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RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Defining early Chinese religion is a difficult task. As opposed to the institutional organized religious traditions of Daoism and Buddhism, which took form in the early stages of the first millennium CE, early Chinese religion is a particularly amorphous entity, as it lacks many of the features modern scholars view as fundamental – a canonical set of sacred scriptures, organized clergy, or a fixed pantheon. In fact, the very label of “early Chinese religion” does not refer to a specific empirical singularity. It is heuristic device, a term coined by later scholars to help make sense of the ideas, beliefs, and practices that circulated in China between the Shang and Han Dynasties. Despite all of that, recent years have witnessed a surge in book-length monographs devoted to ancestral worship (Brashier 2011), funerary practices and visions of the netherworld (Cook 2006; Wu 2010; Lai 2015), and self-cultivation and individual pursuits of immortality (Harper 1998; Poo 1998), as well as an imposing two-part edited volume featuring thematic essays by leading scholars (Lagerwey and Kalinowski 2009). Drawing on the expanding corpus of newly excavated texts, tombs, and artifacts, these studies offer us exponentially more nuanced account of the world of practice in early China, including the divinatory and sacrificial rituals described in the previous chapter of this volume (Chapter 11, by Jue Guo).

This chapter will draw on a combination of transmitted and excavated sources to address a different issue, the emergence of new ways of thinking about ritual and justifying religious innovation. The gradual political waning of the centralized Zhou regime was accompanied by a complementary decline in the authority of the ritual system associated with it. New rituals, designed by pioneering religious innovators, began to emerge, challenging old ways of interacting with the divine realm. Alarmed by these challenges, elite thinkers who saw themselves as guardians of the old ritual system [*li*, 禮] of the Zhou were forced to create new ways of theorizing religion and explaining ritual efficacy. The following pages will provide an outline of this process by depicting it as a growing rivalry between two modes of religiosity: a practical theology associated with a mechanical approach to ritual utilized by religious innovators to justify the invention of new practices and an alternative mode of religiosity advocated by the old guard, which reconceptualized ritual using a moral and cosmological framework and stressed the need for a complete sense of religious piety and devotion to a fixed body of ritual practices.

Religion in the Shang and Western Zhou

In order to fully understand the emergence of new philosophical ideas about religion and ritual in the Warring States period we must first turn our attention to the religious landscape of the Shang and Western Zhou eras. Unfortunately, compared to the relatively rich collection of primary sources from the fifth century BCE onwards, evidence on earlier religious practices is quite scant. Excavations in sites associated with the Bronze Age cultures of Erlitou [二里头, first half of the second millennium BCE] and Erligang [二里岡, mid-second millennium BCE] have uncovered multiple bronze vessels and other ceremonial objects that point to the existence of standardized ritual practices mainly concerned with the proper disposal of the dead (Thorp 2006: 102–104). In the Anyang site [安陽], the location of the capital of the late Shang dynasty [商, ca. 1200 BCE], archaeologists have unearthed large caches of turtle plastrons and bovine scapulae that were used in divination rituals. Known as oracle bones, the inscriptions carved on these artifacts disclose the existence of a complex ritual system accompanied by a specialized vocabulary and strict schedules centered on ritual sacrifices to a wide variety of supernatural beings, from nature gods and local deities to the ancestral spirits of the royal clan. While the precise mechanism that governed oracle-bone divination is unclear, most scholars agree that the Shang believed that the ancestors, as well as other deities and spirits, had the ability to exert their influence on the human realm. Divination was thus used to communicate with the spirits in order to ascertain the correct ritual procedure to solicit their blessing and avoid their wrath (Keightley 2000: 101; Itō 1996: 24).

