

W4 (Week 2, Monday)
Origins and Unity
China

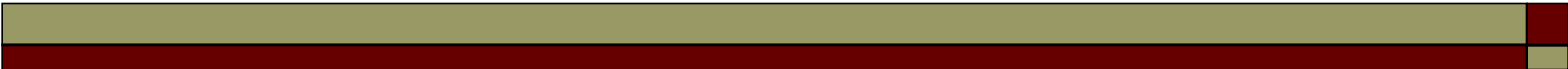
HPAR4010

What makes civilisation?

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Assumptions

- ❑ Common reading of the Chinese bronze age: humans and spirits were seen as continuous and as being harmoniously linked;
- ❑ Bronze age was formative period of Chinese history → continuity between human and divine realms continued throughout Chinese history
- ❑ Are these assumptions true?

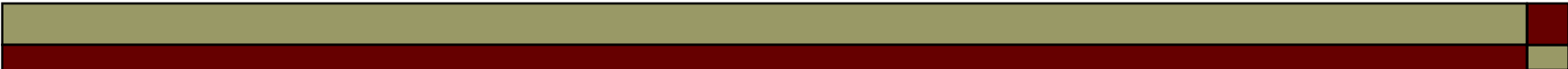


Mircea Eliade

“Mountains are often looked on as the place where sky and earth meet, a ‘central point’ therefore, the point through which the *Axis Mundi* goes, a region impregnated with the sacred, a spot where one can pass from one cosmic zone to another.” (Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 99-100)

K.C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, p.54.

Was Shang divination an act of Shang shamanism? The inscriptions make it clear they were directed to long-departed ancestors, and that the diviner served as an intermediary. The inscriptions often contain the word *bin*, 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 Di; the Supreme God. A phrase consisting of these elements is sometimes interpreted as "the king receives as a guest a specific ancestor," or "the kings receives as a guest the Supreme God." But more likely it means that the king "called upon" a departed ancestor or God. . . . 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.¹³



Julia Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p. xi.

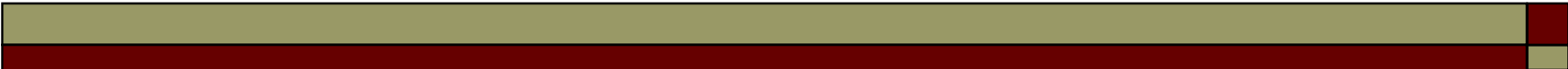
Argues that Chinese civilization came together because of a shared inspiration, namely

“that the human being is open to the divine and the spiritual, attuned to the divine and the spiritual, and desirous of becoming one with the divine and the spiritual. I am here referring to the familiar adage that describes the harmony underlining Chinese thought and civilization: Heaven and humanity are one – *tianren heyi* (literally Heaven and the human being join as one).”

Julia Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p. xi.

It is an adage that I believe to have originated in that very mystic and ecstatic union between the human being and the possessing deity or spirit. This was the primeval experience, the experience of a shaman. It was never forgotten. It has been celebrated in songs, myths and rituals. It was formulated philosophically as an expression of the continuum between the human being as the microcosm of the universe as macrocosm. And this microcosm-macrocosm correspondence has been basic to most of philosophising in China.¹⁹

→ Ecstatic experience between the shaman and the deity constitutes the primeval experience of Chinese culture, later correlative thinking is expression of this experience. The experience as such is universal; Chinese distinctiveness less in its remembrance of the experience.



David Keightley, “The Religious Commitment”.

THE BUREAUCRATIC LOGIC OF SHANG RELIGION

There is nothing uniquely Chinese in this account so far. Religious belief has played similar roles in the genesis of other states.¹¹ Significant in the Chinese case, however, were the modes of conceptualization central to the theology. For it is in the logical relationships that Shang theology postulated as basic, and in the emotions associated with those relationships, that we find the characteristic elements which influenced the development of political culture in Chou and later times. We find, in fact, a paradoxical situation: a Shang state permeated with a commitment to the ancestors, strongly religious in the totality of its demands; and yet we find that the commitment can be characterized as nonreligious, nonmysterious, and—because so explicitly goal directed—rational, in its logic. The logic may be characterized, in fact, with appropriate cautions to which I shall return, as “bureaucratic” in Max Weber’s sense of the term.¹² I do not mean to

David Keightley, “The Religious Commitment”

- positive relationship between Shang religious belief and later bureaucratic conceptions
- Keightley argues that “the high value that later Chinese placed on bureaucratic organization was partly an unintended consequence, not of the anxieties caused by fear of the ancestral dead, but of the way in which those anxieties were assuaged.”
- Bureaucratic reaction was China's "stay against confusion“ → religious faith in the validating efficacy of classification, hierarchy, number, and contract persisted even after Shang religious belief had receded.

Poo Mu-chou, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, p. 28.

In the [Shang] inscriptions one senses that the diviner addressed the deities, or ancestors, as if they were immediately accessible. In fact, since man believed so firmly that the deities and ancestors actually extended care and power to the propitiator directly, the world of extra-human powers in the conception of the Shang diviners should be seen as having been either conterminous with the human world or a continuous extension of it.⁵³

Humans and deities are seen as continuous.

bin 賓 (entertainment/hosting) Ritual

Crack-making on jiachen (day 41), Que divined: “The next *yisi* day we will perform the you ritual to Father Yi with a penned sheep.” Use.

Divined: “Cheng (K1) will be a guest to Di.”

Divined: “Cheng (K1) will not be a guest to Di.”

Divined: “Da Jia (K3) will be a guest to Cheng (K1).”

Divined: “Da Jia (K3) will not be a guest to Cheng (K1).”

Crack-making on jiachen (day 41), Que divined: “Xia Yi (K20) will be a guest to [Cheng (K1)].”

Divined: “Xia Yi (K20) will not be a guest to Cheng (K1).”

Divined: “Xia Yi (K20) ... to Di.”

Divined: “Xia Yi (K20) will not be a guest to Di.”

Divined: “Da Jia (K3) will be a guest to Di.”

Divined: “Da [Jia (K3)] will not be a guest to Di.”

Literature

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Thank you for listening!

感谢大家!

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