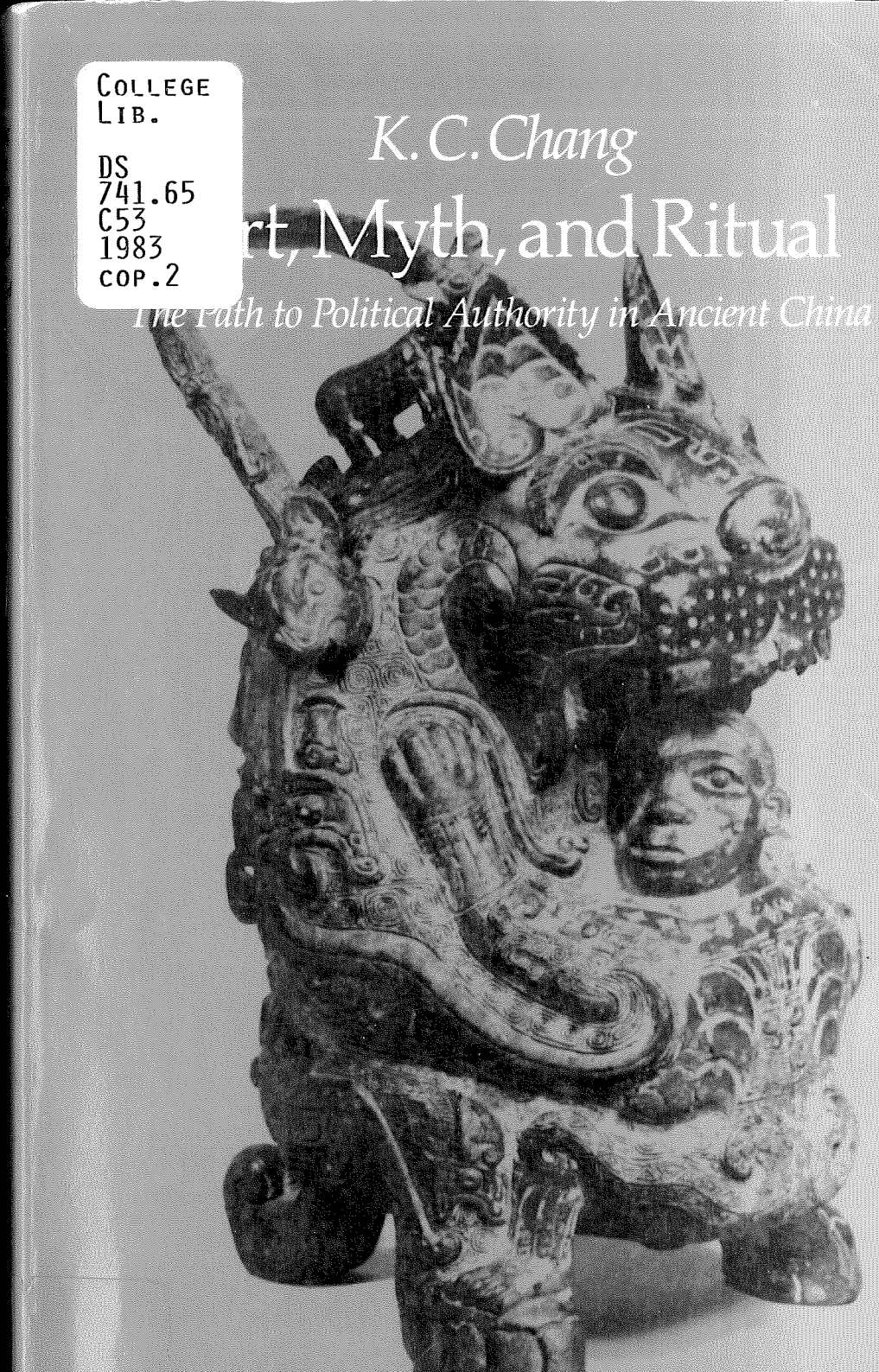
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rt, Myth, and Ritual

The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China



ART, MYTH, AND RITUAL

ART, MYTH, AND RITUAL

THE PATH TO POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN ANCIENT CHINA

K. C. Chang

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

ACW-3956

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Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Chang, Kwang-chih.
Art, myth, and ritual.
Includes index.
1. China–Civilization–To 221 B.C. 2. Political science–China–History. I. Title.
DS741.65.C53 1983 931 83-214
ISBN 0-674-04807-5 (cloth)
ISBN 0-674-04808-3 (paper)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is based on selected course lectures given in 1981–82 at Harvard under its Core Curriculum. I would like to thank Emily Vermeule, chairman of the Subcommittee on Art and Literature for the Core, and Edward T. Wilcox, director of the General Education Program and the Core Program of Harvard College, for their encouragement to develop that course.

Chapter 4 was published in slightly different form as "The Animal in Shang and Chou Bronze Art," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41, (December 1981): 527–554.

For quotations from *Shu* and *Shih*, the two most important texts on ancient China, I have used the following translations by Bernhard Karlgren: *The Book of Documents* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), and *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974). For the translation of *Ch'u Tz'u*, I have used David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). I am grateful to the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, to David Hawkes, and to Clarendon Press for permission to quote from these works. Unless otherwise noted, all other translations of Chinese texts are my own.

Many of the photographs used were supplied by Chinese colleagues; others were taken by me with the permission of the Chinese authorities. I extend thanks to all of my sources for their generosity and trust, and particularly to Higuchi Takayasu for his help in obtaining the photograph for the book's jacket.

In addition, I would like to thank Steve Burger for his help in photography, Nancy Lambert Brown for drawing the maps found in the front matter and in Figure 48, and Maria Kawecki for her careful and skillful editing. Special thanks are due Marjorie Balzer for bibliographic help on shamanism.

The sources of the figures are given at the end of the book. I thank the respective publishers for permission to reprint here those illustrations that appeared previously in other works.

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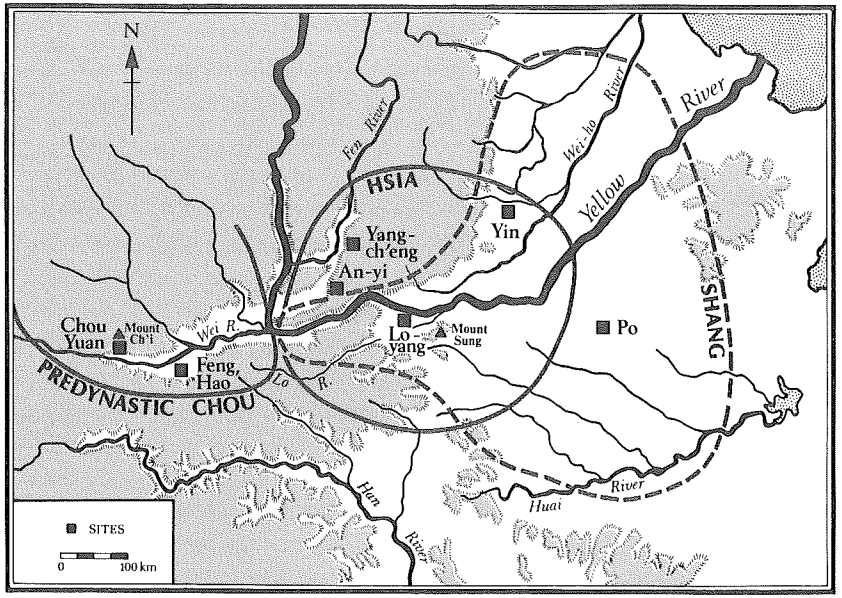
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Map of ancient China xii

ART, MYTH, AND RITUAL



Map of ancient China, showing the approximate areas of distribution of the three dynasties.

INTRODUCTION

Art and myth in ancient China were inextricably related to politics. We are quite accustomed to thinking of politics as a critical element in modern Chinese society. That it is equally so for ancient China is less commonly recognized, and my purpose here is to demonstrate this through a combination of data and insights derived not only from archaeology but also from literature and art.

The objective of the book is thus twofold. First, it provides a fundamental perspective for viewing the nature and structure of ancient Chinese civilization as having a strong political orientation. Second, it demonstrates that the study of ancient civilizations—at least the study of the ancient Chinese civilization—can be most rewarding if it deemphasizes traditional disciplinary barriers, a point I have made repeatedly in the past decade.[1]

The phrase "ancient China" refers to most of the two millennia before the Christian era, during which time the earliest historical civilization of China was created under the Three Dynasties—Hsia, Shang, and Chou.[2]

1. See K. C. Chang, *Inscribed Bronzes of the Shang and Chou: A Comprehensive Study* (in Chinese), Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Special Publication no. 62 (Taipei, 1973), p. i; idem, *Early Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. v–xi.

2. Because of the rapid advances in the archaeology of ancient China, good, up-to-date texts on ancient China are unavailable. A classic in a Western language is Henri Maspéro, *China in Antiquity*, tr. F. A. Kierman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978). Another general text is Jacques Gernet, *Ancient China from the Beginnings to the Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). K. C. Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), focuses on the archaeological aspect only; and K. C. Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), consists of a series of topical studies.

Traditional chronology places Hsia between 2205 and 1766 B.C., Shang between 1766 and 1122, and Chou between 1122 and 256. Except for the last date, all others are suspect, and specialists argue heatedly over them: no fewer than eighteen different dates have been proposed for the inception of the Chou dynasty.[3] For our purposes, these technical arguments are unimportant, because they are irresoluble. We will use round figures for the Three Dynasties: 2200–1750 for Hsia, 1750–1100 for Shang, and 1100–256 for Chou.

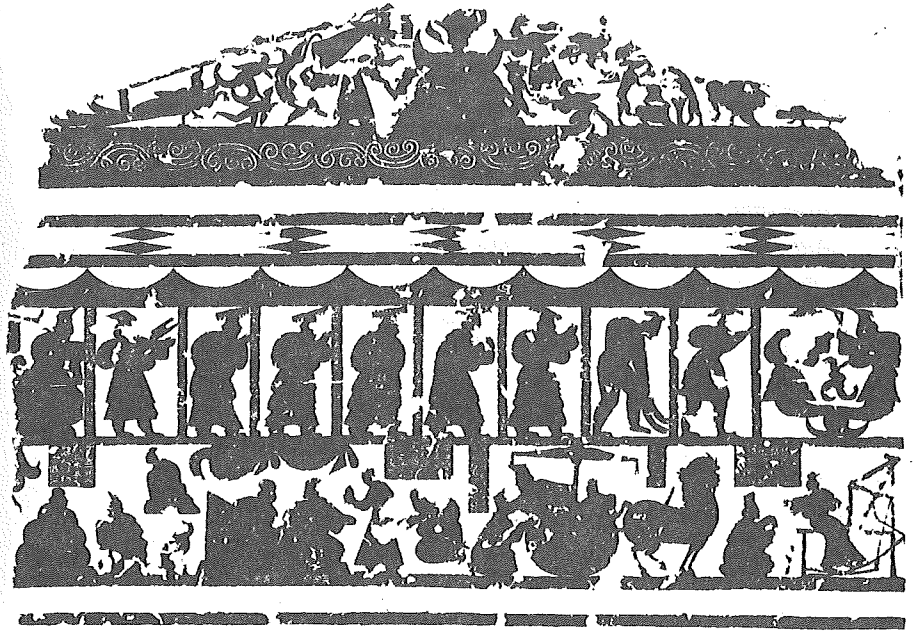
The ages preceding the Hsia dynasty—China's prehistory—can be reconstructed on the basis of two kinds of evidence. The first consists of myths and legends concerning the period before 2200, recorded in texts written during the Three Dynasties (actually for the most part during the latter half of the Chou dynasty). These pertain largely to the legends of ancient heroes and sages, which were systematized during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) into the San Huang (the "Three Sovereigns") and Wu Ti (the "Five Emperors"), illustrated in Figure 1. There are various versions of both sets, but the most common of the Three Sovereigns are Fu Hsi (the "First Man"), Sui Jen (or Chu Jung, the inventor of fire), and Shen Nung (the inventor of plant husbandry); and the Five Emperors are usually Huang Ti (the celebrated Yellow Emperor, the initiator of civilization), Chuan Hsü (the emperor in whose hands heaven was separated from earth), Ti K'u, Ti Yao, and Ti Shun.[4] Throughout most of Chinese history, these sages and heroes were accepted as historical personages, but in recent decades historians and folklorists have shown that most if not all of them were in fact ancient religious figures that had become "euhemerized" during the later Chou and the Han dynasties.[5]

The second kind of data on which one can reconstruct Chinese pre-

3. The eighteen dates are: 1122, 1116, 1111, 1076, 1075, 1070, 1067, 1066, 1057, 1050, 1049, 1047, 1045, 1030, 1029, 1027, 1025, and 1018. See K. C. Chang, "China," in *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, ed. Robert Ehrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

4. For some Western works on ancient Chinese mythology, see Henri Maspéro, "Légendes mythologiques dans le *Chou King*," *Journal Asiatique* 204 (January–March 1924): 1–100; Derk Bodde, "Myths of ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel N. Kramer (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 367–408; Sarah Allen, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Material Center, 1981).

5. The legendary history of ancient China began to be seriously questioned by empirically oriented historians during the 1920s, leading to the establishment of a "Doubting Antiquity School," which refused to recognize the historicity of Chinese history before the later part of the Shang dynasty. See Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).



1. Legendary figures of China (the San Huang and Wu Ti) as depicted in a stone relief mural in the funerary shrine of Wu Liang, in Chia-hsiang, Shantung, carved in the mid-second century A.D. The human figures in the middle register represent the legendary heroes and sages as well as the first and the last kings of the first (Hsia) dynasty. From right to left: Fu Hsi and Nü Wa, the world's parents, shown with their tails intertwined; Chu Jung, creator of fire; Shen Nung, inventor of agriculture, carrying his digging stick; Huang Ti, initiator of civilization; Chuan Hsü; Ti K'u; Ti Yao; Ti Shun; the Great Yü, founder of the Hsia; and, the figure on the far left, Chieh, the last Hsia king.

history is archaeological. Scientific archaeology of underground relics of ancient men and cultures was introduced into China from the West and from Japan in the beginning of the twentieth century.[6] The prehistoric account that has thus far been revealed by the excavations begins with man's early ancestors of almost two million years ago and continues on through the famous Peking Man of only about four hundred thousand years ago, the beginning of animal and plant husbandry of perhaps ten thousand years ago, and the growth of farming villages, until the very eve of the civilization of the Three Dynasties.[7] Possibly some of the prehistoric cultures were, in their later stages, created by some of the heroes and sages described in the traditional legends and myths, but prehistoric people left no texts in which their heroes were identified.