The practice of ancestral worship did not disappear after the fall of the Shang in 1046 BCE and continued to occupy a central role in the religious system of the subsequent Zhou dynasty. Inscriptions on bronze vessels attest to the importance of the ancestral cult as the prominent religious institution of the elite during the Western Zhou period (Kern 2009: 143). As ritual objects that were most likely placed in lineage temples to be used during sacrifices, the texts inscribed on the bronze vessels are commonly interpreted as proclamations made by the living to their deceased ancestors, communicating their achievements and asking for their approval and support (Falkenhausen 1993: 146–157; Rawson 1999: 387). While the inscriptions themselves are quite terse, other Western Zhou sources contain brief descriptions of ancestral rituals and help us shed some light on the mechanics of the ritual performed on their behalf. *The Book of Odes* [Shijing, 詩經] contains several odes and hymns that offer a description and analysis of sacrifices to supernatural deities. In the “Birth of the People” [shengmin, 生民, Mao #247], for instance, we find a narrative that provides us with an explanation for the origin of the sacrificial rituals of the Zhou. In this mythological account, the invention of sacrifice is assigned to Lord Millet [Houji, 后稷], the progenitor of the Zhou people, who was born out of a miraculous encounter between his human mother, Jiang Yuan [姜嫄], and his divine father, Lord-on-High [Shangdi, 上帝]. In addition to teaching the people how to properly cultivate the land, Lord Millet also shows them how to perform the proper annual sacrifices that would ensure a successful crop. Following a detailed description of these sacrifices, the ode concludes with the following statement:

卬盛于豆 We heap the wooden trenchers full;
 于豆于登 wooden trenchers, earthenware platters.
 其香始升 As the scent begins to rise
 上帝居歆 Lord-on-High is pleased.
 胡臭亶時 “What smell is this, so strong and good?”
 后稷肇祀 Lord Millet initiated the sacrifices,

庶無罪悔 and without error or fault,
以迄于今 we continue to perform them today

(Cheng 1985: 526; translation adapted from
Waley 1996: 247)

A similar description of the mechanism of sacrifice can be found in “Thorny Caltrop” [Chuci, 楚茨, Mao #209], which features an account of a ceremonial exchange between humans and spirits involving the offering of wine and food to satisfy the appetite of the latter and ensure they bestow their blessings on their descendants:

苾芬孝祀 Fragrant is the pious sacrifice
神嗜飲食 The spirits enjoy the wine and food
卜爾百福 The oracle predicts for you a hundred blessings
如幾如式 According to the proper quantities, according to the proper rules
既齊既稷 If you have brought sacrificial grain, you have brought millet
既匡既敕 You have brought baskets, you have arranged them
永錫爾極 We will forever give you the utmost blessings
時萬時億 Ten-thousandfold, myriadfold

(Cheng 1985: 427; Quoted in
Falkenhausen 1993: 149)

Both odes describe sacrifice as an act of communication between human and supernatural agents, whether it be a high deity like Lord-on-High or the ancestral spirits of their own lineage. In addition, they reveal an underlying assumption: the correct performance of ritual can ensure the desired outcome. Thus, despite the limited nature of Shang and Zhou sources, most modern scholars support the claim that their system of religious practice followed a mechanical *du-et-des* understanding of the relationship between the human and the divine realms. According to this mode of thought, once the correct ritual procedure is performed by humans, the spirits will have no choice but to respond favorably and bestow their blessings (Keightley 1978; Falkenhausen 1993; Goldin 2015; Pines 2002; Puett 2002). Given the mechanical nature of this interaction, the key for asserting control over the spirit world thus lies in identifying the deity responsible for the situation and ascertaining the exact ritual procedure needed to solve the problem they create, as attested in a large number of Shang oracle-bone inscriptions:

丁巳卜, 尹貞, 王賓父丁, 亡尤。

Dingsi day cracking, Yin divining: When the king hosts [the ancestral spirit of] Fu Ding and performs the *rong* sacrifice,¹ will there be no disapproval.

