Hou Han shu* explicitly identify the "River Diagram" (*Hetu*) as a text in which was recorded revealed wisdom concerning the heavenly bodies. For example, the latter (*Hou Han shu*, 10.3214) has: "Xuan Yuan (i.e. the legendary Huangdi or Yellow Emperor) first received the *Hetu* *doubaoshou* 河圖門苞授 which plotted out the images [formed by] the sun, moon, planets, and constellations. Therefore, books concerning the starry offices begin with the Yellow Emperor" (cf. also *Jin shu*, 11.277). For the "Cinnabar Writing" *danshu* 丹書 bestowed on King Wen, see the "You shi lan" 有始覽 chapter of *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Sibu beiyao ed.), 13.4a:

及文王之時，天先見火赤烏銜丹書集于周社。文王曰：火氣勝。故其色尚赤，其事則火

In the time of King Wen, Heaven first manifested fire. A scarlet bird clasping a Cinnabar Writing alighted on the Zhou altar to the soil. King Wen said, 'The *qi* of fire is in the ascendant.' Therefore, for his color he exalted scarlet and in his affairs he emulated fire.

The standard account of the transmission of esoteric knowledge in the form of "River Diagrams" (*Hetu* 河圖) or "Luo Writings" (*Luoshu* 洛書) is found in *Hanshu*, 27.1315. Cf. also Liu Xiang's 劉向 comment (*Hanshu*, 36.1966) "The patterns of Heaven are difficult to communicate. Your minister, even after submitting a diagram, still needs to explain it in words, and then it can be understood" (*tianwen nan yi xiang xiao, chen sui tu shang, you xu kou shuo, ranhou ke zhi* 天文難以相曉，臣雖圖上，猶須口說，然後可知). For a discussion of the military application of such revealed "texts" in Eastern

Shangdi as depicted in the earliest oracle bone inscriptions still stands at the head of a supernatural hierarchy with the power "to make or break the dynasty" in David Keightley's phrase. His was by then an ancient power, still awesome and apparently approachable only through the intercession of the ancestral spirits, whose role was soon to be enhanced along with the dynastic fortunes at the expense of Shangdi and other lesser nature spirits. But there can be little doubt of the priority originally attributed to the power and influence of Shangdi as the ultimate cosmic source both of the dynastic lineage in the mythical genealogy and of its socio-political organization.⁹⁸ The relationship is clearer in the case of the Zhou, who in their subservience expressly ascribe supreme authority and priority to the *ming* "commands/mandate" of Heaven. Moreover, their more extensive ideological statements refer explicitly to documented Xia antecedents of such conceptions in force nearly a millennium earlier. With the Zhou the scope of Heaven's activity, like the universal kingship itself, was broadened at the expense of the ancestral cult in a manner consistent with the pattern followed by similar religious restorations elsewhere, which "brought back to life ancient supreme gods of heaven who had been turned into *dei otiosi*" in Eliade's phrase,⁹⁹ but the conception of the personality of the high god apparently remained basically unchanged. The Zhou approach to prob-

Zhou, "in imitation of divine patterns that inform the cosmos," see Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), especially chapter 4, "Cosmic Violence," 98 ff and 137-163. Of course, Lewis also goes on to argue for a Warring States date for the "textualization" of the cosmos. In view of the evidence presented here regarding the privileged role of celestial portentology, cosmology, and cosmic legitimations in the second millennium B.C., however, I cannot concur with Lewis's view that the notion of a cosmic kingship, wherein the legitimate authority of the king is derived from his ability to "read" the hieroglyphics of the cosmos, is a Warring States invention. It is worth noting here that the Mawangdui illustrated catalogue of twenty-nine cometary apparitions and their associated prognostications connects virtually all with military activity. The appearance of one type of comet (no. 28) is actually denoted "Chi You's Banner" in commemoration of the prototypical cosmic conflict between Huangdi and the demiurge Chi You 蚩尤; see *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 148, 182, and Xi Zelong, "Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhong de huixing tu" 馬王堆漢墓帛書中的彗星圖, in *Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu lunji*, 1989, 31. Needless to say, the accumulation of this much observational data pertaining to naked-eye comets and novae took a very long time.

98. My general argument as presented here is consistent with Berger's observation that, "Probably the most ancient form of [religious] legitimation is the conception of the institutional order as directly reflecting or manifesting the divine structure of the cosmos, that is, the conception of the relationship between society and cosmos as one between microcosm and macrocosm. Everything 'here below' has its analogue 'up above'"; see *The Sacred Canopy*, 34.

99. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 75.

lems of meaning is more generally stated, more comprehensive than the opportunistic, piecemeal approach of late Shang divinatory theology, because of the emphasis on the universality of Heaven's authority in contrast to the Shang preoccupation with the royal ancestral cult. The processes and phenomena of the natural order, from the great rhythms of the seasons to the occasional and unpredictable anomalies, were all seen essentially as actualizations of the will of Heaven. 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 imbued 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.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can draw several conclusions with regard to the early history of astrology and its association with political developments. As Mircea Eliade has shown, what happened among the stars was understood as a signal moment in the inexhaustible hierophany of the sky divinity, and that dramatizations in myth of such phenomena typically involve notions of 'sovereignty,' 'power,' 'law,' and the like. Kenneth Burke's analysis of the rhetoric of religion shows too that the realm of the supernatural was conceptualized by analogy with human socio-political experience, and that once so conceived it was understood to be the ultimate source of the verities of that experience. Given the existence of a Shangdi in early Shang, a divinity "up above" who from his dwelling place in the sky commanded processes of nature, meteorological phenomena, and a hierarchy of subordinated supernatural entities (thereby controlling human destiny), it follows that the god would also have been thought responsible for the movements of heavenly bodies and phenomena associated with them.¹⁰⁰

It now seems clear that by the twentieth century B.C. the ancient Chinese had already distinguished the somewhat erratic movements of the five planets from the regular motion of the fixed stars, as well as from transitory celestial phenomena like comets, meteors, auroras, and

100. Here again it is useful to recall the myth (see n. 38) that relates the history of Gao Xin's appointment of E Bo and Shi Chen as Regulators of two of the most important seasonal asterisms of that era, Scorpio and Orion. The central premise of the narrative—the incompatibility of the two feuding siblings—reveals the etiological function of the myth. It accounts, again by means of a familial analogy, for the diametrical opposition between the brothers' astral correlates, which cannot appear in the sky simultaneously.

the more common meteorological phenomena. Once discovered, these five bright objects that moved independently of the background of fixed stars would certainly have commanded attention as they wandered among the seasonal constellations along the ecliptic. Occasionally they met briefly in groups of two or three, more rarely four, and rarest of all, five planets. Given a conceptualization of the supernatural realm by analogy with human socio-political experience, it is hardly to be wondered at that this relative freedom of action could be likened to that of the temporal ruler's own deputies, who were dispatched to distant locations on the king's business and who gathered occasionally to deliberate policy. Hence, since the powerful arbiters of time and light—sun and moon—are identifiable in the oracle bone inscriptions as deserving of special treatment by Shangdi, while the more subordinate wind and rain were subject to his direct command, it is likely that Di's "Five Minister Regulators" (*wu chen zheng* 五臣正) refers specifically to the five planets whose behavior and function qualified them for high rank in the supernatural hierarchy.¹⁰¹

In view of the historical responses to exceptional clusters of the five planets, it seems that such "deliberations" of the five planetary spirits were taken to signal momentous shifts in policy at the highest level of the supernatural realm. The occurrence of such deliberations in the very regions of the sky with pre-existing astrological links to specific terrestrial powers (i.e., Great Fire with Shang and the Vermillion Bird with Zhou) must have lent extraordinary force to the directives the high god was understood to be handing down. In the case of the Zhou Conquest in particular, the accuracy of this interpretation is reinforced by analysis of specific military and political actions taken by the Zhou leaders in the short span of thirteen years preceding the Battle of Muye in 1046 B.C. It is further underscored by the intense preoccupation of the early Zhou

101. Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, for his part, was convinced that the Five Minister Regulators belonging to Shangdi in the oracle bone inscriptions correspond to the later *wu gong chen* 五公臣 in *Zuo zhuan* (Zhao 17) where they figure as officials in charge of the seasons of Heaven (*zhang tian shi zhe* 掌天時者). Elsewhere (Zhao Gong 29th year), they become cosmic functionaries in charge of the Five Elemental Forces, conceived as five kinds of useful materials; see *Yinxu buci zong shu* 殷墟卜辭綜述 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1956), 572. In "Tian guan shu," 27.1350, Sima Qian is explicit about the celestial identity of Heaven's five ministers: "These five planets are Heaven's five assistants" (*ci wu xing zhe tian zhi wu zuo* 此五星者天之五佐). By the Han, illustrations of the five planets with associated gods may be found to depict each holding a construction tool of one kind or another. From this John Major concludes, "there is perhaps also a hint that the planetary gods are the architects of the sub-celestial world as it comes into being in its multiplicity of forms"; see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 27.

rulers with "proper attention to Heaven's awesomeness" (*gu yu tianwei* 顧于天威) as recorded in their contemporary pronouncements.

