

REFERENCES TO CELESTIAL bodies and astronomical phenomena in Chinese texts first make their appearance in the late Shang dynasty oracle-bone (divinatory) inscriptions dating from the thirteenth to mid-eleventh centuries B.C.E., most of which pertain to various aspects of Shang cultic ritual. Identifiable stars and asterisms and the like named in the inscriptions include the Northern (Big) Dipper, the “Fire Star” Antares (α Scorpii), Orion the “Triaster” asterism (δ Orionis), the Dragon constellation (corresponding to the portion of the zodiac we know as Virgo through Scorpio), the planet Jupiter, and, of course Sun and Moon. A small number of inscriptions also record important transitory phenomena such as sunspots, solar and lunar eclipses, solstices, comets, and possibly supernovas. Here are some representative examples.

[Preface:] Crack-making on day *bingyin* (3),¹ Que divined: [Charge:] We should perhaps perform a *yin*-ritual to the Fire [star].

[Preface:] [Divined] on day *xinsi* (18): [Charge:] The Sun has a blemish (i.e., a sunspot) [on the] west. . . . [“There will be a] calamity.”] [Verification:] Indeed there was a blemish.

[Preface:] Crack-making on day [*gui*]*chou* (50), Bin divined: [Charge:] On the coming *yi*[*mao*] (52) we should offer steamed millet to [ancestor] Zu Yi. [Prognostication:] The king read the cracks and said, “There will be disasters. . . . It may not rain.” [Verification:] [After] 6 days, on the night of day [*wu*]*wu* (55), the Moon was eclipsed. . . .

IT IS NOTEWORTHY that both Antares and Orion’s belt figure importantly from this early date, for, as we shall see, the volume of astral lore connected with these two crucial seasonal indicators attests to their great significance to the early Chinese. Knowledge of the stars was, of course, vital in ancient times, before the advent of reliable calendars. As the celebrated Qing-dynasty scholar Gu Yanwu (1613–1682; see selection 83) once said, “Before the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou), everyone knew astronomy.”

Also worth noting in the Shang inscriptions is the implication that astronomical phenomena may serve as omens of good or ill fortune, so that both aspects of “applied” astronomy—calendar science and astrology—are represented in the literature from the earliest times. Before turning to a more general consideration of cosmology in the early imperial period, we reproduce examples from the formative period of Chinese civilization that reflect a concern first with calendrical astronomy and then with astrology.

Calendrical Astronomy in the “Canon of Yao” (Yao dian)

One early canonical text that describes the systematic seasonal observation of stellar phenomena is the “astronomical foundation charter” in the “Yao dian” chapter of the *Book of Documents*, originally composed around the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. but modified in Han times. In

this text, the legendary Emperor Yao charges his royal astrologers with the responsibility of scrupulously observing the evening transit (*zhong*), the moment of culmination on the observer's meridian (i.e., the imaginary north-south line that passes directly overhead), of four cardinal asterisms in order to inform the people of the passage of the seasons. This canonical text clearly illustrates the calendrical significance of the four season-defining asterisms, makes plain how vital their observation was to the interests of the state, and describes the observational technique of "centering"—*zhong* (i.e., observing meridian transit)—by means of which the sun's position among the stars, and hence the date, could be more or less accurately inferred.²

Then [yao] commanded Xi and He, in reverent accord with august Heaven, to calculate and delineate the Sun, Moon, stars, and constellations, so as to respectfully confer the seasons on the people.

He separately charged Xi Zhong to reside at Yuyi, [in the place] called Yanggu (Bright Valley), there respectfully to host the rising Sun and to arrange and regulate the works of the East. "When the day is of medium length, and the star is Niao (Bird; α Hydrae), you may thereby determine midspring. The people disperse and the birds and beasts breed and mate."

He further charged Xi Shu to reside at Nanjiao (South Crossing), there to arrange and regulate the works of the South, paying respectful attention to the summer solstice. "When the day is longest and the star is Fire (α Scorpii), you may thereby determine midsummer. The people avail themselves [of the season]; the feathers and coats of birds and beasts are thin and hide-like."