(Guo 1965: 441, quoted in Itō 1996: 24)

In order to control the results of what may be a potentially volatile exchange with the supernatural, an absolute adherence to the proper ritual forms was required. By addressing the deceased by their proper name and entering them into the sacrificial schedule the worshipers were able to take an unpredictable and potentially dangerous ghost and make it into a proper ancestor, thus mollifying his or her will. For these reasons, one of the main outcomes of this pragmatic theology based on a *du-et-des* relationship between the human and divine worlds was the growing systematization of the ritual system (Keightley 2004; Puett 2002: 41; Sterckx 2007: 30). Archaeological evidence suggests that such a process of standardization took place in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE. An analysis of excavated bronze vessels from that period suggests an increasing stress on homogeneity

in shape and design, accompanied by a growing uniformity in the form, content, and execution of the inscriptions. Dubbed as the Western Zhou “ritual revolution,” such a process of standardization could not have been possible without a centralized system of religious and political control. Driven by a desire to consolidate their authority, the Zhou regime began to regulate the production of religious artifacts (Rawson 1999: 419–438). This was accompanied by changes to the religious procedures themselves, namely a shift from collective rituals practiced by the entire community to more standardized liturgical rituals led by ritual professionals (Shaughnessy 1997: 165–195).

The decline of the Zhou and the rise of religious innovation

The rise of ritual professionalization was a direct result of the increasing complexity of the Zhou ritual system. As the descriptions in the *Odes* suggest, sacrifices to spirits and ancestors were highly intricate choreographed religious spectacles that employed musicians, dancers, libationers, invocators, personators, and other ritual experts. Performed in the Zhou capital, as well as other centers of political power, these rituals played a central role in establishing the Zhou ruler’s religious authority and the regime’s claim over the land. During the Spring and Autumn period [770–481 BCE], however, while the nominal sovereignty of the Zhou kings was still generally accepted, the *de facto* control over the territories of the Zhou state moved to the hands of local rulers. As these local rulers were striving for independence, they began rejecting the idea that royal ancestral spirits and royal performances of state sacrifices were essential for the prosperity of their own lands. Textual sources from the late Spring and Autumn and the early Warring States [453–211 BCE] periods confirm the gradual decline in the authoritative status of the Zhou ritual system and the rise of vigorous effort at religious innovation. The *Analects* [*Lunyu*, 論語] reflects a growing preoccupation with the idea of religious innovation, a departure from the old normative ritual system of the Zhou. In passage 3.17 we find the following exchange:

子貢欲去告朔之餼羊。子曰：「賜也，爾愛其羊，我愛其禮。」

Zigong wished to do away with the offering of a sheep in the New Moon Sacrifice.
The Master said: “You cherish the sheep; I cherish the ritual.”

(Yang 2007: 29).

The fact that Zigong, Confucius’ disciple, feels comfortable in suggesting a change to the Zhou New Moon Sacrifice is quite telling, as it reveals its declining status. Even more important, though, is Confucius’ categorical denial of any such attempts and his adamant devotion to the Zhou ritual system of *li*. Confucius, after all, made his living as a ritual expert. Unfortunately, it seems that he was living in a time when the demand for his particular sets of knowledge and skill were no longer in high demand. The following two passages, which discuss the notion of ingratiation, or toadyism [諂], reflect Confucius’ frustration with the current state of affairs:

子曰：「事君盡禮，人以為諂也。」

The Master said: “Serving one’s ruler in complete observance of ritual practice is seen by others as ingratiation.”

(3.18)

子曰：「非其鬼而祭之，諂也。」

The Master said: “To offer sacrifice to an [ancestral] spirit that does not belong to one’s own lineage is [an act of] ingratiation.”