The Three Dynasties form the first period of Chinese history for which we have both texts and archaeological remains. This is not strictly true for the Hsia dynasty, since we have not yet discovered written records left by the Hsia themselves, whereas we do have such records from both the Shang and Chou.[8] But many later records pertaining to the Three Dynasties have been confirmed in essence by the Shang and Chou records, and the textual information on the Hsia may thus be considered much more reliable than anything that exists for the prehistoric (pre-Hsia) period. Such "later records" include, mainly, some of the so-called Confucian classics compiled during the latter half of the second millennium B.C.: *Yi, The Book of Changes; Shih, The Book of Odes; Shu, The Book of Documents; Ch'un Ch'iu, The Spring-and-Autumn Annals,* and its commentaries (*chuan*), especially those by Tso Ch'iu-ming, known as *Tso Chuan;* and *San Li,* or *The Three Books of Rituals,* including *Yi Li, Li Chi,* and *Chou Li.*[9] Useful information pertaining to the Three

6. For the introduction of scientific archaeology and its impact on Chinese historiography, see K. C. Chang, "Archaeology and Chinese historiography," *World Archaeology* 13 (October 1981): 156–169; and Li Chi, *Anyang* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

7. For a recent synthesis of Chinese prehistory, see K. C. Chang, "In search of China's beginnings: New light on an old civilization, *American Scientist* 69 (March–April 1981): 148–160.

8. A very reliable survey of ancient Chinese literature is Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962). For special problems encountered in using these texts for historiographic research, see Cho-yun Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), appendix entitled "Authenticity and dating of pre-Ch'in texts."

9. The most readily available translation of the Chinese classics into English is James Legge, *The Chinese Classics,* vols. 1–5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1872–1895); and idem, *The Li Ki,* vols. 27 and 28 of *The Sacred Books of the East,* ed. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885). Other translations are available, sometimes more up-to-date

Dynasties is also found in *Ch'u Tz'u,* or *The Elegies of Ch'u,* a collection of poetry by several Ch'u authors of central China of the late Chou period;[10] in philosophical works such as *Lun Yü* (The Confucian Analects)[11] and *Meng Tzu* (*Mencius*);[12] and in several books, now in fragmentary form, unearthed in A.D. 280 from Chi prefecture in Honan, including *Chi Nien* (the so-called *Bamboo Annals*),[13] *Yi Chou Shu,* and *Mu T'ien Tzu Chuan.* These works are full of historical data but they are also full of myths, legends, and literary pieces, and they are essential to our understanding of the Chinese life in the Three Dynasties period.

Textual data on the Three Dynasties (many of them were recorded on bamboo or wooden slips and on silk and paper after the Three Dynasties and are known to have been subjected to corruption and distortion in the course of the ensuing two millennia) have been given strong support by recent discoveries of records from the Ch'in and Han dynasties, written on slips and silk (see Figure 2).[14] New kinds of data, both artifactual and inscriptional, have also been brought to light. In addition to numerous artifacts of stone, clay, wood, bamboo, silk, and bronze, which are indispensable for our examination into Bronze Age life, archaeology has also yielded inscriptional material of other kinds, principally inscriptions incised on oracle bones of the Shang and early Chou periods (Figure 3)[15] and those cast on ritual bronze vessels.[16]

and/or improved. For *Shih,* see Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974); and Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, 1960). For *Yi,* see Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For *Shu,* see Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Documents* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950).

10. The definitive translation is David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

11. Legge, *The Chinese Classics;* see also D. C. Lau, tr., *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

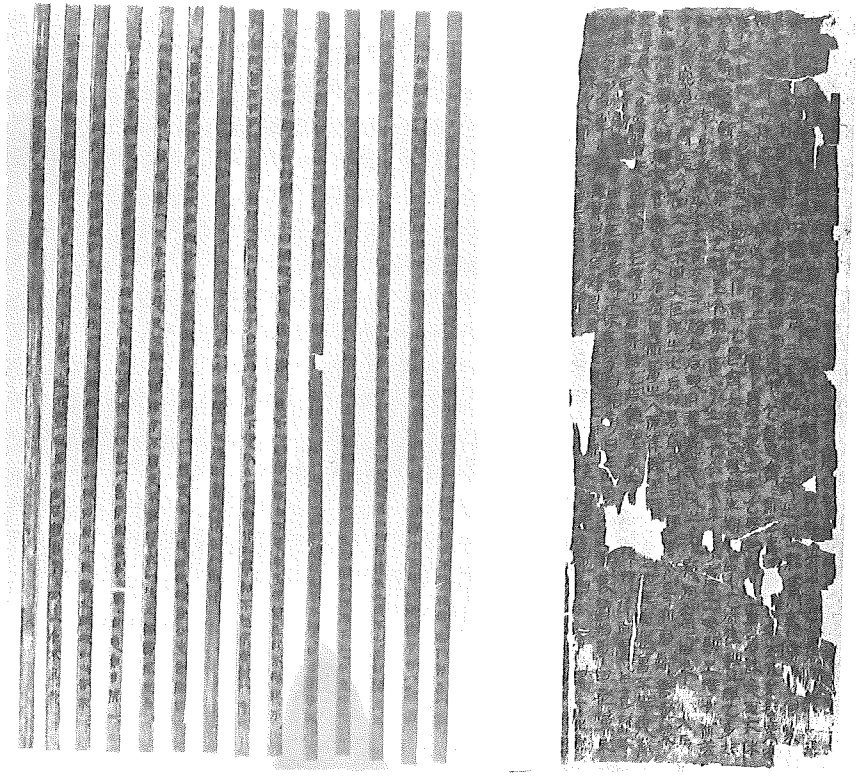
12. Legge, *The Chinese Classics;* see also D. C. Lau, tr., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).

13. For a critical discussion of the usefulness of the *Bamboo Annals,* see David N. Keightley, "The *Bamboo Annals* and Shang-Chou chronology," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38 (December 1978): 423–438.

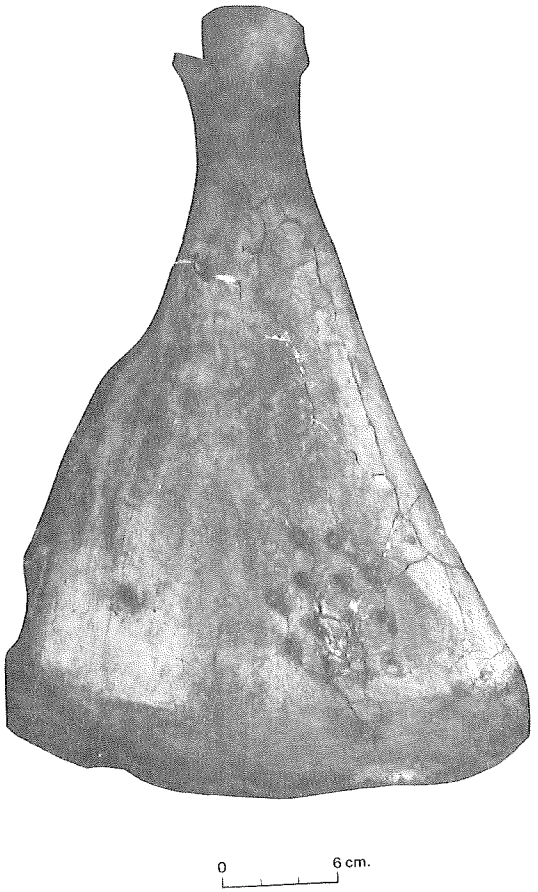
14. See Michael Loewe, "Manuscripts found recently in China: A preliminary survey," *T'oung Pao* 63 (1977): 99–136.

15. A detailed examination of the oracle bone inscriptions as historical data is David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

16. Ancient bronze inscriptions have not received monographic treatment in a Western language, as far as I know. Both William Watson, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1962), and Li Xueqin, *The Wonder of Chinese Bronzes* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), have substantial chapters devoted to the topic.



2. Inscribed bamboo slips of the Ch'in dynasty (left) and silk writing of the Han dynasty (right), recently excavated. Slips on left are about 28 centimeters long; fragment on right is about 18 centimeters long.



3. Inscribed oracle bone of the Shang dynasty, excavated at Yin-hsü, in An-yang, Honan.

All these types of historical data are employed here to analyze the political culture of ancient China, and to seek an answer to a basic question: How did civilization and its concomitant, the political dynasties, arise in ancient China? The data lead to the conclusion that civilization evolved along with the dynasties because in China – as elsewhere – it was the manifestation of the accumulated wealth of a small segment of society, the dynasty. In our case we can demonstrate that this wealth was accumulated primarily through the exercise of political authority, and that the accrual of political authority in the Chinese context was facilitated by several interrelated factors: kinship hierarchy, moral authority of the ruler, military power, exclusive access to gods and to ancestors (as through rituals, art, and the use of writing), and access to wealth itself. By examining the history of these factors we can isolate some of the more convincing causes of the rise of political authority in ancient China. Insofar as the evolution of such authority is a universal theme, the Chinese case should be of more than provincial interest.

In this book the Three Dynasties are treated as a single unit, a unit also referred to as "ancient China." This is permissible, I believe, because the characteristics of the political culture in ancient China were in many important respects common throughout the period, and they even continued into the postancient period, however we define these periods. Profound changes in ancient Chinese society took place around 500–600 B.C., when the Iron Age began to replace the Bronze Age. Purists may wish to interpret the term "ancient China" in the title of this book as including only the period of the Three Dynasties up to the middle of the Spring-and-Autumn epoch. They will see, however, that much information from after that cutoff date has been woven here into the overall pattern of ancient art, myth, and politics, and that this pattern also applies to the later period.

Three dynasties = ancient China

1

CLANS, TOWNS, AND THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Each of the Three Dynasties was founded by members of a different clan. Actually, in early China there were probably many hundreds of such clans, each characterized by a set of common features. Members of a clan traced their descent from the same mythological ancestor through the paternal line, although the actual fact of descent in the far remote past usually could not be genealogically demonstrated.[1] The myth of the ancestral birth gave rise in most cases to a name and an emblem ("totem") used by the entire clan.[2] Clan members supposedly all shared some

1. Some believe in the existence of an archaic society in Chinese history, in which descent was traced through the maternal line and in which women commanded higher political status than men. This belief is based on two very different sources. The first is the nineteenth-century evolutionist paradigm according to which every society goes through a matriarchal phase – a conviction that has been reinforced in Chinese historiography in the twentieth century by the adoption of Marxism as official doctrine. The second source consists of scattered textual accounts of a society in the remote past in which mothers were known (or recognized) while fathers were not. If there was indeed such a stage in Chinese history, it must have occurred long before the Three Dynasties. We know of no actual clans from the Three Dynasties period that were not patrilineal. For some earlier discussions by European sinologists on this issue, see A. Courady, *China* (Berlin: Pflugk-Harttung's Weltgeschichte, 1910), pp. 483ff; W. Koppers, "Die frage des Mutterrechts und des Totemismus im alten China," *Anthropos* 25 (September–December 1930): 981–1002; E. Erkes, "Der primat des Weibes im alten China," *Sinica* 10 (November 1935): 166–176; and W. Eberhard, *Localkulturen im alten China*, vol. 2 (Peking, 1942), pp. 96ff.

2. *Tso Chuan* entry for 715 B.C.: "When the Son of Heaven sends out a virtuous lord, he grants him [he ratifies] his clan name according to his birth." (Translations of Chinese texts are my own unless otherwise noted.)

special quality or character, and this was given as one of the reasons why they did not intermarry.[3]

Although we are certain that each of the many hundreds of these agnatic clans in ancient China had its own myth of ancestral origins, only a few have been preserved in the literature. These were myths of the clans whose members founded the major dynasties and other political houses.

The Hsia dynasty, the first political dynasty in traditional recorded history, was founded by members of the Ssu clan. Perhaps because of the greater antiquity of the dynasty, for which texts are as yet unknown, the mythical origin of the clan's ancestors is unclear. In one version[4] the mother of Yü, founder of the dynasty (Figure 4), gave birth to him as the result of eating some grains of Job's tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*). (Job's tears were called *yi-ssu*, hence the name of the clan, and they are one of the oldest domesticated crops in Eastern Asia.) In another story, however, the clan's ancestor appears to have been born out of a rock. Yü's father, Kun, charged with the task of stemming a great flood, "stole from the [Supreme God] the 'swelling mold' (*hsi jang*)—a magical kind of soil which had the property of ever swelling in size. With this he tried to build dams which, through their swelling, would hold back the waters. When his efforts failed, the [Supreme God], angered by his theft, had him executed. There his body remained for three years [turning into a stone], until somebody . . . cut it open with a sword; thereupon Yü emerged from his father's belly."[5] This story is more or less repeated to account, as well, for the birth of Yü's son: "While digging a passage through a certain mountain, [Yü] was changed . . . into a bear. His wife, [the Lady of T'u Shan], seeing him, ran away and herself became changed to stone. She was pregnant at the time, and so when Yü pursued her and called out, 'Give me my son!' the stone split open on its north side and a son, Ch'i [which means 'to open'] came forth."[6] (See the appendix for lists of the kings of the Three Dynasties.)

3. *Kuo yü* (vol. 10, "Chin yü"): "People of the same clan name also have the same virtue, and people of the same virtue converge in mind, and people who converge in mind have the same goal. Persons of the opposite sexes but having the same goal do not marry, even if they may be very distant relations, for fear of committing incest."

4. *Lun Heng* ("Ch'i kuai p'ien"), by Wang Ch'ung (27–c. 97).

5. Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, Samuel N. Kramer (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 399.

6. Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," p. 401.



4. The Great Yü as portrayed in the Wu Liang Tz'u mural.

The Shang dynasty was founded by members of the Tzu clan, who were descendants of the clan's founder, Hsieh. According to Shang myth, an egg dropped by a dark bird was devoured by Hsieh's mother, who became pregnant as a result and later gave birth to him (Figure 5).[7] The myth of ancestral birth from a bird's egg was widespread in ancient times among the peoples in the eastern coastal areas of China and Northeast Asia,[8] a fact which seems to support the belief of many scholars that the Shang people had come from the east.

The last of the Three Dynasties, the Chou, was founded by members of the Chi clan, which derived its name—according to one account—from the name of a small river flowing in the clan's homeland. The clan's ancestor, Ch'i ("the Abandoned One") or Hou Chi ("Lord Millet"), shown in Figure 6, was according to the origin myth "Sheng min" (in *Shih*) a direct descendant of Supreme God himself, who made an imprint with his foot and caused Lady Yuan of the Chiang clan to become pregnant when she trod on the big toe of the footprint. "Sheng min" relates that after Chiang Yuan gave birth to Hou Chi, he was abandoned in a narrow lane, then in a far-off wood, and then on ice, but each time he was saved, by oxen and sheep, by woodcutters, or by birds. When he grew up, he became a specialist in plant husbandry, was adept in growing millet,

7. Poem "Hsuan niao," in *Shih*: "Heaven bade the dark bird / To come down and bear the Shang."

8. A longer version of a similar story relates the birth of Chu Meng, ancestor of the Fu-yü, a people on the northern coast of the Gulf of Chihli (Pohai Bay). As recorded in the "History of Kao-kou-li," in *Wei Shu* (written 551–554), the story is as follows: "Kao-kou-li was founded by the Fu-yü, who called their ancestor Chu Meng. Chu Meng's mother was a daughter of Ho-po (Lord of the Yellow River). Imprisoned in a room by the king of Fu-yü she was touched by the sun's rays. Whenever she moved away from the sunlight, it followed her. Soon she became pregnant and gave birth to an egg, which was so large that it could have held nearly five pints. The king gave the egg to the dogs, who refused to eat it. It was given to the pigs, who would not eat it either. It was then thrown out on the road, and cattle and horses walked away from it. It was thrown out into the wilderness, but the birds flew down to cover it with their feathers. The king of Fu-yü tried to cut it with a knife, but could not. He finally gave it back to its mother. The mother wrapped it and sheltered it in a warm place, and a baby boy broke the shell and emerged. After he grew up he was named Chu Meng."