He separately charged He Zhong to reside in the West, [in the place] called Meigu (Dark Valley), there to respectfully send off the setting Sun and to arrange and regulate the achievements of the West. "When the night is of medium length and the star is Xu (Void; α , β Aquarii), you may thereby determine midautumn. The people are at their ease, and the feathers and coats of birds and beasts are glossy."

He further charged He Shu to reside in the North, [in the place] called Youdu (Somber Capital), there to arrange and examine the works of the North. "When the day is at its shortest and the star is Mao (Pleiades; η Tauri), you may thereby determine midwinter. The people keep to the warmth [of their houses], and the feathers and coats of birds and beasts are downy and thick."

The emperor said, "Ah! You, Xi, and He. A round year consists of three hundred sixty-six days. By means of an intercalary month you should fix the four seasons and complete the year. If you thus faithfully regulate the many functionaries, their accomplishments will all be resplendent."³

GIVEN, SAY, OBSERVATION of the meridian transit of the reference star α Hydrae of the Vermilion Bird constellation at evening twilight, "when the day is of medium length," it can be inferred that the sun must be some 90° behind at the vernal equinox in Mao (lunar lodge no. 18,⁴ Pleiades; η Tauri). It follows also that three months hence, at the summer solstice, the sun should have moved along to the vicinity of α Hydrae in the Vermilion Bird, at which time the star transiting the meridian at dusk should now be the distinctly reddish "Fire Star." From such rudimentary beginnings stellar indications for the whole year were gradually worked out in a way that made it possible to mark the passage of each month and season with precision. One such early

calendrical almanac from the fifth century B.C.E., the *Lesser Annuary of Xia* or *Xia xiao zheng*, does precisely that, by mentioning fifteen distinct stellar phenomena associated with eight of the twelve months. These include the first and last visibility of certain asterisms at night, the orientation of the handle of the Northern Dipper (Ursa Major) at dusk or dawn, and meridian transits of three stars at dawn or dusk. At the same time, much of this information, in a less specialized form, would have been familiar to “everyman” in early China, much as was Hesiod’s poetic *Works and Days* in ancient Greece. For example, here is a representative passage from the late-fourth-century-B.C.E. historical narrative *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*):

When [the asterism] Dragon’s Horn (lunar lodge no. 1, α Virginis) appears, the rain stops. When [the asterism] Heaven’s Taproot (Virgo/Libra) appears, the rivers dry up. When [the asterism] Root (Libra) appears, the plants shed their leaves. When [the asterism] Quadriga (π Scorpii) appears, frost falls. When [the asterism] Fire (α Scorpii) appears, the clear winds warn of cold. Thus the teachings of the former kings say, “When the rains stop, clear the paths. When the rivers dry up, complete the bridges. When the plants shed their leaves, store the harvest. When the frost falls, make ready the fur garments. When the clear wind comes, repair the inner and outer defense walls and the palaces and buildings.” Therefore, the *Ordinances of Xia* says, “In the ninth month clear the paths, in the tenth month complete the bridges.” Its *Seasonal Advisories* says, “Gather in your harvest floor’s bounty; prepare your baskets and spades. When [the asterism] Plan the House (lunar lodge no. 13, α Pegasi) is centered, look to begin earth moving. The Fire [star’s] first appearance is already anticipated by the village headmen.” This is how the former kings broadly promulgated their virtuous sway throughout the realm, without resorting to monetary incentives.⁵

BY THE EARLY imperial period, seasonal observations such as these were systematized and spelled out in great detail, in accordance with the *yinyang* and Five Phases⁶ correlative cosmology that increasingly came to dominate cosmo-political thinking in the third to first centuries B.C.E. The opening passage from the “Monthly Ordinances” (Yue ling) chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*) illustrates the inseparability of the cosmological, natural, ritual, and political spheres in the ideology of the early empire:⁷