(2.24) (Yang 2007: 22, 30)

While the problematic nature of the *Analec*s, its authorship, and its dating make it hard to reconstruct a comprehensive religious world view, the passages quoted here indicate that religious innovation was quite prevalent at that time. The rapidly fading memory of the golden age of Zhou rule paved the way for attempts to modify the old ritual system associated with it. The growing influence of local rulers at the expense of the royal house of the Zhou led some ritual experts to design new sacrifices in order to ingratiate themselves with the new powers that be, who did not necessarily favor the old system of *li*. The *Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, 春秋左传], another text from the late Spring and Autumn or early Warring States period, is strewn with accounts of such conflicts between religious innovators and supporters of the Zhou ritual system. The next narrative is a good example of this tension: during the performance of ancestral rites, the presiding master of ritual [zongbo, 宗伯] in the state of Lu, Xia Fuji, decided to rearrange the tablets in the temple, placing the tablet of the most recent ruler, Lord Xi, above that of his half-brother and predecessor Lord Min, an action that was in direct violation [ni 逆] to the sacrificial system. Asked to explain his actions, Xia Fuji offered the following explanation, followed by a rebuttal by the noble person [junzi, 君子], who is the exponent of the Zhou ritual system:

吾見新鬼大，故鬼小，先大後小，順也，躋聖賢，明也，明順，禮也。君子以為失禮，禮無不順，祀，國之大事也，而逆之，可謂禮乎？

“I saw that the new ghost is larger and the old ghost is smaller. To put the larger first and the smaller last is to follow the right order. To elevate sages and worthies is wise. To be wise and follow the right order is in accordance with ritual propriety.” The noble man considered this a deviation from ritual propriety: “In the performance of ritual there is nothing that does not follow the right order. Sacrifices are among the great affairs of the domain. Can it be called ritual propriety to violate the right sacrificial order?”

(Yang 1990: 524; Durrant, Li and Schaberg 2016: 473–475)

This account is an illustrative example of an ongoing dispute between a new guard of religious innovators, who had no problem suggesting alterations to the ritual system to suit their own agenda, and the old guard, who saw themselves as the preservers of Zhou culture.² A similar point is conveyed in another anecdote from the *Zuozhuan*:

鄭大旱，使屠擊，祝款，豎柎，有事於桑山，斬其木不雨，子產曰，有事於山，蓺山林也，而斬其木，其罪大矣，奪之官邑。

There was a major drought in [the state of] Zheng. [The king] sent Tu Ji, invocator Kuan, and an attendant named Fu to perform a sacrifice on Mulberry Mountain. They cut down the trees [for the sacrifice], but it did not rain. Zichan said: “[the goal of] performing a sacrifice on the mountain is to nourish its forests. These [men] have cut down the trees and thus their crime is immense.” He proceeded to take away their official positions and fiefdoms.

(Yang 1990: 1382; Durrant, Li and Schaberg 2016: 1539)

Zichan [子產, also known as Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑, d. 522 BCE] is mentioned throughout the text as a critic of popular religious ideas, especially the practice of interpreting astral phenomena as portents from divine forces (Goldin 1999: 39–45). Less is known about the identity of Tu Ji, Kuan, and Fu, except that they appear to be ritual specialists who held office in the state of Zheng and that they outranked Zichan in matters of religious affairs. When his state suffered a

drought, the king's instinctive reaction was to send the three to perform a sacrifice to on top of the sacred Mulberry Mountain. The procedure they performed seemed to deviate from the established traditional sacrifice in that it involved the removal of trees, presumably to be served as offerings to the spirits deemed to be responsible for the drought. When this performance failed to achieve the desired results, the three were castigated by Zichan. His criticism, however, was directed toward their decision to assuage the spirits of the mountain by departing from the established ritual procedure for this type of case. Much like the Confucius of the *Analects*, Zichan deemed religious innovation as a threat to the ritual system of the Zhou and the ideology it encapsulated.

Defending the Zhou ritual system thus required the construction of a new theoretical framework to replace the old *du-et-des* model, which was now used by religious innovators to justify their actions. This new model offered a revised explanation of the relationship between the human and divine realms, emphasizing the moral aspects of this interaction. It also involved the construction of a new discourse on ritual, reconceptualizing *li* as a set of ethical, sociopolitical, and religious guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual and the state.³ According to this theory, piety to the *li* was not only the mark of a refined cultivated human being but also the only viable way to interact with the divine realm.