It is unlikely that the five planets were already associated at this early date with all five elements, colors, and other correlates of the mature system of late Zhou. But in the remarkably precise identification of certain colors and elements with the sequence of three planetary massings in the second millennium B.C., it is possible to discern the beginnings of what came to be thought of as a pre-ordained pattern. As yet, the agent of causation was still the high god rather than the theoretical cosmic imperative in the cyclical scheme elaborated by Zou Yan. But like the principles of socio-political order and the concept of Heaven's Mandate itself, the essential basis of Zou Yan's theory of historical process appears to have been disclosed empirically, and later Five Elements theory derives much of its persuasiveness from a resonance with popular beliefs and religious legitimations of the social order harking back to the early Bronze Age.

Quite apart from the new linguistic coinage pertaining to Heaven that makes its appearance in early Zhou (e.g. *tian*, *tianming*, *tianwei*, *tianxian*, etc.), attitudes concerning the relationship of Heaven to mankind become explicitly formulated in terms of a coherent and conclusive political ideology. History in early Zhou meant the study of precedents, an examination of the complex amalgam of genealogical, cosmo-magical, and factual knowledge about the past, from which recognizable patterns and lessons could hopefully be abstracted. "The mirror is not far," it was said, "it is in the generations of the lords of Xia and the lords of Yin." A broadening of archaeological and archaeoastronomical horizons now obliges us to examine in a new light the "mirror" of Three Dynasties history, especially the history of ideas provided by those early Zhou ideologues. From the Zhou founders' appeals to precedent going beyond the founding of Shang all the way back to early Xia, and from the confirmation this version of history has received from an unexpected direction—actual events in the skies—it is now apparent that the associated impression that historical change correlates with manifestations of the divine will in nature must have a history at least as long, even if theoretical formulations based on such insight first emerged much later. Belief in the validity of heavenly intervention would have been powerfully reinforced with each repetition of the remarkable planetary phenomena to which I have drawn attention. Certainly, from the perspective of the Zhou, the third historical appearance of a Mandate conjunction and the successful conquest of Shang would have provided more than sufficient grounds for the kind of conclusive formulation of

the doctrine of Heaven's Mandate found in their earliest pronouncements. That the Zhou would have been most anxious to develop complex legitimations to account for historical developments is to be expected, since by overturning the Shang hegemony they also undermined the very foundations of the preexisting cosmo-political order. If the classical portrayals of the Zhou dynastic founders like the Duke of Zhou are anachronistic, it is in representing them as self-consciously concerned with categories of meaning. The enunciation of the concept of Heaven's Mandate as a form of politico-religious legitimation, on the other hand, fits the historical context.¹⁰²

Still, the contrast between the particularistic and opportunistic approach to fundamental spiritual issues taken by Shang divinatory theology as against the incipiently ideological disposition epitomized by the doctrine of Heaven's Mandate is a striking one. In spite of a number of cosmo-political continuities to which I have drawn attention here, a reading of early Zhou sources suggests that at some level a significant conceptual watershed has been crossed.¹⁰³ In the Former Han, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179?-104? B.C.), after Zou Yan, characterized the Shang-Zhou transition as a shift in a binary cycle away from a preoccupation with "substance" (*zhi* 質) toward an emphasis on "pattern" (*wen* 文). Sima Qian in turn, following Dong Zhongshu, discerned a symptomatic religious decline during the Shang, a falling away from a traditional attitude of "reverence" toward Heaven and the natural realm in favor of superstitious preoccupation with the spirits of the ancestors. With regard to the supernatural sanction underpinning the universal

102. As Berger has shown, the "rootedness of religion in the practical concerns of everyday life" means that, "The religious legitimations . . . make little sense if one conceives of them as productions of theoreticians that are then applied *ex post facto* to particular complexes of activity. The need for legitimation arises in the course of activity. Typically, this is in the consciousness of the actors before that of the theoreticians. . . . To put it simply, most men in history have felt the need for religious legitimation—only very few have been interested in the development of religious 'ideas'"; see *The Sacred Canopy*, 41.

103. With the advent of religious reform and the universal sovereignty of Zhou clear progress may have been made toward the time, still some centuries ahead, when according to Eliade, "the ubiquity, the wisdom and the passivity of the sky god were seen afresh in a metaphysical sense, and the god became the epiphany of the order of nature and the moral law . . . the divine 'person' gave place to the 'idea'; religious experience . . . gave place to theoretic understanding, or philosophy"; see *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 110. 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; see Geertz, "'Internal Conversion' in Contemporary Bali," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 172.