In the first month of the year the sun is in Plan the House (α Pegasi). At dusk Triaster (lunar lodge no. 21, α Orionis) is centered and at dawn Tail (lunar lodge no. 6, λ Scorpii) is centered. This month’s [propitious] heavenly stems are *jia* and *yi*, its ruler Tai Hao, and its tutelary spirit Gou Mang. Its insects are the scaly sort, its keynote is *Jue*, and among the [12 tones of the] pitch pipes it corresponds to Great Budding. Its number is eight, its taste sour, and its odor rank. Its sacrifice is the Household, and sacrificial offerings give preference to the spleen. The east wind dissipates the freezing cold, and the hibernating insects begin to stir. The fish swim upstream, the otter makes an offering of his fish, and the wild geese arrive. The Son of Heaven dwells in the left (i.e., east) or blue-green wing [of the palace]. He rides the *luan*-carriage, drives the azure dragon[-steeds], and flies blue-green pennants. He dons blue-green ceremonial robes, wears azure jade pendants, dines on wheat and mutton, and the [motifs] of his incised vessels are [seasonally] apt. As this is the month of the Beginning of Spring, three days beforehand the

Prefect Grand Astrologer reports to the Son of Heaven, “such-and-such day is the Beginning of Spring; the influence of Wood is in the ascendant.” The Son of Heaven then fasts, and on the day of the Beginning of Spring he personally leads the Three Eminences, Nine Ministers, Lords, and Grandees in ceremoniously welcoming the Spring in the eastern suburbs. On their return [the Son of Heaven] rewards his Eminences, Ministers, Lords, and Grandees at court.

THIS IMPERATIVE TO harmonize human activity with the rhythms of the cosmos underlies the rhetorical question that begins Sima Qian’s (fl. ca. 100 B.C.E.) summation of the astronomical knowledge of his day in the “Treatise on the Heavenly Offices” (*Tian guan shu*) in *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*: “Ever since the people have existed, when have successive rulers not systematically followed the movements of Sun, Moon, stars, and asterisms?” In what follows, however, Sima Qian emphasizes the application of this knowledge not to calendrical science, but to discerning the will of Heaven and prognosticating the future—that is, to astrology: “The twenty-eight lunar lodges govern the twelve provinces and the handle of the Dipper seconds them; the origin (of these conceptions) is ancient.”

So now we turn to a consideration of the principles and practice of astrology in early China.

Field Allocation Astrology

From the observation in hoary antiquity that the cycles of sun and moon directly influence human activity it naturally came to be assumed that whatever transpired in the skies had consequences below. In an effort to render such phenomena intelligible, and hence manageable, there gradually developed a scheme of astral-terrestrial correspondences in which locations in the sky were coupled with locations on the ground. In this scheme, the Heavenly River arching across the night sky, which we know as the Milky Way, was thought to correspond to the archetypal terrestrial River (i.e., the Yellow River), and the stellar fields surrounding it were the heavenly correlates of the terrestrial polities. When something transpired in the stellar field allocated to a terrestrial region it was taken as an omen of things to come, and it was the responsibility of specialized officials to report the event and its interpretation to the ruler.

The early antecedents of this system of Field Allocation (*fenyue*) astrology are to be found in certain conceptions already influential in the second millennium B.C.E. Several passages in pre-Qin works preserve the remnants of etiological myths and traditions that establish the existence of definite connections between celestial locations and terrestrial polities. One of the most famous is the legend of E Bo and Shi Chen, which is preserved in the *Zuo Commentary* (Duke Zhao, first year):

Formerly, Gao Xin had two sons, the eldest was named E Bo and the younger one Shi Chen. They lived in Kuanglin but could not get along, daily taking up shield and lance against one another. In the end, Gao Xin could no longer condone it and removed E Bo to Shangqiu to have charge of [the asterism] Chen (Great Fire in Scorpio). The Shang people emulated him in this; therefore Great Fire is the Shang asterism. [Gao Xin also] moved Shi Chen to Daxia to have charge of Shen (Orion), and the people of Tang emulated him, and served the houses of Xia and Shang there. The last of their line was Tang Shuyu. When [Zhou] King Wu’s wife Yi

Jiang was pregnant with Tai Shu (i.e., Tang Shuyu), she dreamt that the Lord on High told her, “I have named your son Yu and will give Tang to him, make Tang belong to Shen (Orion), and cause his descendants to flourish.” When the child was born he had the character Yu on his hand, and so his name was called Yu. When [Zhou] King Cheng extinguished the Tang [line] he enfeoffed Tai Shu there; hence, Orion is the star of Jin. From this we can see that Shi Chen is the spirit of Shen (Orion).