5. The origin myth of the ancestor of the Shang. The bird is shown dropping an egg, and Chien Ti (right), who later devoured it, gave birth to Hsieh.



6. Portrait of the mythical figure Hou Chi, ancestor of the Chou dynasty.

beans, and other plants, and began the practice of offering sacrifices.[9] In another dynastic legend, "Mien," also in *Shih*, the origin of the human race was compared to the spreading of young gourds. The ancestral birth from bottle gourds is a common myth, and this could be another version of the Chi clan origins.[10]

Since the Three Dynasties were founded by the three clans—Ssu, Tzu, and Chi—the dynasties' rise and fall were in fact the rise and fall of the fortunes of the individual clans in the political arena in which many clans coexisted, and this fact—that political authority was wielded by social groups basing their membership on blood relationships—is a prominent feature of the ancient Chinese state. Furthermore, each of the clans was itself highly stratified, again along blood lines. Each clan comprised a number of lineage groups, and the members of each group were related to one another according to a genealogically demonstrable relationship. Individual lineages, and even individual members within each lineage, possessed unequal degrees of political status.

9. See *Shih* ("Sheng Min"), as translated by Karlgren, in Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1977).

> The one who first bore our tribe was (lady) Yuan of Chiang;
>
> . . . . .
>
> She trod on the big toe of God's footprint,
> She became elated, she was enriched, she was blessed,
> And so she became pregnant, and it came about quickly;
> She bore, she bred: that was Hou Chi.
>
> . . . . .
>
> They laid him in a narrow lane,
> The oxen and sheep between their legs nurtured him;
> They laid him in a forest on the plain,
> He was found by those who cut the forest of the plain;
> They laid him on cold ice,
> Birds covered and protected him;
> Then the birds went away, and Hou Chi wailed;
> It carried far, it was strong, his voice then became loud . . .

10. *Shih* ("Mien"), as translated by Karlgren, in part:

> Long drawn-out are the stems of the gourds
> When (our) people first was born,
> It came from Tu, from Tsu and Ch'i;
> The ancient prince T'an Fu, he moulded covers, he moulded caves;
> As yet they had no houses.

The lineage system of the Three Dynasties is not clearly understood, but the broad principle that political status was genealogically determined is not in question.[11] In a number of Chou texts we find clear explications of a system of lineage segmentation, resulting in the fission of the agnatic lineages and the establishment of the branch lineages in their own well-defined spatial domains. As a hypothetical example, consider a major lineage that might have ruled over an urban center with significant political authority. The lineage would have been one of a group of lineages all belonging to a certain clan, but let us assume that this lineage was superior to the others of the same clan and to the other clans within the territory of its rule. It could be termed the "royal" lineage—the ruler of its own dynasty. This lineage would be perpetuated by a line of male heirs, whose status would be determined by specified factors such as being the son of a primary wife or being the first-born among brothers.

At some point in the royal lineage's life there would arise reasons for sending one of its male members away from the royal domain to establish a new polity. He would be a brother, an uncle, or a cousin of the ruler, and he might be accompanied by a sizable group of people in order to relieve population pressure, to open up new arable land, or to shore up defense. Whatever the reason, he would be sent off with (a) his clan affiliation and emblem, (b) several groups of lineage members of one or more clans to provide both agricultural and industrial labor and military force, (c) title to the land of his newly established domain, (d) a new name for his new polity, and (e) ritual symbols and paraphernalia both to continue his ritual affiliation with his father's lineage and to manifest his new independence. In the new land he would build a new temple, in which his own tablet would eventually be placed as that of the founder of the new lineage. Thus, a new line of lineage segments would be initiated; they would be secondary lineages with respect to the stem lineage from which they had broken off, and their political as well as ritual status would likewise be secondary. This process of branching off would be repeated to form tertiary, quaternary, and subsequent levels of lineage segments. Such a system of segmentary lineages was thus also a system of decreasing political statuses.[12]

11. For a detailed discussion of the clan and lineage system of ancient China, see K. C. Chang, "The lineage system of the Shang and Chou Chinese and its political implications," in Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 72–92.

12. The process of lineage fission and political enfeoffment lies at the core of the so-called

The focal points of the segmentary lineages were walled towns. The Chinese town, ancient as well as modern (Figure 7), was, in the words of Joseph Needham, "not a spontaneous accumulation of population, nor of capital or facilities of production, nor was it only or essentially a market-centre; it was above all a political nucleus, a node in the ad-

feng-chien system of the Chou dynasty, the words deriving from *feng*, "to put borders to [a piece of land]," and *chien*, "to establish [a ruler-ship over the land]." This term is often translated as "feudalism," but the application of the term does not imply that the Chinese system should be equated with the European institution. See Derk Bodde, "Feudalism in China," in *Feudalism in History*, ed. R. Coulborn (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Press, 1956).

The fundamental datum pertaining to the *feng-chien* system of early Chou is the following entry in *Tso Chuan*, under 505 B.C.: "When King Wu had subdued Shang, King Ch'eng completed the establishment of the new dynasty, and chose and appointed [the princes of] intelligent virtue, to act as bulwarks and screens to Chou. Hence it was that the duke of Chou gave his aid to the royal House for the adjustment of all the kingdom, he being most dear and closely related to Chou. To the duke of Lu there were given—a grand chariot, a grand flag with dragons on it, the *huang*-stone of the sovereigns of Hsia, and the [great bow], Fan-jo of Feng-fu. [The heads of] six clans of the people of Yin—the T'iao, the Hsü, the Hsiao, the So, the Ch'ang-shao, and the Wei-shao—were ordered to lead the chiefs of their kindred, to collect their branches, the remoter as well as the near, to conduct the multitude of their connexions, and repair with them to Chou, to receive the instructions and laws of the duke of Chou. They were then charged to perform duty in Lu, that thus the brilliant virtue of the duke of Chou might be made illustrious. Lands [also] were apportioned [to the duke of Lu] on an enlarged scale, with priests, superintendents of the ancestral temple, diviners, historiographers, all the appendages of State, the tablets of historical records, the various officers and the ordinary instruments of their offices. The people of Shang Yen were also attached; and a charge was given to Po Ch'in, and the old capital of Shao Kao was assigned as the center of his State.

"To K'ang Shu there were given a grand carriage, four flags—of various coloured silks, of red, of plain silk, and ornamented with feathered—and [the bell], Ta-lü, with seven clans of the people of Yin—the Tao, the Shih, the Fan, the Ch'i, the Fan, the Chi, and the Chung-k'uei. The boundaries of his territory extended from Wu-fu southwards to the north of P'u-t'ien. He received a portion of the territory of Yu-yen, that he might discharge his duty to the king, and a portion of the lands belonging to the eastern capital of Hsiang-t'u, that he might be able the better to attend at the king's journeys to the east. Tan Chi delivered to him the land, and Mao Shu the people. The charge was given to him, as contained in the 'Announcement to K'ang,' and the old capital of Yin was assigned as the center of his State. Both in Wei and Lu they were to commence their government according to the principles of Shang, but their boundaries were defined according to the rules of Chou.

"To T'ang Shu there were given a grand carriage, the drum of Mi-hsü, the *Chüeh kung* mail, the bell *Ku-hsien*, nine clans of the surname Huai, and five presidents over the different departments of office. The charge was given to him, as contained in the 'Announcement of T'ang,' and the old capital of Hsia was assigned as the center of his State. He was to commence his government according to the principles of Hsia, but his boundaries were defined by the rules of the Jung." Translated by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), p. 754.

ministrative network, and the seat of the bureaucrat [or] . . . the ancient feudal lord."[13] The construction of the town was, in fact, in its impetus, a political act that gave the new lineage its new seat of power, typically in a new land. In *Shih* we read a description of one such political act, involving the founding of a royal capital by a predynastic ancestor of the Chou people:

The ancient prince T'an-fu,
At daybreak he galloped his horses;
He followed the bank of the Western river,
He came to the foot of (mount) Ch'i;
And so together with the lady Chiang
He came and lingered (there) and took up an abode.

The plain of Chou was rich and ample;
Even the *chin* and *t'u* plants [bitter herbs] were sweet like honey-cakes;
And so he started, he planned,
He notched our tortoises [for divination];
And so he stopped; he halted, he built houses here.

And so he remained quiet, he stopped;
He went to the left, he went to the right,
He made boundaries, he made division,
He measured to the cubit, he laid out acres;
From west he went east,
Everywhere he took the task in hand.

And so he called the Master of Works,
He called the Master of Multitudes,
He made them build houses;
Their plumb-lines were straight;
They lashed the boards and thus erected the building frames;
They made the temple in careful order.

In long rows they collected it,
In great crowds they measured it out,
They pounded it, (the walls) rising high;
They scraped and went over them again, (so they became) solid;
A hundred tu [of walls] all rose;
The drums could not keep pace!

13. Joseph Needham, et al., *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 4, pt. 3, "Civil Engineering and Nautics," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 71.



7. A modern Chinese walled town, Wang-yeh-fu, in Ninghsia, 1923.

And so he raised the outer space;
The outer gate was high;
He raised the principal gate;
The principal gate was grand;
He raised the grand Earth-altar,
From which the great armies marched![14]

The poem describes virtually everything about an ancient Chinese town that is significant: it was built on a piece of largely vacant land, according to a plan (Figure 8); it consisted of a pounded earthen wall with important buildings inside (Figure 9); and it served as the political seat of the lord (in this case a Chou ruler from the Chi clan), who were the founders of a new lineage line. Furthermore, the very town whose construction is so vividly narrated in this ancient poem is even now being excavated under Mount Ch'i in central Shensi, after having lain buried for more than three thousand years (Figures 10, 11).[15]

Thousands of such towns dotted the North China landscape, and the sites of many have been discovered in recent decades, from all three dynasties. Actually, the archaeological manifestation of the Hsia dynasty is still a controversial issue, but an increasing number of scholars identify the so called Erh-li-t'ou Culture with the Hsia.[16] In traditional texts the Hsia dynasty is located in southwestern Shansi and northwestern Honan, with Mount Sung in central Honan as its sacred mountain.[17] The sites of the Erh-li-t'ou Culture—discovered by archaeologists only since the 1950s—are found in this area, and their available radiocarbon dates suggest late third and early second millennium B.C., the traditional temporal span of Hsia. The best excavated of the Erh-li-t'ou sites include those

14. *Shih* ("Mien") in Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974), pp. 189–190.

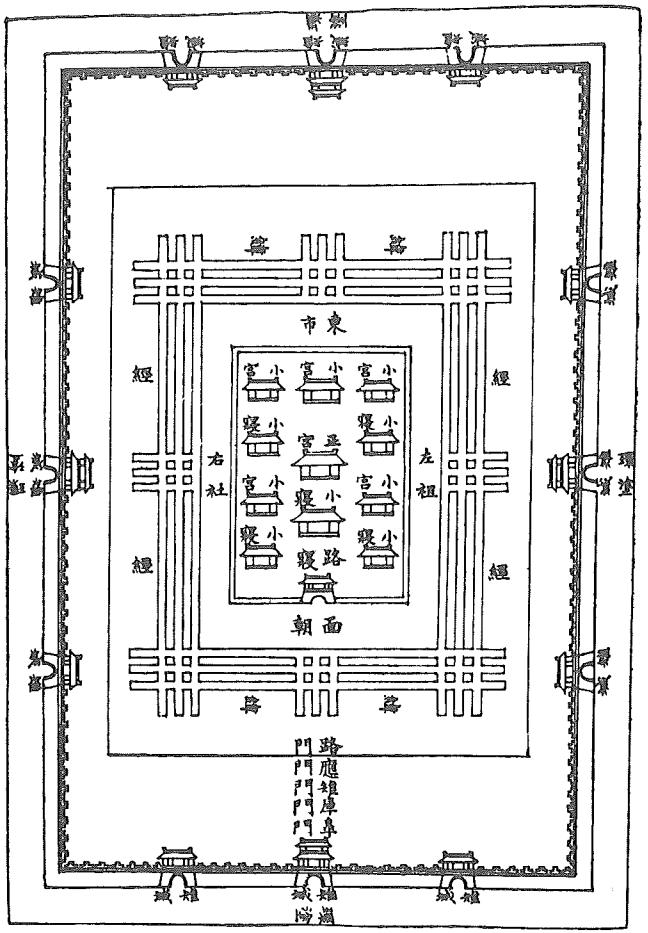
15. K. C. Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977; rpt. 1981). The appendix entitled "Highlights of Chinese Archaeology, 1976–80" has a brief description of the contemporary archaeology in the Plain of Chou.

16. See K. C. Chang, "The origin of Shang and the problem of Xia in Chinese archaeology," in *The Great Bronze Age of China: A Symposium*, George Kuwayama, ed. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1983), pp. 10-15.

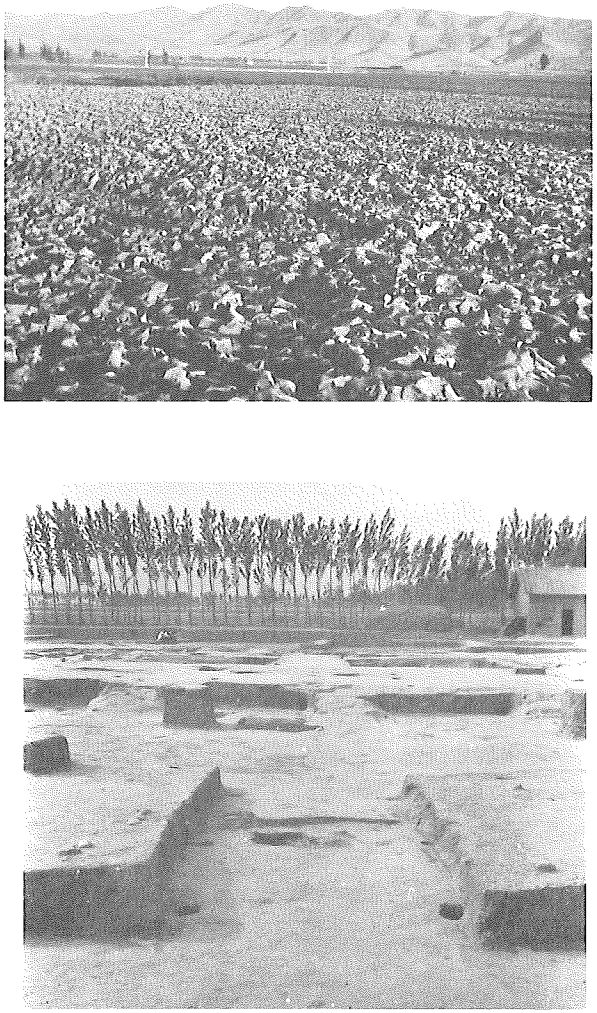
17. The best summary of traditional texts on Hsia geography is Yen Keng-wang, "Hsia capital locations and the Erh-li-t'ou culture" (in Chinese), *The Mainland Magazine* (*Ta-lu Tsa-chih*), 61 (May 1980): 1–17.