Morality and religious thought in the Warring States period

The growing emphasis on morality as a key component of religious behavior can be traced to the mid-to-late Western Zhou period. Shang oracle-bone inscriptions and early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and hymns are utterly devoid of any reference to morality in interacting with divine forces, instead emphasizing the mechanical *du-et-des* nature of this relationship. The key for obtaining blessing and avoiding punishment lies in knowing the correct ritual procedure. Later sources, however, reveal the emergence of an alternative religious model centered around Heaven [tian, 天], an anthropomorphized deity that bestows its mandate [ming, 命] on the Zhou ruler, known as the Son of Heaven [tianzi, 天子], to govern on its behalf in a moral and virtuous [de, 德] fashion. The notion of an all-seeing Heaven that assigns rewards and punishments based not on the correct offering of sacrifices but on the merit of one's moral behavior became a central component of political and religious thought from that point onward (Pines 2002: 58; Poo 1998: 30). One of the best examples for this new mode of religiosity can be found in the *Mozi* [墨子]. In the "Will of Heaven" [Tianzhi, 天志] chapter, we find the following admonition to a potential ruler:

然則天亦何欲何惡？天欲義而惡不義。然則率天下之百姓以從事於義，則我乃為天之所欲也。我為天之所欲，天亦為我所欲。然則我何欲何惡？我欲福祿而惡禍祟。若我不為天之所欲，而為天之所不欲，然則我率天下之百姓，以從事於禍祟中也。

Now, what is it that Heaven desires and what does it loathe? Heaven desires what is right and loathes what is not right. Thus, if I lead the people of the world to act in accordance with what is right, then I will be doing what Heaven desires. And if I do what Heaven desires, then Heaven will do what I desire. Now, what is it that I desire and what do I loathe? I desire good fortune and emoluments, and loathe calamities and disasters. If I do not do what Heaven desires but rather what it loathes, then I will be steering all the people under Heaven to act in ways that lead them into disaster and calamity.

(Sun 2001: 193)

The religious model of the *Mozi* can be described as a blend of the old *du-et-des* mode of religiosity and the notion of a moral universe governed by an anthropomorphized Heaven. On one hand, it features a relatively straightforward relationship between humans and Heaven – if we follow the basic principles of moral behavior, Heaven will be pleased and repay us with good fortune and material benefit, whereas immoral behavior will result in misfortune and adversity. On the other hand, this mechanical system of give and take is not based on the offering of sacrifices. The *Mozi* contains little mention of religious ritual. In fact, one of the most well-known features of the text is its condemnation of *li*, especially the prolonged funerary rites and the elaborate musical performances that accompanied the rituals of the Zhou elite, which the author perceives as a frivolous waste of resources and manpower that can be otherwise used to promote the benefit of the state. In that sense, the ideas articulated in the *Mozi* stand in opposition to the attitude expressed by such figures as Confucius and Zichan, who sought to protect and maintain the integrity of the traditional ritual system of the Zhou at all costs. This view, in addition to the text's adamant efforts to prove the existence of ghosts and spirits, has led some scholars to identify Mozi as an anti-elite reformer and argue that the religious model expressed in the text belongs to the realm of archaic popular religion (Graham 1989: 47). When read in the context of the religious innovation debate, however, it becomes clear that the relationship between the human and the divine articulated in the “Explaining Ghosts” [Mingui, 明鬼] chapter has more in common with the new moral theology than the old *du-et-des* model (Sterckx 2013). Much like Heaven, the ghosts and spirits of the *Mozi* are omniscient anthropomorphized deities that have a keen interest in the human world:

雖有深谿博林，幽澗毋人之所，施行不可以不董，見有鬼神視之... 嘗若鬼神之能賞賢如罰暴也，蓋本施之國家，施之萬民，實所以治國家利萬民之道也。

Even in the deepest valleys or vast forests, in those hidden places where no one lives, you must always act properly. For the ghosts and spirits will see what you do... Once the notion that ghosts and spirits can reward the worthy and punish the wicked be firmly established and executed among the various states and the common people, it could surely be used to bring order to the state and great benefit to the people.

