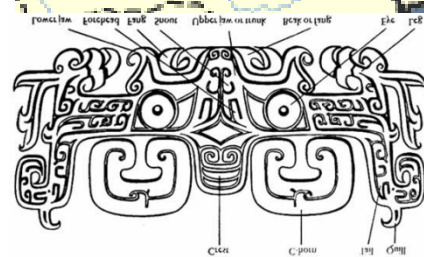
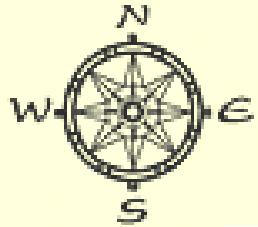


Death as Journey in Ancient China

Death, Burial and the Afterlife

Shang (1523 - 1028 B.C.)

商。。。 history



What is ‘death’?

- China’s earliest dictionary (c. 100 CE), Xu Shen’s *Shuowen*, explains death with a pun: the word “die” (*si* 死) meant *si* 澌 “exhaust, run out (of life force),” “what is left behind by humans” (*ren suo li ye* 人所離也).
- A roughly contemporary Daoist definition for life and death explained that being human was the gathering together of life force (*sheng qi* 生氣). Death was the dispersal (*san* 散) of this energy.
- Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (late 4th cent. BCE): death one point of transition or metamorphosis in the continuum of gathering and dispersed energy.
- For others, the moment of death represented a “cutting off” (*zhe* 折) of being human and the beginning of being a ghost (*gui* 鬼).

Ghosts (*gui*)

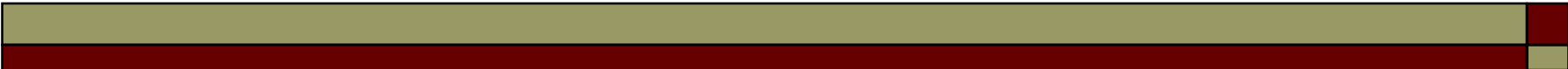
- To define “ghost,” Xu Shen once again resorted to a pun: a *gui* 鬼 is what a human “returns to” (*ren suo gui wei gui* 人所歸為鬼).
- “To return (home)” (*gui* 歸), according to the *Liji* 禮記, a Han compendium of earlier rituals, was “to return to the earth” (*guitu* 歸土).
- Only when a body has been returned to its home, the earth, could proper sacrifices—the mortuary feasts and tasting food rituals (*xiangchang* 享嘗)—take place in the main shrine (*miao* 廟) or at the sacred plot in the wilderness, the burial site (*zhao* 兆).
- Those without a proper burial could not receive sacrifices from their descendants, essential to nurturing them through transition and at critical junctures of their spirit journey. They had not “returned home” and thus roamed the earth causing illness and calamity. People who travelled outside of areas cleaned through exorcist rituals risked running into these ill-omened spirits and becoming sick or even dying.

Yin and Yang

- ❑ Dispersal of energy after death -- division of the forces of Yin and Yang.
- ❑ *po* Yin energy that attached itself to “home” (the tomb) and the *hun* Yang energy journeys into the world of spirits.
- ❑ Notion of a divided *hun* and *po* soul after death; the composite term *hunpo* represented a single entity representing the vital energy stored in the organs of the body.
- ❑ Han-period (206 BCE – 220 CE) assumed that part of a person’s energy was stored in the tomb and part floated above it or away.
- ❑ *hunpo* or “consciousness” might be worshipped at the gravesite, the *shen* “social identity” or “named spirit” was worshipped in the ancestral temple.

Yin and Yang *qi*

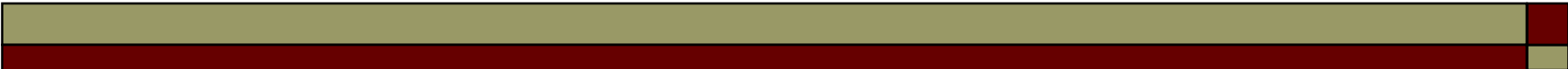
- ❑ Fourth century BCE Yin and Yang *qi* were probably used as medical terms that described the condition of the body; also applied to cosmological schemes, BUT the exact concept of a dual soul is not clear. → human life was understood as composed of *qi* and blood.
- ❑ Yin and Yang understood as the two most influential of many vapors.
- ❑ By the third century BCE, Yin and Yang were active cosmological concepts → meaning the four seasons were understood as products of Yin and Yang, the products of Heaven and Earth.
- ❑ These vapors or energies might be understood as the natural forces called “essence” (*jing* 精) or “spirit” (*shen* 神), which activated the human form (*xing* 形) → life was envisioned during the late Warring States period as a kind of “spirit illumination” (*shenming* 神明) that “penetrated” (*tong* 通) the body.
- ❑ When life *qi* was at its most vigorous (yang), the elite descendant would draw down a power (*de* 德) from Heaven, through the ancient kings and his ancestors.