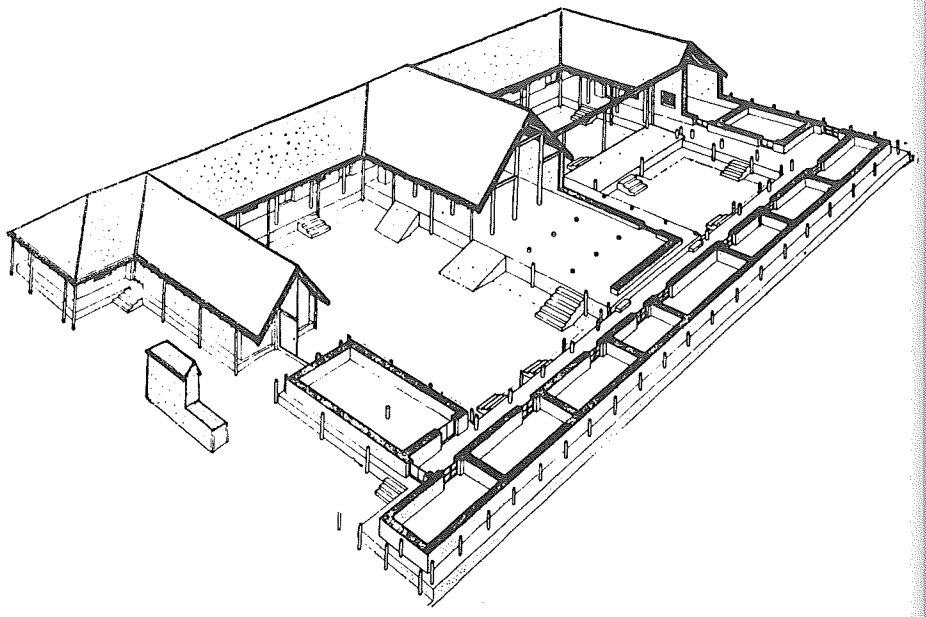
8. This Han dynasty tile with its "Four Deities" picture gives a microcosmic symbolization of an ancient Chinese town with its square shape and cardinal orientation. The four directional animals are a black turtle-snake on the north (bottom); a red bird on the south (top); a green dragon on the east (left); and a white tiger on the west (right).



9. Idealized plan of the Chou dynasty royal capital (Lo-yang); with rectangular city wall, three gates on each side, nine major avenues east-west and nine north-south, royal palaces at the center, markets in the north, the ancestral temple east of the palace, the earth altar west of the palace, and the Hall of Audience south of the palace. All buildings had their main doorways open to the south.



10. Recent excavations in the Plain of Chou, described in "Mien" in the *Book of Odes*. Top: The Plain of Chou under Mount Ch'i. Bottom: Exposed floors of a predynastic house complex.



11. Reconstruction of some of the recently excavated predynastic and early dynastic houses of the Chou in the Plain of Chou, Shensi.

at Tung-hsia-feng in Hsia prefecture in Shansi and at Wang-ch'eng-kang in Teng-feng, Honan.[18] Both are sites enclosed by walls of pounded earth. According to one legendary account (*Shih pen*, "Tso pien"), Kun, the aforementioned father of Yü, the Hsia dynasty's founder, was the culture hero credited with the first building of walled towns.

Archaeological sites of the Shang dynasty number in the dozens, but in the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty at Yin-hsü (near An-yang, the ruins of Yin, the last dynastic capital) about a thousand town names are mentioned.[19] These towns are concentrated in the area to the east of Hsia, incorporating the modern provinces of western Shantung, southern Hopei, eastern Honan, and northern Anhwei and Kiangsu (Figure 12). Early Chou dynasty sites, on the other hand, are located in the western part of North China, largely in the east-central portion of Shensi—namely, the middle and lower Wei river valley.[20] At some of these Shang and Chou sites are found remains of pounded earth walls, but at other sites no such walls have yet come to light. The absence of walls could be archaeologically accidental; many of the sites have not been investigated thoroughly, and many of the walls could have been largely obliterated by erosion and disturbance. But the towns were in any event more important than their walls; walls may have been unnecessary where defense needs did not exist, or they could have been built with timber. The planning and the political function of the towns were the same with or without earthen walls. The thousands of towns that dotted the Three Dynasties' political landscape were linked together—by invisible lines, as it were—into hierarchical systems of administrative control and wealth distribution, and the town hierarchies largely coincided with the hierarchies of clans and lineages. Each "state," or *kuo*, in ancient China was thus a network of towns linked in various hierarchical levels. At the beginning of the Three Dynasties, there were numerous such states, each probably consisting of a smaller number of towns. As time progressed the number of states decreased, but the number of towns within each state increased, through a process of continual subjugation. According to Ku Tsu-yü (1624–1680), there were ten

18. A brief discussion of the two sites in light of Hsia history is found in Chou Yung-chen, "The search for the Hsia culture," *China Reconstructs* 27 (November 1978), pp. 48–50.

19. K. C. Chang, *Shang Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 210.

20. For the geographic distribution of Shang and Chou sites, see K. C. Chang, "Sandai archaeology and the formation of states in ancient China: Processual aspects of the origins of Chinese civilization," in *The Origin of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David N. Keightley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 495-521.



12. Sections of the Shang dynasty city wall in Cheng-chou, Honan. Height of remaining sections is about 2.5 meters.

thousand *kuo* at the time of the Great Yü. By the time of T'ang, the founder of the Shang dynasty, the number of *kuo* had dropped to more than three thousand. At the time of King Wu Wang of Chou, conqueror of the Shang dynasty, only eighteen hundred *kuo* remained. At the beginning of the Eastern Chou (771 B.C.), twelve hundred *kuo* were left, and at the end of the Spring-and-Autumn period (481 B.C.) that number decreased to just over a hundred, of which only fourteen were considered major states.[21]

The interactions among the various town hierarchies included such activities as political alliance, trade, war, and marriage. Shifting political alliances reduced the number of political units from the total number of individual towns to a number of *kuo*, and in each of the Three Dynasties one of the states appeared to command preeminent status. The states of Hsia, Shang, and Chou, however, were merely the most prominent during their respective dynasties; they were by no means the only states that existed.

A few comments on marriage practices will serve to elaborate our discussion of lineage hierarchies.

The first recorded marriages between states concern the predynastic Chou kings Wang Chi and Wen Wang. Wang Chi's wife came from Shang, as related in the poem "Ta ming" in *Shih*:

> The lady Chung Jen of Chi came from the Yin-Shang,
> She came and married in Chou;
> She became bride in the capital;
> And so together with (her husband) Wang Chi she practised the virtue;
> T'ai Jen became pregnant and bore this Wen Wang.[22]

Moreover, one of Wen Wang's consorts may also have come from Shang. The same ode quoted above contains the following passage:

> Reverent was T'ai Jen,
> The mother of Wen Wang;
> Beloved was lady Chiang of Chou,
> The wife in the (royal) house in the capital.

21. Ku Tsu-yü (1624–1680), *Tu Shih Fang-yü Chi-yao* (Significant notes on geography in the reading of history), vol. 1.

22. Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, p. 188. The same marriage is described in another c 'Ssu-chai" (ibid., p. 192):

Heaven looked down upon the world below,
And its appointment lighted on (him) –
When Wen Wang started his action,
Heaven made for him a mate,
To the north of the Hsia (river),
On the banks of the Wei (river);
Wen Wang was fine;
And in a great state there was the young lady.
In a great state there was the young lady,
She looked as if she were a younger sister of Heaven;
Wen fixed on a lucky day,
And went in person to meet her on the Wei (river);
He arranged boats to form a bridge;
Amply illustrious was the splendour.
The appointment came from Heaven;
It gave the apointment to this Wen Wang,
In Chou, in the capital;
The lady-successor was (a girl from) Hsin;
The eldest daughter (of Hsin) performed her functions,
And she staunchly bore Wu Wang;
(Heaven said:) "I shall protect and help you and appoint you,
To march and attack the great Shang."[23]

Although the poem does not explicitly name Shang as the state of origin of Wen Wang's bride, the allusion to "a great state" has led scholars to suspect that the lady did indeed come from Shang; in fact, in reliable texts, Hsin is referred to as the dominion of a Shang lord.[24] Ku Chieh-kang has long cited a reference in *Yi* (*The Book of Changes*) – "Ti Yi gives his daughter in marriage"[25] – as relating to the same story, namely, the marriage of Ti Yi's daughter to Wen Wang of Chou. If this is true, it appears that at the time of this marriage the political status of the wife-giver (Shang) was higher than that of the wife-receiver (Chou), a situation consistent with relative statuses in political marriages found in some ethnographic records.[26]

The situation was, however, somewhat different in the late Chou period, for which we have better records and more detailed data pertaining to interstate marriages. In ancient China, bilateral cross-cousin

23. Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, p. 188.

24. Hsin, in fact, was the small state from whch Yi Yin, T'ang's prime minister, came.

25. Ku Chieh-kang, "Stories in the texts of the *Book of Changes*" (in Chinese), *Yenching Journal of Chinese Studies* 6 (December 1929): 979.

26. E. R. Leach, "Structural implications of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage," in Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: London School of Economics, 1961; orig. pub. 1951).

marriages were probably permitted – that is, a man could marry his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter. The most important evidence for this is in kinship terminology found in Chou texts:[27]

chiu: mother's brother; husband's father; wife's father
ku: father's sister; husband's mother
sheng: sister's son; father's sister's son; mothers brother's son; wife's brother; sister's husband; daughter's husband.

Bilateral cross-cousin marriage is known to be a rather flexible institution, and it has a wide enough range for specific adjustments under particular circumstances. That this custom was probably practiced in ancient China has been noted by several scholars.[28] Within the framework of the bilateral cross-cousin marriage, strong emphases were sometimes placed exclusively on either the patrilateral (marrying father's sister's daughter only) or the matrilateral (marrying mother's brother's daughter only) variety under certain circumstances. And the guiding principle for the shifting emphases appears to be the political status of the intermarrying parties. Patrilateral cross-cousin marriage tended to take place among political equals, whereas matrilateral cross-cousin marriage tended to take place as a contributing factor in the delicate and dynamic balance of political power between lineages of unequal status. It has been suggested that some of the endogamous marriages within the Shang royal house were patrilateral cross-cousin marriages,[29] but the evidence for this is controversial and there is no other known occurrence in ancient China outside that context.

On the other hand, several interesting facts in Eastern Chou texts strongly point to the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

1. In *Tso Chuan* intermarrying states referred to each other as "maternal uncle and sororal nephew states," and this designation strongly suggests the probability that the relationship between the intermarrying states was an ongoing one.

27. The most authoritative writings on ancient Chinese kinship terminology are those of Ruey Yin-fu; see his *Collected Works* (*China: The Nation and Some Aspects of Its Culture*) (in Chinese), sect. G, "The Chinese family system," and sect. H, "The Chinese kinship system," (Taipei: Yee Wen, 1972), pp. 723–1028.

28. Ruey, *Collected Works*, pp. 723–1028; Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization* (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1930), p. 157.

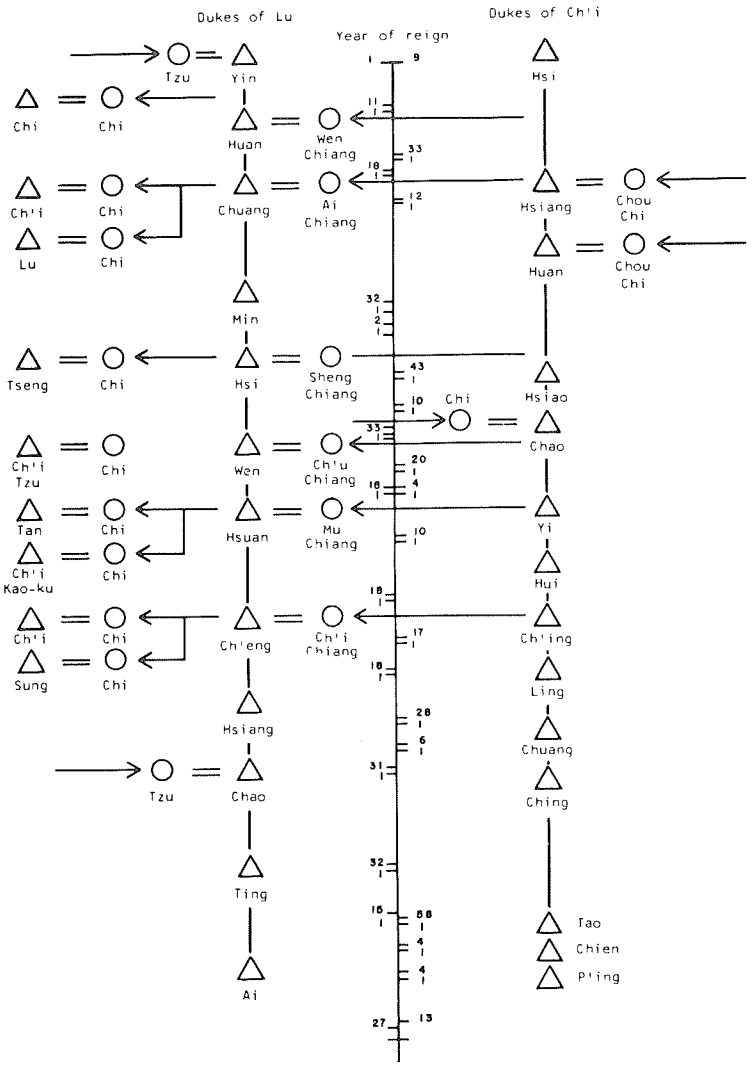
29. See K. C. Chang, *"T'ien kan*: A key to the history of the Shang," in *Studies in Early Civilization*, ed. David Roy and T. H. Tsien (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1978), pp. 13-42.

2. Such an ongoing relationship is referred to in *Tso Chuan* in terms that do not necessarily apply to the actual relationship between any two particular rulers, but that apply to the two states *as states*, regardless of generation. Under the Twelfth Year entry of Duke Chao (528 B.C.), for example, the state of Ch'i is referred to as the "king's maternal uncle," even though there were cases where Ch'i rulers married daughters of Chou's rulers.

3. According to marriage records that I have found in *Tso Chuan*, there was a distinct tendency for the marriages between different lineages of different clans to be one-way rather than reciprocal. Figure 13 shows some of the marriage relations between the two most powerful eastern states: Lu, of Chi clan, and Ch'i, of Chiang clan. The dukes of Lu, a brother state of Chou, married women of Ch'i lineage of the Chiang clan, among others; they rarely gave their sisters and daughters in marriage to Ch'i rulers, but frequently married them off to men of other states. The Ch'i dukes, on the other hand, married their daughters to men of Lu but obtained their women mainly from other states. Even though it can be said that the Ch'i (of Chiang clan) married their women into the Chi clan, and also sometimes married women from the Chi clan, it is important to note that the specific lineages into which their daughters married and from which their wives came were different, even though these different lineages were all of the Chi clan. Taking the lineage rather than the clan for comparison, we see clearly that more women were exchanged one way than the other.