AGAIN, ON THE occasion of a disastrous fire in Song, the successor state of Shang (Duke Xiang, ninth year):

The Marquis of Jin asked Shi Ruo the reason for the assertion he had heard, that the fires in Song are a manifestation of the workings (i.e., Dao) of Heaven. Shi Ruo replied, “The ancient Regulator of Fire offered sacrificial nourishment to the asterisms Heart (α Scorpii) and Beak (α Hydrae) [at their spring and autumn culminations] when [the people] carry out and bring in the [hearth] fires. For this reason, Beak is [known as] Quail Fire and Heart as Great Fire. Tao Tang’s (i.e., Emperor Yao’s) Regulator of Fire, E Bo, dwelt at Shangqiu and sacrificed to Great Fire (α Scorpii), 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 people principally focused on Great Fire (α Scorpii). They observed that the incipient signs of their calamities and defeats inevitably began with Fire, hence from the date one can deduce that the Way of Heaven is implicated.” The Duke of Jin said, “Is it inevitably so?” to which [Shi Ruo] responded, “It depends on the Way. If a state is disordered but such manifest signs are lacking, [the workings of Heaven] cannot be known.”

THE SAME LEGEND is alluded to in an equally famous passage in *Guoyu*, “Jinyu” (Discourses of Jin): “I have heard that when Jin was first enfeoffed, Jupiter was in Great Fire, which is the star of E Bo; in truth, it marked the periods of the Shang.”

This famous nexus of astral lore involving E Bo and Shi Chen weaves together various elements of cultural significance in characteristic fashion. At bottom, it is a classic example of the kind of etiological myth dating from the preliterate period that served both to explain and to transmit vital astronomical and calendrical knowledge. In so doing it also laid the foundation for the subsequent elaboration of an astrological theory based on celestial and terrestrial correspondences. In this pithy story we have a tale about the human origins of the deities associated with the principal constellations of spring and autumn, Scorpio and Orion, which are diametrically opposed or “at odds” in the heavens and hence never appear in the sky simultaneously. Just as if unable to abide each other’s presence, E Bo invariably ducks beneath the western horizon just before Shi Chen rises in the east. These personified asterisms are then linked to the cardinal directions (East and West), to seasonal activity for which they anciently served as harbingers (carrying out and in of the hearth fires marking the beginning and end of the agricultural season), as well as to the dominant political entities of the early Bronze Age (Shang and Xia), their descendants, and the hereditary lines of astrologers and calendar specialists who served them. In this and other examples of such astral lore it is possible to discern the ancient nucleus of the system of astral-terrestrial correlations that over time was to become amplified and ultimately standardized in the field allocation system.

The following is an example of a famous prognostication, which purports to date from the mid-seventh century B.C.E.⁸ It concerns the restoration of Chong Er to power in the state of Jin⁹ and his subsequent elevation to the status of hegemon. Like most examples of field allocation astrology from the preimperial period, the prognostication is based on well-established correlations between twelve states and their assigned stellar fields, here identified using the names of Jupiter stations. These stations, denoted “stages of Jupiter’s march” (*Sui ci*), are regular 30° spaces containing two or three lunar lodges each. Each corresponds to Jupiter’s annual movement during one of the approximately twelve years the planet takes to complete a circuit of the heavens. Fundamentally, Jupiter’s presence in a state’s astral space was thought to confer political and military advantage. As we have already seen, Jupiter station Shi Chen, which is named for one of the feuding brothers of legend, contains lunar lodge no. 21 Shen (Orion). Shen is the astral space of the state of Jin, having anciently been the astral correlate of Tang, the fiefdom Jin supplanted. As we also saw, when Jin was first founded Jupiter was in Great Fire, or Scorpio. Here, as Chong Er hesitates at the southern bank of the Yellow River on his return from nineteen years of forced exile, the future Duke Wen of Jin is persuaded by the historiographer/astrologer (*baozhang shi*) Dong Yin to cross into Jin and reclaim his rightful place as ruler:

[Historiographer] Dong Yin [of Jin] came out to meet Duke [Wen] at the Yellow River. The Duke asked, “Might I cross?” [Dong] replied, “Jupiter is in Great Bridge (lunar lodges nos. 17–19) and about to complete its heavenly travel. Thus, in your First Year you will start by gaining the star of Shi Chen. As for the space Shi Chen, [its terrestrial correlate] is the abode of the people of Jin and it is that whereby Jin arose. Now that My Lord’s return coincides with Shi Chen [it means] you have but to cross! When My Lord departed, Jupiter was in Great Fire (lunar lodges nos. 3–5), which is the star of E Bo. [Great Fire] is called the Great Asterism. The Great Asterism is for bringing the goodness [of the harvest] to fruition; Hou Ji emulated it, and Tang Shu was enfeoffed during it. The historical records of the blind [historiographer] say, ‘Successors will continue the ancestral line, like the increase of grain; there must needs be a Jin State.’ Your servant divined by milfoil and obtained all eights for [hexagram] Tai [Peace], [whose judgment] says, ‘Heaven and Earth unite in receiving sacrifice; the smaller departs and the greater approaches. [Good Fortune. Success].’ The present [circumstances] correspond to this, so how could you not cross? What’s more, you left under Chen (Great Fire = Scorpio) and you return under Shen (Shi Chen = Orion); these are both auspicious signs for Jin; they are Heaven’s great seasonal markers. If you cross and complete your grasp [of power in Jin], you are sure to dominate the lords of the states as hegemon. Your descendants are depending on it; have no fear, My Lord.” The prince crossed the river and summoned [local headmen]; [the localities of] Linghu, Jiushuai, and Sangquan all capitulated. The people of Jin were frightened, and [the usurper] Duke Huai [of Jin] fled to Gaoliang, leaving Lü Sheng and Ji Rui in command of the army. On day *jiawan* (31) [the Jin army] encamped at Luliu. The Earl of Qin sent Gongzi Zhi into the army; then the army withdrew and encamped at Xun. On day *xinchou* (38), Hu Yan together with grandees from Qin and Jin entered into a covenant at Xun. On day *renyin* (39), Duke (Wen) went among the Jin army. On day *jiachen* (41), the Earl of Qin returned [home]. On day *bingwu* (43), [Duke Wen] entered Quwo. On day *dingwei* (44), he entered [the Jin capital at] Jiangu and ascended the throne in the temple of Duke Wu. On day *mushen* (45), [Duke Wen had] Duke Huai killed at Gaoliang.

Heavenly Cycles and Cosmo-political Consequences

THE JOB DESCRIPTION of those who, like Dong Yin, occupied the office of historiographer/astrologer in ancient China is succinctly stated in the canonical *Rites of Zhou (Zhouli)*:

[The *baozhang shi*] concerns himself with the stars in the heavens, keeping a record of the changes and movements of the stars and planets, sun and moon, in order to discern [corresponding] trends in the terrestrial world, with the object of distinguishing (i.e., prognosticating) good and bad fortune. He divides the territories of the nine regions of the empire in accordance with their dependence on particular celestial bodies; all the fiefs and territories are connected with distinct stars, based on which their prosperity or misfortune can be ascertained. He makes prognostications, according to the twelve years [of the Jupiter cycle], of good and evil in the terrestrial world.”¹⁰