(Sun 2001: 234, 243)

As this passage suggests, ghosts and spirits play a crucial role in the philosophical system of the *Mozi*. Much like Heaven, they function as an awe-inspiring deterrent for immoral behavior, an external device designed to ensure sociopolitical order. Given their significance, it is hardly surprising that the author spends most of the “Explaining Ghosts” chapter attempting to convince his readers of their existence. These sustained efforts, however, also indicate a waning belief in the power of supernatural beings, their perspicuity, and their ability to influence the human world. The recent discovery of excavated manuscripts that were not preserved in the transmitted canon reinforces the importance of this topic in Warring States religious and philosophical discourse. The Shanghai Museum text, *The Perspicuity of Ghosts and Spirits* [*Guishen zhi Ming*, 鬼神之明], for example, revolves entirely around this issue.⁴ Similarly to the *Mozi*, the text adamantly argues for the existence of ghosts and spirits and treats them as ultimate arbiters of reward and punishment. In dealing with their omniscient nature, however, it promotes a more skeptical claim in arguing that there are areas in which ghosts and spirits are perspicuous and areas in which they are not perspicuous [夫鬼神有所明，又有所不明] (Ma 2005: 310; Brindley 2009: 216).

The *Great Drought of Lu* [*Lubang Dahan*, 魯邦大旱], another excavated text from the Shanghai Museum corpus, offers more evidence for the centrality of the ghosts and spirits debate in the Warring States period while also shedding more light on the tension between religious

innovators who continued to operate under the *du-et-des* mode of religiosity and supporters of the new moral theology. When a great drought occurred in the state of Lu, Duke Ai [魯哀公, r. 494–468 BCE] summoned Confucius and pleaded for his advice. Confucius, in return, explained that the drought was caused by the duke's failure to practice moral government. When asked for a concrete solution to the problem, Confucius provided the following statement:

庶民知說之事鬼也,不知刑與德。汝毋愛圭璧幣帛於山川,正刑與德。

The common people only know of the *shui* rainmaking sacrifice⁵ [directed towards] the spirits but know nothing of [ruling through] law and moral government. Thus, you must be generous in offering jades and silks to the [Spirits of the] Mountains and Rivers and also implement laws and moral government.

(Ma 2002: 205–206)

Confucius' recommendation to pursue both courses resonates with his famous assertion in the *Analec*s regarding the need to venerate ghosts and spirits but to keep them at a distance (Yang 2007: 61–62). The text, however, does not end with that. Upon his return, Confucius reports the case to his disciple Zigong [子貢, 520–446 BCE] and asks for his opinion. Zigong's response is quite surprising:

若夫政刑與德,以事上天,此是哉! 若夫毋愛圭璧幣帛於山川, 毋乃不可。夫山,石以為膚,木以為民,如天不雨,石將焦,木將死,其欲雨,或甚于我,何必恃乎名乎? 夫川,水以為膚,魚以為民,如天不雨,水將涸,魚將死,其欲雨,或甚于我,何必恃乎名乎?

Ruling through law and moral government, thereby serving Heaven above, this is correct! Lavishly offering jades and silks for the [Spirits of the] Mountains and Rivers, this I cannot endorse. As for mountains, stones are their skin and trees are their people. If the sky does not send down rain, the stones will roast and the trees will die. Their desire for rain is certainly deeper than ours – how can they rely solely on our words [of evocation]? As for rivers, water is their skin and fish are their people. If the sky does not send down rain, the water will dry up and the fish will die. Their desire for water is certainly greater than ours – how can they rely solely on our words [of evocation]?