4. In the available records we often see a difference in political status between the maternal uncle and sororal nephew states, and that the wife-receivers seem to enjoy a higher political and/or ritual status than the wife-givers.[30] It is particularly interesting to note in this connection that when a king married his daughter to one of his lords he would ask a lord from a brother state to "give the bride away." In a commentary to *Tso Chuan*, Tu Yü explains that this was because of the "inequity of ranks." In other words, although a king's daughter had to be married to someone whose lineage could not possibly be politically superior to the king's, a compromise was made so that the king's lineage would not suffer loss of dignity by an inferior alliance.

30. Francis L. K. Hsu, "Observations on cross-cousin marriage in China," *American Anthropologist* 47 (January–March 1945): 83–103.



13. Marriage relations between some Lu and Ch'i dukes, 722–468 B.C., according to *Tso Chuan*.

In sum, available evidence from the Three Dynasties makes it clear that the political landscape of ancient China was dotted with hundreds of thousands of towns inhabited by members of discrete clans and lineages, and that these towns were linked in political hierarchies according to the kinship relations and interaction patterns of their inhabitants.

2

MORAL AUTHORITY AND COERCIVE POWER

The hierarchy of towns and of clans and lineages outlined in the previous chapter gives an idealized portrait of the power structure, a system that probably worked most of the time but whose balance was delicate at best. Clans, each claiming divine descent, competed for a rulership for which most if not all of them qualified in the mythological sense; within the clans the lineages, after many degrees of ramification, became scattered and their status claims became fine and relative and less than clear-cut. In other words, the kinship system by itself could not maintain the status hierarchy indefinitely. Other factors had to enter the balance sheet.

One of the more lofty of these factors affecting the political balance among the multitude of contenders was an evaluation of worth based on earned points of merit. It was not enough to be born to rule; one had to have earned the right to rule by deeds deserving the support of the ruled. The poem "Huang yi" describes why the Chou dynasty was the chosen ruler, and not the Hsia or the Shang:

> August is God on High;
> Looking down, he is majestic;
> He inspected and regarded the (states of) the four quarters,
> He sought tranquility for the people.
> These two kingdoms [Hsia and Shang],
> Their government had failed;
> Throughout those states of the four (quarters)
> He investigated and estimated;
> God on High brought it to a settlement;
> Hating their extravagance,

> He looked about and turned his gaze to the West;
> And here he gave an abode [among the Chou].[1]

This judgment on the part of God, based on the success or failure of the governments and on the rulers' extravagance or temperance, was called "heaven's mandate." This term, *t'ien ming*, attributing the choice to "heaven," represents a Chou concept.[2] It is doubtful that the Hsia and Shang used the same term. But the idea of rulership based on "deservedness"—whether from the point of view of God or from the point of view of the governed—goes back at least to the Shang. The Hsia, of course, did not seize the dominant rulership from a previous dynasty and did not need any moral justification for thier own supreme status. The Shang, however, did seize power from the Hsia and gave ample justification for their actions. *Shu* contains a document purporting to be a speech given by T'ang, the dynasty's founder, to his people on their way to vanquish the Hsia dynasty, under its last monarch, Chieh:

> The king said: Come, you multitudes, all listen to my words. It is not that I, the small child, dare act so as to start rebellion. The lord of Hsia has much guilt; Heaven has charged (me) to kill him. Now, you multitude there, you say: Our ruler (king Chieh) has no compassionate care for our multitude, he sets aside our husbandry works and has an injurious government. I have heard the words of you all; the lord of Hsia has guilt, I fear God on High, I dare not but punish him. Now you will surely say that Hsia's guilt is such as I say. The Hsia king in all (ways) obstructs the efforts of the multitude, in all (ways) he injures the city of Hsia, the multitude are all slack and disaffected. They say: That one [Chieh] daily injures and destroys, I and you shall all together perish. Such is the conduct of (the king) of Hsia. Now I will necessarily march.—May you support me, the One Man, to apply Heaven's punishment. I will then greatly reward you. May there be none of you who do not believe me. I do not eat my words. If you do not obey the words of this proclamation, I will kill you and your wife and children; there will be nobody who will be pardoned.[3]

Chieh's fate was, of course, eventually also the fate of Chòu, the last monarch of the Shang dynasty, who was in turn vanquished by the Chou people when he incurred hatred for his despotic actions. Mencius lumped

1. In Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974), p. 194.

2. The Chou idea of the "mandate of heaven" is well discussed in Fu Ssu-nien, *Hsing Ming Ku Hsün Pien-cheng* (A critical analysis of the archaic meanings of the concepts *hsing* and *ming* (in Chinese) (Li-Chuang: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1940); and in Kuo Mo-jo, *Ch'ing-t'ung Shih-tai* (The Bronze Age) (in Chinese) (Chungking: Wen-chih, 1945). For a discussion in English, see Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 84–90; and K. C. Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 191–192.

3. Translation from Karlgren, *The Book of Documents*, p. 20.

Chieh and Chòu together as "mutilators, cripplers, and outcasts"; killing these kings, in his opinion, was just punishment and was by no means regicide.[4]

Thus, political dynasties fell because the king misbehaved and no longer deserved to rule. On the other hand, the founder of the new dynasty accomplished his meritorious deed by overthrowing the old, an action that was taken in response to the call of the multitude. The dynastic cycle of ancient China, then, has nothing to do with the rise and fall of the civilization; it merely signifies the shifting political fortunes of specific social groups whose rulers gain or lose their claim to the moral authority to rule.

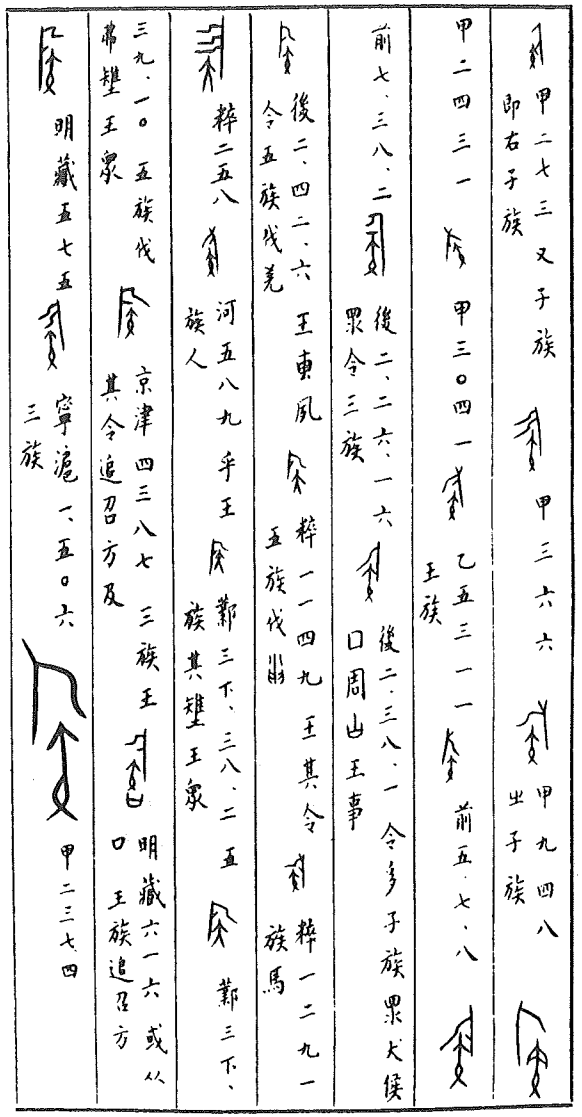
Obviously the idea that a king's claim to rule was founded on merit may be characterized as a Confucian ideal,[5] but it was actually appealed to by both the Shang and the Chou as justification for their rule and must be regarded as a part of the art of governance in ancient China. A reading of the documents in *Shu* supports this point. Besides, as the above-quoted *Shu* document makes quite clear, the moral authority of the new dynasty was only one side of the coin. On the other side was a threat: "If you do not obey me, I will kill you and your wife and children; no one will be pardoned." What were some of the major sources of coercive power that enabled ruling groups to carry out such threats?

The lineage (*tsu*) itself was probably the most important social framework for coercion; *tsu* rules were the society's fundamental law. "The oracle bone character for *tsu* has two elements, a flag above and an arrow below [Figure 14]. Ting Shan's interpretation, that it originally signified a military unit, is generally accepted. In ancient China the association of flags with military units is well known, and in oracle bone inscriptions *tsu* are shown to be action units in military campaigns. Its size was probably a hundred strong on an average, the hundred adult men coming from a hundred households."[6] Thus, the leader of a *tsu* was not only the head of a lineage or sublineage but also a military commander, and his orders in civic as well as military affairs were to be obeyed. Defiance of a *tsu* leader could be punished severely, by mutilation or even death. The word for king, *wang*, the supreme head of all lineages, derives according to one hypothesis from the pictograph of an

4. Translation from D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), bk. 1, pt. B.

5. Donald J. Munro, in *The Concept of Man in Early China*, calls the moral pretensions the Confucian "path to privilege."

6. K. C. Chang, *Shang Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 163.



14. The character *tsu*, as seen in Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions. The character is illustrated here in several sizes and with slight variations.

executioner's ax (Figure 15).[7] In Bronze Age China one of the main uses for bronze was in the making of weaponry, including pivotal parts of the fearsome horse-drawn chariot (Figure 16).

During the Three Dynasties, rules of behavior within the *tsu* were codified in rituals, which, most Chinese legal historians agree, were in fact laws.[8] The power of the lineage lords over their subjects was manifested in the ritual obligations of lineage members. Members of the same patrilineage traced their common descent to acknowledged male ancestors, a fact that was symbolized by and crystallized in the ancestor cult. *Yi Li* gives us an account of the procedures and details of some of the related rites, but we are best acquainted with some of the tangible aspects of these cults. First, there was the ancestral temple, which not only provided the setting for the rituals but was also a symbol in itself, as the center of rituals and of state affairs. The several levels of temples[9] probably coincided with the levels of lineage subdivision (Figure 17). It is implied in *Tso Chuan* (Twelfth Year of Duke Hsiang, 562 B.C.) that there were three levels of kin groups: *hsing*, *tsung*, and *tsu*. There were also three levels of ancestral temples: *tsung*, *tsu*, and *mi*. Each of these groups had, above all, an ancestral temple at the corresponding level as the center of its kinship cosmos. In *Li Chi* ("Ch'ü li"), we read: "When a superior man (high in rank) is about to engage in building, the ancestral [*tsung*] temple should have his first attention, the stables and arsenal the next, and the residences the last. In all preparations of things by (the head of) a [family], the vessels of sacrifice should have the first place; the victims supplied from his revenue, the next; and the vessels for use at meals, the last."[10] The importance of the ancestral temples and their para-

7. Lin Yün, "Shuo wang" (A discourse on *wang*) (in Chinese), *K'ao-ku* 1965 (6): 311–312.

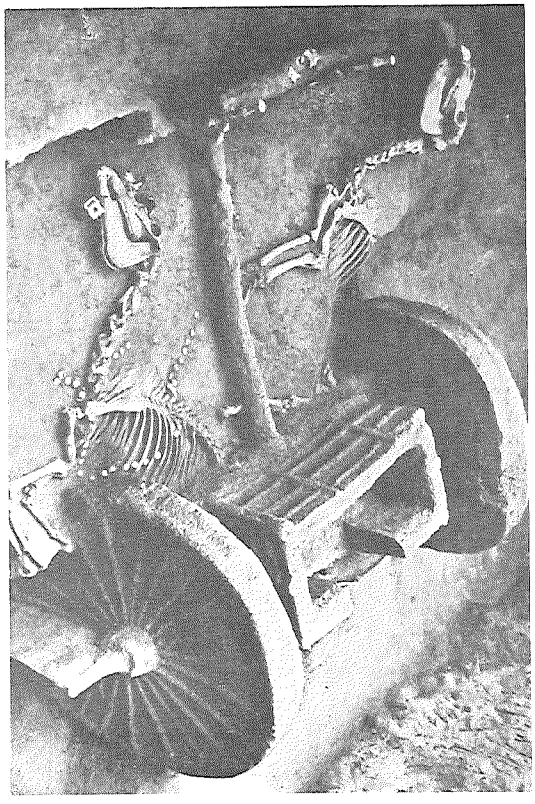
8. See Mei Chung-hsieh, "Law and ritual" (in Chinese), in *Chung-kuo Fa-chih Shih Lun Chi* (Studies of Chinese legal history), ed. Hsieh Kuan-sheng and Cha Liang-chien (Taipei: Institute of Law, Chinese Culture College, 1968), pp. 137–145; and several other essays in the same collection. In the ancient Chinese classics, the relationship between *fa* (law) or *hsing* (punishment) and *li* (rituals) has always been clearly stated. An example is *Ta Tai Li Chi* ("Li ch'a"): "*Li*, ritual, is to prohibit something from happening, and *fa*, law, is to prohibit it after it has happened." Confucius himself stated: "Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves." D. C. Lau, tr., *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 63.

9. Ling Shun-sheng, "Chung-kuo tsu-miao chih ch'i-yuan" (The origin of ancestral temples in China), *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* 7 (Spring 1959): 141–184.

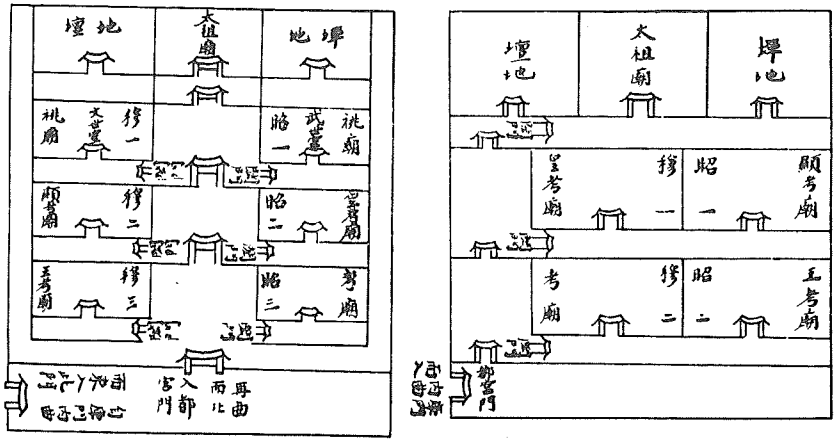
10. Translated by James Legge, *Li Ki*, in *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 27 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 105.



15. Two bronze executioner's axes of the Shang dynasty. The left one (about 32 centimeters tall) was excavated from Su-fu-t'un, Yi-tu, Shantung, from an area probably occupied by another state contemporary with Shang. The one on the right (about 40 centimeters tall) was excavated from Yin-hsü, An-yang, Honan.