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- Life in its most crude form, was perceived as originating from water and from Tai Yi, The Great One. Relevant to our study of death is the notion that at this time the spirit (*shen*) was linked to “earth,” which was seen as derived from “water,” and that the same word for water returning to its source (*gui*) was used to refer to a person returning to the earth. The flow (*xing* 行) of *qi* (a watery essence) above ground was like that of water on or below the ground—and both represented the natural flow of the cosmos or Dao.

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- Donald Harper suggests that the Warring States term *shenming*
 - represents a state of transcendent personal power and ability through
 - empathetic magic to communicate with “essences” and “spirits” outside
 - of the body as well.
 - When this vital radiance wavered or escaped the body for any reason, *yin* or destructive essences and spirits could intrude into the body causing illness and ultimately death.
 - Han texts referred to death as the “release from form” (*jiexing* 解形) → the escaped *shen* carried with it the person’s identity.
 - A person’s *shen* (identity) was worshipped in the shrine; potential to influence descendants.

Mozi (Mozi jiangou, “Shangtong, zhong”)

“In antiquity, the Sage Kings knew what the Heavenly Ghosts desired and thus escaped their disgust and sought out what was good for the world. They guided the world’s people to practice purification and abstinence, washing their faces and hands and bathing, keeping clean to present the alcohol and grain offerings in sacrifices to the Heavenly Ghosts (*tiangui*). They did not dare to present unclean sacrificial offerings to the spirits (*guishen*) or fail to present fat sacrificial animals and good quality jade staffs and discs, nor to be untimely in their spring and autumn sacrificial rituals, unjust in hearing court cases, unfair in the division of goods, or slovenly in their residences.”



Journeys (after death and even before)

- Journeys involve the transition from earthly social disorder to heavenly order after traversing a landscape filled with numerous spirits and famous figures from the past.

Han period practices around death

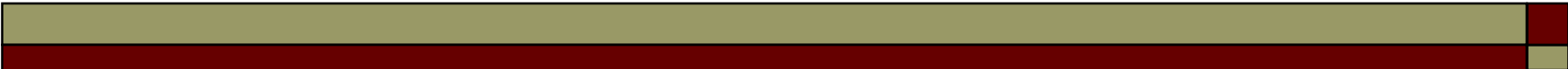
- ❑ Care for a dying person involved the creation of a special environment while the body was properly aligned within the cosmos and separated into a purified *yin* space.
- ❑ First, the seriously ill was moved to the primary wife's private chamber (a room, *shi*) behind the main hall (*tang* 堂).
- ❑ The patient was placed by the northern wall with his head facing east. Attendants swept and cleaned both inside and outside the house before visitors came to visit the patient.
- ❑ Removal of any musical instruments as the patient “desired quiet.”
- ❑ Visitors may have held hands with the patient through a window, perhaps a northern window in the east wall or through a special window in the wall that separated the back room from the main hall.

Han period practices around death

- When the illness became critical, the patient was laid on the ground as a symbol of returning to the earth. Attendants changed the patient into court attire and, as death drew near, they placed cotton gauze over his mouth and nostrils to determine when he had stopped breathing.
- The sons prayed a five sacrifices to exhaust their emotions (qing) and specialists prayed to the spirits above and below.
- When the dying one breathed his last, the sons broke out into crying and the wife leaped about wailing. Leaping was an extreme expression of grief prescribed at certain moments of mourning ritual along with the baring of the shoulders, binding the hair and waist with bands of rough fibers—all meant as expressions of communication with the spirit. → successive stages of the mourning ritual.

Mourning rituals

- ❑ Marked transitions from death through the traditional three-year period of mourning (for an elite male with progeny).
- ❑ Ensured the social identity of the deceased—linking together all aspects of the deceased: the aspects resident in his tomb, in his spirit tablet in the temple, and in Heaven.
- ❑ The first set of rituals involved “resuscitation,” or “summoning the soul” and preparation of the body.



Directions

- ❑ North and West were linked to Yin and the pollution of death;
- ❑ West was associated with the direction the spirit should go → Heaven

Mourning period

- ❑ 3 years of mourning
- ❑ Mourners would perform sacrifices at set periods to settle the spirit in the shrine and in Heaven.
- ❑ These sacrifices made sure that the souls did not have to stay underground in a region called the Yellow Springs (*huangquan*).
- ❑ Sacrifices also symbolized the gradual release of the mourners from the suffering of the mourning rituals (living at first in a primitive manner: in a hut, with crude clothing and nothing but gruel to eat).
- ❑ At feasting ceremonies, the corpse is represented by a personator, presumably a grandson, but referred to directly as “Corpse” (*shi*).
Why?

Thank you for your attention!

感謝大家！