THE MORE UNUSUAL the changes and movements of the stars and planets, the more grave the implications, particularly since unanticipated events such as comets and eclipses were viewed with foreboding. In contrast, the most auspicious of all celestial events were dense gatherings of the five visible planets (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury), which occurred only at rare intervals. These planetary “minions” of the Lord Above were already a focus of attention in the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, where they are referred to collectively as the Supreme Lord’s Five Minister Regulators (*wu chen zheng*). In the late Warring States period, their gatherings were understood to have heralded the founding of each of the Three Dynasties, so that by the late third century B.C.E. a planetary massing had virtually become an ideological necessity if a new ruling dynasty were legitimately to claim to have received Heaven’s Mandate. Moreover, given the obvious analogy between the operations of the Five Phases on earth and the changes foretold by the movements of the Five Planets up above, in the correlative cosmology of the times a massing of all five was an unmistakable sign that a phase-transition was in the offing. And so it is not surprising that a somewhat less than impressive gathering of planets in 205 B.C.E. was pressed into service and dutifully linked with the rise of the Han dynasty by the “Grand Historian,” Sima Qian, in his “Treatise on the Heavenly Offices”: “When Han arose, the Five Planets gathered in Eastern Well (lunar lodge no. 22; Gemini).”

At a time when rulership entailed comprehensive mastery of the cosmos, human affairs, and the phenomena of nature, observing and interpreting the motions of heavenly bodies was a matter of utmost concern to the state. Indeed, it was flawless performance of this role that enabled the ideal ruler to “promulgate his virtuous influence throughout the realm” as we saw above in the first passage from *Guoyu*. Here then is the rest of Sima Qian’s concluding summary of the astrological knowledge of his day, displaying both ancient conceptual roots as well as the Han theoretical framework based on the prevailing *yinyang* and Five Phases correlative cosmology:

Ever since the people have existed, when have successive rulers not systematically followed the movements of sun, moon, stars, and asterisms? Coming to the Five Houses (Huang Di, Gao Yang, Gao Xin, Tang Yu, Yao-Shun) 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 Kingdom into twelve regions. Looking up they observed the figures 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 Phases; in Heaven are arrayed the lunar lodges, and on Earth there are the terrestrial regions.

THEREFORE,

When the Five Planets gather, this is a change of phase: the possessor of [fitting] virtue is celebrated, 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 ASTROLOGICAL AND calendrical functions of the office of Prefect Grand Astrologer could only be neglected at one's peril, for the risk was great that if one overlooked the incipient signs of a shift in the workings of Heaven, failure to align oneself properly with the new trend could lead to disaster. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (141–87 B.C.E.) when it became impossible to ignore the inaccuracy of the calendar inherited from the Qin, long overdue reform of the system of mathematical astronomy became a necessity. Thus it was that at the same time that other aspects of imperial ceremonial were being reinvented, supposedly based on ancient precedents, an imperial commission was appointed to reform the calendar. These experts confronted the daunting task of correcting and redesigning the calendar so that it both correctly predicted the timing of new moons and solstices and also conformed with esoteric texts that supposedly revealed how the Yellow Emperor had achieved immortality. The end result was the Grand Inception (*Tai chu*) calendrical regime whose commencement in 104 B.C.E. marked the inauguration of a new era and a belated official confirmation that the Han dynasty, in power for a hundred years, now ruled by virtue of the influence of Earth:

When it came to the accession of the Sovereign, he summoned the specialists in recondite arts, Tang Du, to reapportion the heavenly sectors (lunar lodges), and Luoxia Hong of Ba to convert the angular measurements into a calendrical system. After that the graduations of the chronograms conformed to the regulations of Xia. Thereupon, a new regnal era was begun, the titles of offices were changed, and [the emperor] performed the *Feng* sacrifice on Mount Tai (in the summer of 110 B.C.E.). Accordingly, [Emperor Wu] issued an edict to the Imperial Scribes, which said, "Recently, We were informed by the responsible officials that the astronomical system still has not been fixed. Having widely solicited advice about bringing order to the stellar graduations, they have been unable to resolve the matter.