16. Remains of a Shang dynasty horse chariot found recently at Yin-hsü.



17. Two levels of ancestral temples. Temples on the left were those of Chou dynasty kings, with the temple of the founder at the center and three temples of the remote ancestors on each side. Temples on the right were those of a feudal lord, with only two temples on each side.

phernalia reflects the importance of ancestral rituals in the Chou institution. *Li Chi* ("Chi t'ung") makes this clear:

> Of all the methods for the good ordering of men there is none more urgent than the use of *li*. *Li* are of five kinds, and there is none of them more important than . . . *chi* [rituals].
>
> [Rituals] . . . are not a thing coming to a man from without; it issues from within him, and has its birth in his heart. When the heart is deeply moved, expression is given to it by ceremonies; and hence, only men of ability and virtues can give complete exhibition to the idea of [rituals].[11]

To reinforce such rules that were supposed to "issue from within," authorities made periodic inspections among the lords to see whether ancestral rites were properly performed. According to *Li Chi* ("Wang chih"), if the king found that ancestral rites were not being correctly observed, the lords were to be degraded. To vanquish a state and a system of government, an enemy state could assure destruction by breaking up the ancestral temples and looting the symbolic treasures.[12]

If the rituals and their tangible associations such as temples, tablets, and treasures provided the sanction, the reminder, and the symbol for the solidarity of the lineages, then myths provided the charter, giving the *raison d'être* for such groups. Almost invariably, according to the hero myths, the lineage ancestors had performed meritorious deeds, and it was precisely for their merits and deeds that ancestors were honored in the rites. *Kuo Yü* ("Lu yü") and *Li Chi* ("Chi fa") both specify the same criteria that were needed in order for an ancestor to merit a place in the ritual calendar: "According to the institutes of the sage kings about sacrifices, sacrifice should be offered to him who had given (good) laws to the people; to him who had laboured to the death in the discharge of his duties; to him who had boldly and successfully met great calamities; and to him who had warded off great evils . . . Only men and things of this character were admitted into the sacrificial canon."[13] This is to say that ancestors earned their places by merit and not merely by birth, a point discussed earlier. Myths are an integral part of the ritual system of the ancestor cult in the Shang and Chou periods, and "it was in their [the grandee houses'] interest to keep alive every scrap of tradition that showed their forefathers as powerful sages and good lords, and their opponents and foes as rebels and miscreants, doomed to failure and to loss

11. Legge, *Li Ki*, p. 236.
12. *Tso chuan*, entries under 552 B.C. and 606 B.C.
13. *Li Ki*, pp. 26–28.

of sacrificing descendants."[14] It is in this spirit, presumbly, that in *Li Chi* ("Chi t'ung") we find the following statement: "For the progeny who maintain the ancestral temple and the state, it is deceitful to enumerate the deeds of ancestors if they did not exist; imbecile not to know the deeds if they existed; unkind not to publicize the deeds if they were known." Dynastic rulers reaped the largest rewards by publicizing their deeds, of course, but rulers at all levels acquired their status by earning it also. Clan ancestors were by necessity culture heroes. The Great Yü, founder of the Ssu clan and the Hsia dynasty, was credited with the containment and control of the Great Flood. Hsieh, the Tzu clan's ancestor, was in some versions of Shang predynastic history an official at Yü's court and assisted him in controlling the flood. T'ang, founder of the Shang dynasty, was, according to *Shih Chi* (*Historical Memoirs* by Ssu-ma Ch'ien of the early first century B.C.), a man of such virtue that birds and beasts voluntarily entered his hunting net, even though the net was open on all sides. But T'ang had also performed meritorious deeds: once he threw himself into a fire in order to ensure the sucess of a rain-making ceremony; mercifully the rain came and put out the fire before T'ang was roasted. As for the Chi clan of the Chou dynasty, its ancestor, Hou Chi, was the beneficent hero who brought to his people millet, beans, and other crops.

The legendary kings who reigned before the Three Dynasties were culture heroes in their own right, at least in the telling of the people who wrote the accounts of their ancestors' lives, mostly in the late Chou period or during the Han dynasty. The most prominent of the heroic deeds of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors are those attributed to the Yellow Emperor (Figure 18). He was the first great warrior among the sage ancestors: he fought Ch'ih Yu, a rival for supremacy, and defeated him at Chuo-lu (in Hopei), in the first great battle in Chinese history. He was also credited with the invention of the carriage and boat, the bronze mirror, housing, the cooking pot and the steamer, the crossbow, and a kind of football. Other inventions were attributed to the officials of his court: writing was supposedly devised by Ts'ang Chieh, music by Ling Lun, the Celestial Stems and Terrestrial Branches (the two sets of cyclical signs for the calendar) by Ta Jao, and medical texts by Lei Kung and Chi Po.[15]

14. Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and cults in ancient China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946).

15. Yuan K'o, *Chung-kuo Ku-tai Shen-hua* (Ancient myths of China) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1960), p. 136.



18. Portrait of Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor, from the second-century mural at Wu Liang Tz'u.

3

SHAMANISM AND POLITICS

One day around 500 B.C., King Chao (reigned 515–489 B.C.) of Ch'u, one of the hegemonic states of the Spring-and-Autumn period, was in a contemplative mood after reading one of the ancient documents in *Shu*. The document, "Lü hsing," was allegedly an edict issued to the marquis of Lü by King Mu of the Chou dynasty, perhaps in the late eleventh century B.C. It told of the great sage Ti Shun, who "commissioned Ch'ung and Li to cut the communication between heaven and earth." Puzzled, King Chao turned to his minister and asked, "If it had not been thus, would the people have been able to ascend to heaven?"

A myth of the "severence of heaven-earth communication" was then supplied by the minister, as recorded in *Kuo Yü*, a fourth-century B.C. text:

> 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 powers 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 spheres 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 (traditionally put at the twenty-sixth century B.C.), however, the Nine Li 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-hsü [Figure 19], charged Ch'ung, Governor of the South, to handle the affairs of heaven in order to determine the proper place 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.[1]

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. As Motse, the late-Chou philosopher, said, "The ghosts and spirits are wiser than the sages by as much as the sharp-eared and keen-sighted surpass the deaf and blind."[2] 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.[3]

If we look again at the meritorious deeds of the founders of the Three Dynasties, we find that all of their deeds were to some degree magical, supernatural. The Great Yü was powerful enough to stem the flood, and his gait—the so-called "Yü gait"—was later adopted as a special gait used by shamans.[4] T'ang, as we have seen, made rain through a ceremony, and Hou Chi had a special ability to make his crops grow fatter and faster than those of other farmers. These traditional beliefs have been well confirmed by the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty, which show that the king was indeed the head shaman:

> In the oracle bone inscriptions are often encountered inscriptions stating that the king divined or that the king inquired in connection with wind- or rain-storms, rituals, conquests, or hunts. There are also statements that "the king made the prognostication that . . . ," pertaining to weather, the border regions, or misfortunes and diseases; the only prognosticator ever recorded in

1. Quotations are from Derk Bodde, "Myths of ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel N. Kramer (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

2. *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse* (London: Probsthain, 1929), p. 212.

3. Ch'en Meng-chia, "Myths and Magic of the Shang Dynasty" (in Chinese), *Yenching Journal of Chinese Studies* 20 (December 1936): 485–576; Li Tsung-t'ung, *History of Ancient Chinese Society* (in Chinese) (Taipei: Hua-kang, 1954), pp. 118–125; and Yang Hsiang-k'uei, *Studies of Ancient Chinese Society and Ancient Chinese Thought* (in Chinese) (Shanghai: Jen-min, 1962). Yang characterized the Ch'ung-Li myth by saying, "The kings severed communication between heaven and the people, and they took as their monopoly the great right of communicating with God" (p. 164).

4. Ch'en Meng-chia, "Myths and Magic of the Shang Dynasty," pp. 535–536.



19. Portrait of Chuan Hsü from the second-century mural at Wu Liang Tz'u.

> the oracle bone inscriptions was the king . . . There are, in addition, inscriptions describing the king dancing to pray for rain and the king prognosticating about a dream. All of these were activities of both king and shaman, which means in effect that the king was a shaman.[5]

The king, of course, was not the only shaman; he was assisted by many religious figures, all of whom may not have been strictly "shamanistic." The term "shaman" may be used here in the sense used by Arthur Waley: "In ancient China intermediaries used in the cult of Spirits were called *wu*. They figure in old texts as experts in exorcism, prophecy, fortune-telling, rain-making and interpretation of dreams. Some *wu* danced, and they are sometimes defined as people who danced in order to bring down Spirits . . . They were also magic healers and in later times at any rate one of their methods of doctoring was to go, as Siberian shamans do, to the underworld and find out how the Power of Death can be propitiated. Indeed the functions of Chinese *wu* were so like those of Siberian and Tungus Shamans that it is convenient . . . to use shaman as a translation of *wu*."[6]

The best-known evidence of ancient Chinese shamanism is in *Ch'u Tz'u* (*Elegies of Ch'u*), an anthology of seventeen pieces of poetry mostly attributed to Ch'ü Yüan (c. 340–278 B.C.) of Ch'u. One of the pieces is the "Chiu ko" ("The Nine Songs"), in which "male and female shamans, having first purified and perfumed themselves and dressed up in gorgeous costumes, sing and dance to the accompaniment of music, driving the gods down from heaven in a sort of divine courtship."[7] An example of this "divine courtship" can be seen in the following lines from "Yün chung chün" (The Lord Within the Clouds"):

> We have bathed in orchid water and washed our hair with perfumes,
> And dressed ourselves like flowers in embroidered clothing.
> The God has halted, swaying, above us,
> Shining with a persistent radiance.
> He is going to rest in the House of Life.
> His brightness is like that of the sun and moon.
> He yokes to his dragon car the steeds of god:
> Now he flies off to wander around the sky.
> The god had just descended in bright majesty,
> When off in a whirl he soared again, far into the clouds.
> He looks down on Chi-chou and the lands beyond it;

5. Ch'en Meng-chia, "Myths and Magic of the Shang Dynasty," p. 535.

6. Arthur Waley, *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), p. 9.

7. David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 35.

There is no place in the world that he does not pass over.
I think of my lord with a heavy sigh,
And sad thoughts trouble my heart very sorely.[8]

The imagery here is like that of a love poem; it is clear that the basic role of a shaman (or shamaness, as in this poem) was that of an intermediary who used alluring dance and music to induce the deity to descend (Figure 20). Was shamanism a practice that extended beyond Ch'u and earlier than the fourth century B.C., Ch'ü Yüan's time? The answer is undoubtedly yes, but evidence from earlier times and other places is not as explicit as that found in *Ch'u Tz'u* and requires further analysis. First, there is the above-mentioned passage in *Kuo Yü* (probably slightly earlier than Ch'ü Yüan), pertaining to King Chao of the same Ch'u state, who reigned 515–489 B.C. There are also numerous—twenty-three, to be exact[9]—references to *wu*-shamans in *Shan Hai Ching*, portions of which were compiled during the earlier parts of the first millennium B.C.,[10] including references to special mountains where the shamanistic ascent was to take place (Figure 21). Chow Tse-tsung has also presented an interesting argument suggesting that "*wu*-shamans originated the practice of medicine" and attributing medical knowledge to ancient kings and sages."[11]

The best evidence for shamanism in ancient China before *Ch'u Tz'u*, however, consists of artifacts from the Shang dynasty—namely, oracle bone inscriptions and representations of animals in art. Art is the subject of Chapter 4; following is a brief discussion of oracle bones.[12]

The inhabitants of North China during the third millennium B.C. were the first people anywhere to use the shoulder blades of animals for divination (by heating them and interpreting the resultant cracks).[13] By

8. Translated by Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, p. 37.

9. *Index du Chan Hai King* (Université de Paris: Centre d'Études Sinologique de Pékin, 1948), pp. 26–27.

10. Meng Wen-t'ung, "A brief discussion on the date of writing of *Shan Hai Ching* and its place of origin" (in Chinese), *Chung-hua Wen-shih Lun-ts'ung* 1 (August 1962): 43–70.

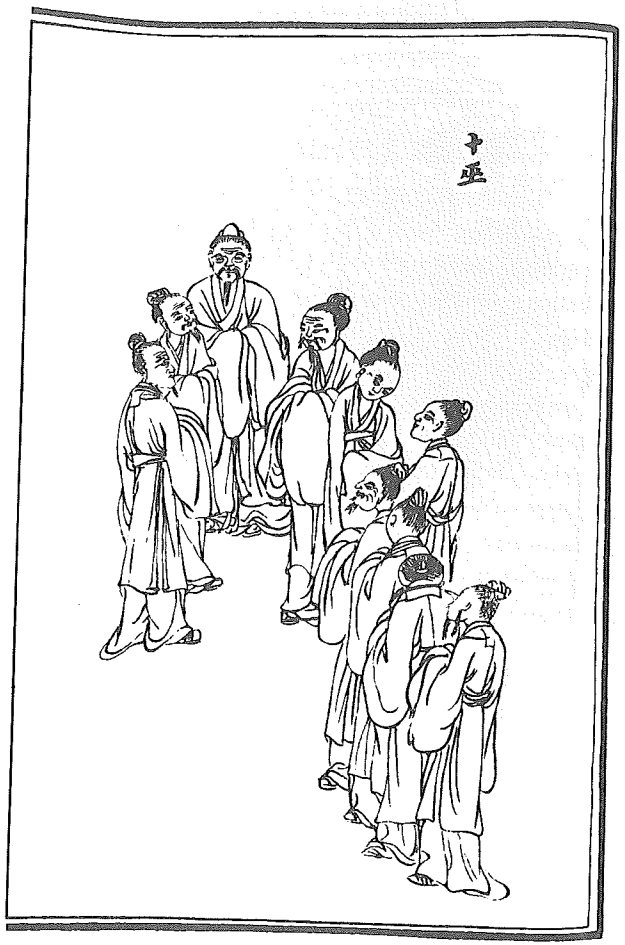
11. Chow Tse-tsung, "Ancient Chinese *wu* shamanism and its relationship to sacrifices, history, dance-music, and poetry," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, n.s., 12 (December 1979): 1–59.

12. For a detailed treatment of the subject, see David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

13. See K. C. Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 175–180, 189.



20. A depiction of the descent of the "Lord Within the Clouds," described in the poem in *Ch'u Tz'u*.



21. Group of *wu*-shamans, as illustrated in *Shan Hai Ching*.

the time of the Shang in the middle of the second millennium B.C. this practice had reached its height with the addition of three new features: the widespread use of turtle shells as well as shoulder blades, the sophisticated preparation of the bones (they were incised with a series of hollows and grooves prior to the divination, to facilitate heating), and the carving of inscriptions on the bones (Figures 22, 23). [14] After the fall of the Shang, the use of bones for oracles and the practice of inscribing them were continued by the Chou on a reduced scale until these customs died out soon afterward. But the custom of burning animal shoulder blades for divination continued in a large part of the northern hemisphere of both the Old and the New Worlds until relatively recent times.[15]

The Shang oracular activities took place largely at the royal court under the king's direct supervision, for his ritual and political purposes exclusively, and a large number of officials—including religious figures fitting the *wu*-shaman definition—were involved. First, the bones—about half of them shoulder blades of cattle (*Bos exiguus*) and water buffalo (*Bubalus mephistopheles*) and the other half plastral shells of turtles—were obtained, mostly by importation; the turtle shells were often from species found in South China (*Ocadia sinensis, Mauremys mutica, Cuora* species). Presumably the scarcity of the bones added something to their quality as instruments of communication. The bones were carefully prepared—scraped, polished, perhaps soaked and dried, finally chiseled to produce rows of grooves and hollows. During the ritual, the diviner applied heat at the bottom of the grooves and hollows to produce hairline cracks on the opposite surface of the bone. These cracks were interpreted to provide answers to the questions that were put to the ancestors. The king himself sometimes would bring the question to the diviner, but more often he asked the question through a mediating "inquirer." The cracks were interpreted by a "prognosticator," a role in which the diviner himself could have doubled but which the king himself often performed.