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.¹⁰⁴

In contrast, 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. We have only scant information about the two centuries following the founding of the dynasty by Cheng Tang, before "reverence" deteriorated into "superstition," as Sima Qian said, but discernible in the institutionalization and routinization of divination long after the heady years of the founding is a flagging attention to entire categories of supramundane agency which seemed to grow less and less relevant.¹⁰⁵ Certainly the worship of the high god seems to have been completely eclipsed during most of the late Shang.

The view presented here of a fundamental continuity of cosmopolitical conceptions throughout the ancient period carries with it the implication that, whatever other threads in common with later tradition may

104. In structuralist terms, therefore, one might characterize this transition as an ideological shift away from the "metonymic-connexion axis" back to the "metaphoric-similarity axis" (for an application of structuralist analysis to ancient Chinese correlative thinking, see Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 315). In this respect the choice of *wen* "pattern, form, style" to denote the paradigm represented by the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, and the "vehement reassertion of the transcendental power of the high god" which it entailed, appears particularly apt. By implication, of course, this same paradigm applies equally to the *zeitgeist* of Xia, with whom the Zhou clearly identified themselves; see Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 38. Note especially Schwartz's choice of the word "reassertion" above. See also Schwartz's remarks (p. 48 ff.) concerning the reemphasis on correct performance of ritual with the advent of the Zhou, especially "the striking observation of the *Book of Ceremonies* . . . [that] the Shang people had put the spirits in the first place and the rites second, while the Chou put the rites first and the spirits in second place."

105. Keightley characterizes the taming of Shang belief by convention this way: "These later inscriptions record, I would suggest, the whisperings of charms and wishes, a constant bureaucratic murmur, forming a routine background of invocation to the daily life of the last two Shang kings, who were now talking, perhaps, more to themselves than to the ultra-human powers"; see Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 382.

be discernible, the late Shang may have represented a significant departure from the norm in important respects, and not merely because of the cultic focus of the oracle bone inscriptions. Small wonder then that the Zhou founders, who did not share the Shang king's optimism and confidence in the power of the Shang royal ancestors, identified so strongly with their "virtuous" predecessors in early Xia and early Shang. The Zhou leaders' tireless speechmaking on behalf of Heaven was no mere pious posturing, nor was their exculpatory message a dissembling pose. They saw themselves as the agents of the restoration of the prestige of the high god and the principle that the universal sovereignty was not a birthright, hence the anxious preoccupation with preserving the mandate for their posterity that suffuses the rhetoric of early Zhou bronze inscriptions and received texts.¹⁰⁶

David Keightley has argued that by the end of Shang "the balance of caution against confidence, of negative doubt against the need for positive action, of religious reflection against secular activity, of Neolithic pessimism against Bronze Age optimism . . . shifted in favor of optimism, confidence, and human control."¹⁰⁷ If this is so, the religious and ideological correctives applied by the Zhou founders in response to the social, psychological, and cultural strain of dynastic ascendancy may be said to manifest in their inspiration a return to Neolithic pessimism, and yet their comprehensive, conclusive formulation marks a significant advance beyond the opportunistic, piecemeal approach to problems of meaning taken by Shang divinatory theology. In striving to emulate Heaven, which overarched the world and provided the rhythmic back-

106. "Heaven's Mandate is not easy to keep, it is not to be counted on," it was said. One reason, as Karl Löwith incisively remarked in another context, is that "the conjunctionist thesis leads imperceptibly and unconsciously to the idea of variability and pluralism in religious and political regimes. If changes depend on the movements and conjunctions of the upper planets with certain signs of the zodiac, then major historical events can only be considered 'providential' in the metaphorical sense"; see *Meaning in History*, 20. Relevant in the present context too is Clifford Geertz's cultural analysis of ideology and his conclusion that "the function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped. . . . And it is, in turn, the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible [or *undefined*] social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them, that accounts both for the ideologies' highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held. . . . Whatever else ideologies may be . . . they are, most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience"; see Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," 218-220 (insertion mine).

107. Keightley, "Shang Divination and Metaphysics," 388.

beat to the phenomena, the Zhou reasserted the primacy of universality and inclusiveness, in apparent marked contrast to the former Shang overindulgence in exclusivist hegemony, itself a logical outgrowth of their preoccupation with the cult of the royal ancestors. Thus this epoch-making Shang-Zhou dynastic transition also evoked a fundamental tension at the heart of ancient Chinese political thinking about the mandate and legitimate succession that was henceforth to manifest itself repeatedly in the religious and political life of early China. More importantly, 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.