"Now, We have heard that in antiquity the Yellow Emperor achieved perfection and did not die. He is renowned for having examined into the graduation [of the stellar regions] and verification [of their portents], determined the clear and turbid [notes of the musical scale], initiated the [sequence of the] Five Phases, and established the division and number of the [24 fortnightly] *qi*-nodes and their [associated] phenomena. Thus, [concern with such matters]

goes back to high antiquity. We deeply regret that the ancient writings are lost and the music abandoned, so that We are unable to perpetuate the brilliance [of antiquity], [now that] the accumulation of days and temporal divisions properly conform to the subduing of the influence of Water [of the Qin].

“Now, in accordance with the regulations of Xia, Yellow Bell will make the note *Gong* (of the pentatonic scale), Forest Bell will make the note *Zheng*, Great Budding will make the note *Shang*, Southern Regulator will make the note *Yu*, and Maiden Purity will make the note *Jue*. Henceforth, the seasonal *qi*-nodes will be correct again, the sound of the note *Yu* will be clear again, names will once again change properly, so that a *xi* [eleventh month] day will coincide with the winter solstice; in this way the operations of separating and coming together of yin and yang will proceed [normally]. Inasmuch as winter solstice on new-moon day *jiazi* [1] in the eleventh month is already anticipated, let the seventh year [of the present Primal *Feng*-Sacrifice reign period] be changed to be the origination year of the Grand Inception reign period. The year will be called *yanfeng shetige*, and the month will be called *bixou*; new moon will occur at midnight on day *jiazi*, and winter solstice will occur at dawn.”

Two years later, in the eleventh month, new moon on day *jiazi* (25 December 105 B.C.E.) and winter solstice at dawn were to coincide, so those responsible for computing the calendar took this day as the base epoch (for the new calendar). The Son of Heaven proceeded in person to Mount Tai and at dawn on the day *jiazi* in the eleventh month, the day of the new moon and winter solstice, he sacrificed to the Lord on High in the Hall of Light, but did not renew the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices. The laudatory sacrificial liturgy said,

“Heaven has further bestowed on me the Sovereign Emperor the numinous reckoning of the Supreme Origin: the cycles have come round and now begin again. The Sovereign Emperor makes reverent obeisance to the Supreme Ultimate.” . . . [That] summer, the Han [dynasty] changed the calendrical system, taking the Regulation (1st) Month as the beginning of the year. Among the colors, yellow (of Earth) was given precedence (over the former black), the offices of state were renamed, and the officials’ seals of office now carried (inscriptions of) five characters (instead of six as prescribed by the Qin). With that, this became the origination year of the Grand Inception reign period.

—DWP

Notes

1. Numbers in brackets after bisyllabic italicized terms refer to the cycle of sixty days.
2. Various attempts to establish the epoch of observation based on the seasonal stellar phenomena mentioned in this text have failed to produce a consensus because of such factors as uncertainty about the exact time of observation, the precise identity of the reference stars or asterisms referred to, whether all four date from the same epoch, and the like. It is probably safe to assume that the seasonal stellar indications all date from sometime in the second millennium B.C.E.
3. Tr. B. Karlgren, *The Book of Documents* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), p. 3 (modified).
4. For a list of the twenty-eight lunar lodges (*xiu*), see *Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), Appendix A, Table V.
5. Note that this passage from the *Guoyu* begins by citing the first five lunar lodges in sequence by way of illustration. Analogous seasonal and behavioral correlations certainly existed for the remaining twenty-three lodges as well.

6. The Five Phases (formerly referred to as Five Elements) and related concepts are discussed in section 26.

7. These detailed prescriptions for seasonally appropriate rituals and occupations for the twelve months of the year were originally included in the *Lost Documents of Zhou* or *Yi Zhou shu*. They also provided the organizational motif for an important section of the encyclopedic Qin treatise *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü* (*Lü shi chun qiu*), compiled at the behest of Chancellor Lü Buwei in 239 B.C.E.

8. The text is translated from the *Guoyu*, *juan* 10.

9. Jin was one of the major states during the Spring and Autumn (841–476 B.C.E.) and the Warring States (475–221 B.C.E.) periods, coming to an end in the year 369 B.C.E.

10. Joseph Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3: *Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 190 (modified).