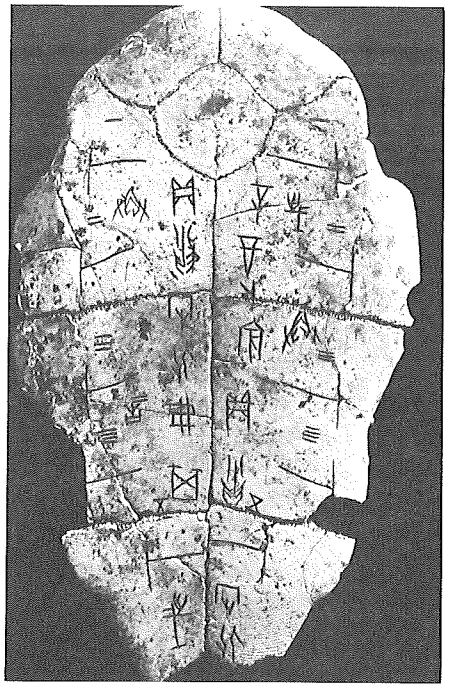
How the cracks were interpreted we do not know. The degree of "auspiciousness" as shown by the cracks was sometimes noted with inscriptions near them, but the notations do not seem to correlate

14. *Shang Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 32–33.

15. For a succinct description of the practice of scapulimancy in historic times throughout the northern hemisphere from Europe to North America, see Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, pp. 4–5.



22. Inscribed shoulder blade of the Shang dynasty.



23. Inscribed turtle shell of the Shang dynasty. Length is about 25 centimeters.

systematically with the shapes and angles of the cracks.[16] Possibly the diviner had to enter into a different verbal or mental contract with the ancestors each time a heating took place,[17] but if so the details of such contracts, if any, have been lost. After the divination, an inscription sometimes would be made next to the cracks to record the question asked and, occasionally, the answer given. From these inscriptions we know that the king would turn to his ancestors for confirmation or approval before undertaking such actions as building a new town, engaging in a battle, going on a hunt or a journey, or performing a ritual in a particular way. He might ask his ancestors to tell him about his fortune in the coming night or the coming week, about a dream he had had, about the birth of a consort's child, about disease or even a toothache. Scholars who study these inscriptions have been able to find out much about the religious and ritual life of the kings, as well as about various other aspects of Shang culture and society.

Was Shang divination an act of Shang shamanism? The inscriptions make it clear that inquiries were directed to long-departed ancestors, and that the diviner served as an intermediary. The inscriptions often contain the word *pin*, which in later classical texts usually means to receive as a guest or to be a guest. In the oracle bone inscriptions, the word is often placed between the word for king and the name of a specific ancestor or of Ti, the Supreme God. A phrase consisting of these elements is sometimes interpreted as "the king receives as a guest a specific ancestor," or "the king receives as a guest the Supreme God."[18] But more likely it means that the king "called upon" a departed ancestor or God. *Shan Hai Ching* states that "Ch'i went up to *pin* heaven three times," making it clear that *pin* refers to the human chief going to the deity rather than the other way around. In any event, there was a Shang ritual that enabled the king and the spirits to be together, presumably brought about by some kind of middleman. The act of divination was intended, similarly, to bring the middleman diviner and the spirits together.

16. Chang Ping-ch'üan, "Divination cracks on the oracle bones at Yin-hsü and related problems" (in Chinese), *Annals of Academia Sinica* 1 (June 1954): 231–245.

17. According to Lin Sheng, "Investigation and study of divination by sheep scapulae among the Ta-lu people of the Yi ethnic group in Yung-sheng county, Yunnan" (in Chinese), *K'ao-ku* 1964 (2): 98–102, divination by heating the shoulder blades of sheep is still practiced among the Ta-lu people in Yung-sheng county, Yunnan province, in southwestern China. Before each such ritual, the diviner in his prayer indicates what kinds of cracks he anticipates – whether he expects an auspicious or inauspicious response. When cracks are produced, he interprets them accordingly.

18. Shima Kunio, *Inkyo Bokuji Kenkyū* (A study of the oracle bone inscriptions from Yin Hsü) (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1958), p. 201.

The descent of the spirits or the ascent of the shaman or the king was achieved in a manner not altogether clear. Music and dance were apparently part of the ceremony. Alcoholic drinks were possibly involved: the Shang were notorious drinkers, and many bronze ritual vessels were designed to serve alcoholic beverages. Did the alcohol or other substances bring about a trance, during which the shaman engaged in imagined flight? Possibly, but there is as yet no concrete evidence for this. The role of animals in the ritual art of the Shang may provide significant clues.

4

ART AS THE PATH TO AUTHORITY

Animal designs are a well-known feature of the decorative art of Shang and early Western Chou bronzes.[1] Animal motifs reached their height of development during the An-yang phase of the Shang, but an early form of animal mask, at least the eyes and a facial outline, is already apparent on middle Shang bronzes, and it may even be related to some of the much earlier decorative designs on black pottery and on jades in prehistoric cultures of the eastern coast.[2] By late Shang (An-yang) and early Western Chou times, animal motifs had become highly complex and varied. A list of such animals designs compiled by Jung Keng includes: the *t'ao-t'ieh* design, the *t'ao-t'ieh* design composed of banana leaves, the *k'uei* design, the double-headed *k'uei*, the triangular *k'uei*, the dragon with two tails, the curling dragon, the plain dragon, *ch'iu* design, the rhinoceros, the owl, the hare, the cicada, the silkworm, the turtle, the fish, the bird, the phoenix, the elephant, the deer, the curling *k'uei*, the *k'uei* in a leaf, and the frog and algae design.[3] Other common animals

1. Cheng Te-k'un, "Animal in prehistoric and Shang China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 35 (1963): 129–138; Li Chi, "Hunting records, faunistic remains, and decorative patterns from the archaeological sites of An-yang," *Bulletin of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, National Taiwan Universtiy* 9/10 (November 1957): 10–20.

2. Hayashi Minao, "A view on the animal mask designs of ancient China" (in Japanese), *Museum* 301 (April 1976): 17–28; Hayashi Minao, "The jade culture before the Yin dynasty"(in Japanese), *Museum* 334 (January 1979): 4–16; Wu Hung, "A group of early jade and stone sculptures" (in Chinese), *Mei-shu Yen-chiu* 1 (February 1979): 64–70; Jessica Rawson, *Ancient China: Art and Archaeology* (London: British Museum, 1980), p. 78.

3. Jung Keng, *A Comprehensive Study of Shang and Chou Bronze Ritual Vessels* (in Chinese) (Peking: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1941).

seen on An-yang bronzes are oxen, water buffalo, sheep, tigers, bears, horses, and boars.

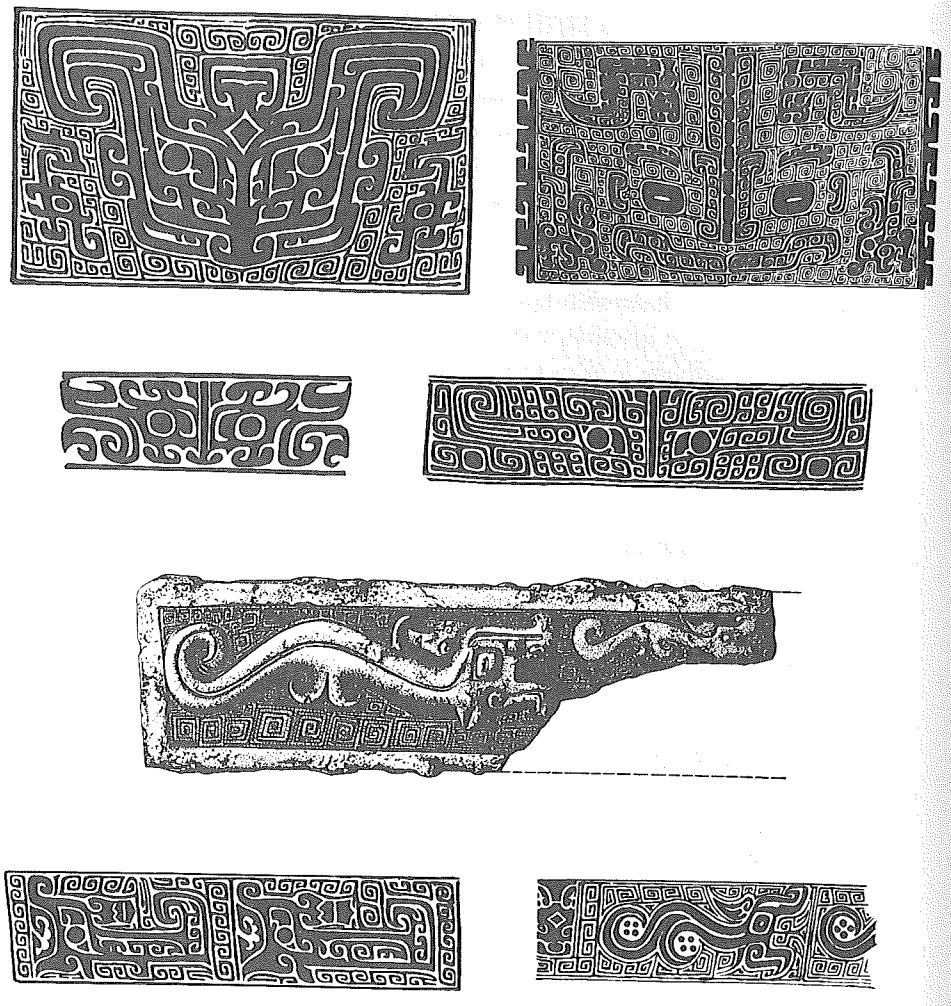
Clearly, there are two kinds of animals in these designs. On the one hand, there are real-world animals: rhinoceros, owl, hare, cicada, silkworm, turtle, fish, bird, elephant, tiger, deer, frog, ox, water buffalo, sheep, bear, horse, and boar. On the other hand, there are many which do not occur in the real world and which must be referred to by the mythological names found in ancient texts. The following are particularly prominent (see Figure 24).

1. *T'ao-t'ieh.* The third-century B.C. book *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (in the chapter entitled "Hsien-shih lan") refers to "the *t'ao-t'ieh*, conspicuous on Chou [or Hsia, in another version] dynasty *ting*-tripods, which has a head but is bodiless. It tries to devour a man but before it can swallow him his own body is destroyed. [This image was used] to illustrate the principle of just deserts." On the basis of this description, traditional Chinese antiquarians since the Northern Sung Dynasty (twelfth century) have identified the mythicized animal mask commonly encountered on Shang and Chou bronzes as the *t'ao-t'ieh*.

2. *Fei-yi. Shan Hai Ching*, in the chapter entitled "Pei-shan ching," contains a description of "a snake with one head but two bodies, which is called *fei-yi* and which when seen causes drought in the land." (Contrast this with the *t'ao-t'ieh*, which may not have a body at all.) Li Chi suggests the use of the name *fei-yi* for the design that consists of an animal head at the center in full face with two elongated bodies, each extending to one side.[4]

3. *K'uei.* According to *Shuo-wen* (compiled A.D. 100) *K'uei* is the name of a kind of "divine spirit that looks like a dragon with a single foot." This beast is described in *Shan Hai Ching* ("Ta-huang tung ching") as "looking like a bull, black, hornless, with a single foot. When it enters into and emerges from the water, there will be a windstorm. It shines like the sun and moon and its voice sounds like thunder . . . The Yellow Emperor once captured one. He used its skin to make a drum and beat the drum with the bone of a thunder beast. The sound could be heard beyond five hundred *li*." In *Chuang Tzu* (c. 300 B.C.), in the chapter entitled "Ch'iu shui," a *k'uei* is described in conversation with a *hsüan*, another divine animal, perhaps a millipede, as he talks about his jumping around with "a single foot." Traditionally, antiquarians have used the name *k'uei* to refer to the design that shows the profile of a mythological (that is, uniden-

4. Li Chi, *A Study of the Bronze Chia-type Vessels Excavated from Yin-hsü* (in Chinese) (Nankang: Academia Sinica, 1968), pp. 69–70.



24. Mythical animals in Shang bronze decorative designs. Top row: *T'ao-t'ieh*. Second row: *Fei-yi*. Third row: *K'uei*. Bottom row: *Lung*.

tifiable) animal with only a single visible leg, foot, or claw. (The same design with two or more legs, feet, or claws would be called a *lung*.)

4. *Lung*. The most common mythical animal mentioned in ancient texts is the *lung*, or "dragon," but a precise description of its morphology is lacking. *Shuo-wen* describes it as "the chief of all scaled reptiles. It is sometimes dark, sometimes bright; sometimes small, sometimes big; sometimes short, sometimes long. It ascends to heaven at the spring equinox, and dives into the water at the autumn equinox." Wen Yi-to, in a treatise discussing such concepts as "the intertwined *lung*" or "the pair of *lung*," gives the following description: "The *lung* resembles a horse, so the horse is sometimes referred to as the *lung*. Sometimes the *lung* resembles a dog, which is thus also called *lung* . . . In addition, a kind of *lung* with scales resembles the fish, a kind with wings resembles the bird, and a kind with horns resembles the deer. As to the various kinds of reptiles that are often confused with the *lung*, they need not even be mentioned."[5] Since the form of the *lung* is so flexible and varied, antiquarians have likewise used the term very flexibly: all animals in bronze designs that cannot be identified as real-world animals and that also cannot be referred to by the names of any of the other mythological creatures (such as *t'ao-t'ieh, fei-yi, or k'uei*) are thus *lung*, or dragons.

5. *Ch'iu*. The *ch'iu* is apparently a special kind of *lung* without horns according to the commentary of Wang Yi (early second century) on "Li sao."

These and other names for mythical animals are found in ancient texts, and modern scholars have adopted them to label specific animal designs on Shang and Chou bronzes. Have they applied the names correctly? If a person from the Shang or Chou were to read our antiquarian works, would he recognize these names and approve their usage? It is impossible to say.

However, several facts are indisputable as far as the animal designs on Shang and Chou bronze art are concerned. It is known that these designs occur in large numbers and constitute the majority of decorative designs in Shang and early Western Chou bronze art. They include a large variety of animals, both those that can be identified as real-world animals and those that can be described only with the names of mythological

5. Wen Yi-to, "A study of Fu-hsi" (in Chinese), in Wen Yi-to, *Mythology and Poetry* (in Chinese) (Peking: Chung-hua, 1956), p. 25.

animals in ancient texts. In addition, two other characteristics must be mentioned.

First, the animal designs on Shang and Chou bronzes often—though far from always—occur in pairs and are placed on the surface of the object in a symmetrical pattern. The basic decorative component is a band of animal designs that circles the vessel. The band is divided into units, often by flanges, each unit being filled with an animal in profile. When an animal profile is pointed toward the left, the animal profile in the adjoining unit on the left is often pointed toward the right, resulting in the joining together of two side views of the animal head, separated by the flanges at the center. Viewed from the center line, the two animal profiles may be described either as a single animal split into two halves, each spreading sideways, or as two animals joined together along the median line of the face. Thus, the *t'ao-t'ieh* and the *fei-yi* can both be looked at either as two animals joined together or as a single animal split apart. We will return to this point below.

Second, on a small number of Shang and possibly early Western Chou bronzes, both human and animal figures occur together. The best known of these are the pair of *yu* in the Sumitomo[6] and the Musée Cernuschi[7] collections. A little man is depicted on the *yu* as hugging a tiger-like animal, and his head is placed under the open mouth of the animal. The man-beast theme is also seen on a bronze *kuang*[8] and a bronze knife[9] in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; on the handle of a square *ting* found in the 1930s in the eastern sector of the Shang royal cemetery in An-yang;[10] on the face of a bronze ax in the tomb of Shang's Lady Hao at Hsiao-t'un, An-yang, excavated in 1976;[11] and on the surface of a bronze *tsun* unearthed in Fu-nan, Anhwei, in 1957.[12] In addition to the juxtaposition of man and beast, these bronze artifacts share other decorative features: the animals' mouths are open and the

6. Umehara Sueji, *The Collection of Old Bronzes of Sumitomo* (in Japanese) (Kyoto: Sen'oku Museum, 1971), pp. 62–65.

7. Vadime Elisséeff, *Bronzes archaïque chinois au Musée Cernuschi*, vol. 1 (Paris: L'Asiathèque, 1977), pp. 120–131.

8. John A. Pope, et al., *Freer Chinese Bronzes*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1967), no. 45.

9. According to photographs taken by the author.

10. Ch'en Meng-chia, "Yin dynasty bronzes" (in Chinese), *K'ao-ku Hsüeh-pao* 1954 (7): 15–59.

11. "The excavation of Tomb No. 5 of Yin-hsü, An-yang" (in Chinese), *K'ao-ku Hsüeh-pao* 1977 (2): pl. 13.2.

12. Ko Chieh-p'ing, "Bronze artifacts of Shang dynasty date found in Fu-nan, Anhwei" (in Chinese), *Wen-wu* 1959 (1): inside cover.

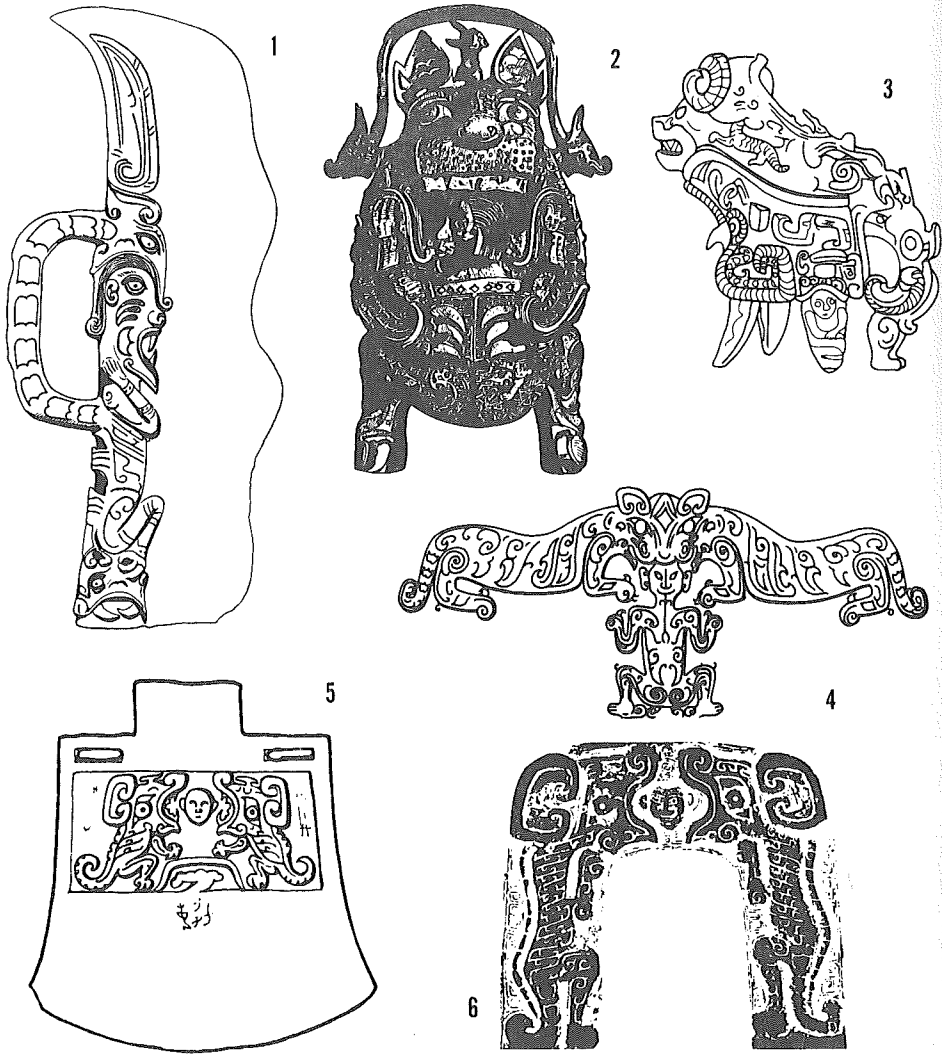
human head is below or close to the mouth; the human head or body is perpendicular to the axis of the animal head or body; and the animal designs all appear to be depictions of the tiger. There are important variations. A single animal is shown with the man in the Kyoto, Paris, and Washington pieces, whereas the three other pieces all feature two animal profiles facing each other, with the human head flanked by their open jaws; on some pieces the human is represented by only a head, whereas on the other pieces the human figure is complete with a body; on the *yu* pieces the human and the animal embrace, but on all other pieces they are separate (Figure 25).

Any interpretive theory aiming to account for the meaning of the animal design on Shang and Chou bronzes should explain all of the above characteristics and not just some of them. In other words, the issue of the animal design involves not a single question but a series of questions: Why did the bronze makers of the Shang and Chou use animal designs on their decorations? What functions did these designs serve in Shang ideology? Why was there such variety? Why do the figures often appear in pairs? Why do they sometimes occur together with humans? Why do man and beast appear in such distinctive formal relationships?

The Meaning of Animal Designs

Is there "meaning" in the animal designs on Shang and Chou bronzes? That is, was there an iconographic meaning invested in the animal forms by Shang and Chou artists? Most students of ancient Chinese bronzes believe that there is such a meaning, and past studies—too many to be enumerated here—have pointed either to familiar totems or to mythical deities that are represented by specific animals; but there are few Shang and Chou documents linking specific designs with specific totems or deities. In contrast, a minority opinion (with forceful advocates) holds that animal forms developed out of geometric forms, as an afterthought, as it were, and that therefore they have no meaning. The most frequently quoted lines advocating such a position are those of Max Loehr:

> If the ornaments on Shang bronzes came into being as sheer design, form based on form alone, configurations without reference to reality or, at best, with dubious allusions to reality, then, we are almost forced to conclude, they cannot have had any ascertainable meaning—religious, cosmological, or mythological—meaning, at any rate, of an established, literary kind. Quite possibly these ornaments were iconographically meaningless, or meaningful



25. Man-beast motif in Shang bronze art.
(1) Freer Gallery knife. (2) *Yü* in the Sumitomo collection, Kyoto. (3) *Kuang* in Freer Gallery. (4) Motif on the *tsun*-beaker found in Fu-nan, Anhwei. (5) Ax from Tomb 5 at Yin-hsü, Anyang. (6) Motif on handle of four-legged cauldron found at Yin-hsü.

only as pure form—like musical forms and therefore unlike literary definitions.[13]

The opposing positions are clear, and a resolution easily suggests itself. The problem, I believe, can be approached from two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, we should be able to ascertain the historical sequence of the development of the animal designs to see if indeed geometric form alone has temporal precedence. On the other hand, we can propose an iconographic theory that is convincingly based on facts. With regard to the first point, we can simply state that zoomorphic decorative designs not only occurred as early as the earliest known decorative designs on ancient Chinese bronzes, but may be traceable even to the neolithic period. With regard to the second point, we need to devise a theory of meaning that scholars may be reasonably expected to find convincing. Such a theory should result from a straightforward reading of the textual and archaeological facts, and it should take into account *all* of the characteristic features of animal designs described above. I believe that such a theory exists.

In fact, explanations of the meaning of both the bronze ritual vessels and their animal motifs are furnished by the ancient Chinese themselves in pre-Ch'in texts. Recall the description of the myth of the separation of heaven and earth, as related in *Kuo Yü*. The Chinese original of the passage that was quoted in Chapter 3 used two words, *wu* (animal offerings) and *ch'i* (ritual vessels), in such a way as to make it clear that the shamans and shamanesses were instrumental in the communication between heaven and earth, or between ancestral spirits and other deities and living people, and also that both the vessels and the *wu*-animal offerings were a part of the paraphernalia essential for the performance of the heaven-earth communication ritual.

If the bronze vessels were designed to help in the ritual of bringing the dead and the living together, might not the animal designs on them have been an essential part of the paraphernalia? This question is clearly answered in *Tso Chuan*, third year of Duke Hsuan (606 B.C.). In that year, King Chuang of Ch'u went on a military expedition against the Jung tribe of Lu-hun. When he reached the Lo River he halted to view his troops near the Chou capital in Lo-yang. King Ting of Chou sent Wang-sun Man to welcome the King of Ch'u, who impudently asked Wang-sun about the size and the weight of the *ting*-tripod, the royal symbol. Wang-sun Man's pointed reply began as follows:

13. Max Loehr, *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China* (New York: The Asia Society, 1968), p. 13.

> *Ting*-tripods do not matter; virtue does. In the past when the Hsia dynasty was distinguished for its virtue, the distant regions put into pictures their distinctive *wu*, and the nine pastors sent in the metal of their provinces. The *ting*-tripods were cast, with representations on them of those *wu*. All the *wu* were represented, and [instructions were given] for the preparations to be made in reference to them, so that the people might know [the distinctions] between the helping and the harming spirits. Thus the people when they went among the rivers, marshes, hills, and forests did not meet with the injurious things, and the hill-spirits, monstrous things, and water-sprites did not meet with them [to do them injury]. Hereby a harmony was secured between the high and the low [or heaven and earth], and all enjoyed the blessings of heaven.[14]

This passage has been interpreted variously,[15] but the above translation represents a very simplified literal interpretation. To paraphrase, it means that the Hsia cast the bronze tripods and put the images of the *wu* on them so that living people would realize which animals were helping people to cross from earth to heaven and which animals were unhelpful or even harmful. Thus, Wang-sun Man as much as tells us that among the animals are some which are capable of helping the shamans and the shamanesses in their task of communicating between heaven and earth, and that the images of these animals were cast on ancient bronze ritual vessels. This is a relevant point in Wang-sun Man's reply to the King of Ch'u because he concludes by saying that the King of Chou is still very much in touch with heaven!

The key word in the *Tso Chuan* passage is *wu*, which is translated not as "objects" but as "animal offerings" or "animals to help in heaven-earth crossings." This reading is based on two facts. First, on the ancient vessels themselves we see not "objects" but animal images, which have to be the "representations on them of those *wu*" referred to in *Tso Chuan*. Second, the passage makes it clear that the purpose of the casting of tripods with *wu* images on them is such that "a harmony was secured between heaven and earth and all enjoyed the blessing of heaven," which conforms completely with the statement of *Kuo Yü* discussed earlier, concerning the function of the bronze vessels. If the bronze ritual vessels were a part of the shamanistic paraphernalia in the heaven-earth crossing, it should come as no surprise that images of animals who were helpers in this task were cast on the vessels.

14. Based on the translation in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), p. 293.

15. An example is Chiang Shao-yuan, *A Study of Travels in Ancient China* (in Chinese) (Taipei: Shang-wu, 1935; rpt. 1966).

Can the word *wu* be used in this way? The word appears in *Tso Chuan* some five or six dozen times and was used in various ways, but "animals with power" or "animal offerings" was the meaning on many occasions. Under the entry for the tenth year of Duke Ting (500 B.C.) we read that "the armor of the Shu-sun Shih are [decorated with] *wu*." According to what we know of ancient armor, the decor could only be animal designs, not "objects." Under the entry for the thirty-second year of Duke Chuang (662 B.C.) is the following passage:

> In autumn, in the seventh month, there was the descent of a spirit in Hsin. Kung Huei asked Kuo, the historiographer of the Interior, the reason for it, and he replied: "When a state is about to flourish, intelligent spirits descend in it, to survey its virtue. When it is going to perish, spirits also descend in it, to behold its wickedness . . . " The king then asked what should be done in the case of this spirit, and Kuo replied, "Present to it its own proper *wu*, which are those proper to the day on which it came."[16]

Wu here is usually translated as "offerings," which varied according to the spirits involved and the days in question. These documentary data, recalling the passage in *Kuo Yü*, show that the sacrificial animals were the same ones which had the power to help the shamans and shamanesses in their communication task, and that to make animal offerings was a concrete means of achieving communication between heaven and earth, the dead and the living.[17] We thus come to the inevitable conclusion that the animal designs on Shang and Chou bronzes are iconographically meaningful: they are images of the various animals that served as the helpers of shamans and shamanesses in the task of communication between heaven and earth, the spirits and the living.

Earlier, in connection with *lung*, or dragon, we saw the phrase "a pair of *lung*." This appears repeated in *Shan Hai Ching*, where the term is invariably associated with agents bringing messages back and forth between heaven and earth. The chapter entitled "Ta-huang hsi ching" contains an account of the well-known deed of Ch'i (or K'ai), the second sovereign of the Hsia dynasty: "Beyond the sea in the southwest, south of

16. Based on translation in Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, p. 120.

17. See Fu Ssu-nien, "Postscript to Mr. Ch'en P'an's essay discussing the story about the Duke shooting fish by arrow at T'ang in the *Ch'un Ch'iu*" (in Chinese), *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*, 7 (December 1938): 194–197. The character *wu* (which is a different character from the *wu* meaning shaman) in the oracle inscriptions of the Shang has not been absolutely identified and is sometimes confused with the character *li*, meaning plow; see Li Hsiao-ting, *Collected Interpretations of Characters in the Oracle Bone Inscriptions* (in Chinese), Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Monograph no. 50 (rpt. Taipei, 1970), pp. 317–330.