(Ma 2002: 207–209)

This case raises a few important points. First, it further reinforces the tension between the ritual experts, who sought to perform the rainmaking sacrifices in order to appease the Mountain and River Spirits, and their opponents, who believed that serving Heaven can only be achieved through moral government. Secondly, it demonstrates that while the viability of this old model was certainly questioned by educated elites, its popularity among the common people remained intact. From a practical point of view, offering sacrifices to the Mountains and Rivers based on the *du-et-des* model of interacting with the divine was still seen as the most immediate and commonsensical solution to the state of drought. The following *Zuo*zhuan passage conveys a similar sentiment:

秋,七月,有神降于莘,惠王問諸內史過曰,是何故也。對曰:國之將興,明神降之,監其德也;將亡,神又降之,觀其惡也...王曰:若之何?對曰:以其物享焉,其至之日,亦其物也,王從之,內史過往,聞號請命,反曰,號必亡矣,虐而聽於神,神居莘,六月,號公使祝應,宗區,史囂,享焉,

神賜之土田，史嚚曰，號其亡乎，吾聞之國將興，聽於民，將亡，聽於神，神聰明正直而壹者也，依人而行，號多涼德，其何土之能得。

In autumn, in the seventh month, there was a spirit that descended at Shen. King Hui asked the court scribe Guo, “What is the reason for this?” He responded: “When a domain is about to prosper, radiant spirits descend there and inspect its virtue. When it is about to fall, spirits also descend there to observe its offenses . . .” The king then asked: “What should I do about it?” He replied: “Use the appropriate objects in making offering to the spirit. These ought to be the objects corresponding to the day of its arrival.” The king followed this. The court scribe Guo traveled to Shen to present the offerings. There he heard that the duke of Guo had been requesting favors [from the spirit]. Upon his return, he said: “The state of Guo is sure to perish. Its ruler is cruel and heeds spirits.” The spirit dwelled in Shen for six months. The duke of Guo then instructed Invocator Ying, Ancestral Attendant Qu, and Scribe Yin to make offerings to it. The Spirit promised to give him the state of Guo. Scribe Yin said, “Surely the state of Guo will perish! I have heard that when a state is about to prosper, its ruler heeds the people; but when it is about to perish, he heeds the spirits. Spirits are keen of ear and eye, upright, straightforward in responding to human behavior. The state of Guo in many cases has shown little enough virtue – how can it possibly expand its territory?”

(Yang 1990: 251–253; Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: 223,
with slight modifications)

As in the previous examples, this story points to an ideological conflict between two opposing sides. On one side, we have the duke of Guo, the representative of the old *du-et-des* mode of thought, who believes that if he provides the proper offerings to the descending spirit it will repay him by expanding his territory. On the opposite side, court scribe Guo and scribe Yin, much like Zigong in the *Great Drought of Lu*, epitomize a new mode of religious thought based on a belief in a moral universe. Spirits, they argue, cannot be swayed by lavish offering. Their actions are a result of the ruler’s behavior – ethical conduct and proper government will be repaid by blessings, while a lack of virtue will result in disaster.

Moreover, by arguing that the king should offer the spirit the proper offerings according to its day of descent, it can be said that the author is trying to establish a strong link between moral behavior and piety to a standardized system of ritual. *The Drought of the Great King of Jian* [Jian Dawang Bohan, 東大王泊旱], another Shanghai Museum excavated text, makes an analogous argument. When a harsh drought fell upon his kingdom, the ruler of Jian, a small kingdom inside the southern state of Chu [楚], ordered one of his diviners to figure out which deity is responsible for the drought so that they may offer a sacrifice to it in the proper place and stop the drought. The king insisted on participating in the divination process while standing in the blazing sun, and this caused him to fall ill.⁶ Taking his illness as another indicator for the dissatisfaction of the deities, the king becomes increasingly distressed and attempts to persuade his diviners to look for an alternative site for the sacrifice. His idea of performing sacrifices to the Mountain and River Spirits that resided outside the kingdom of Jian, however, attracts much criticism in the royal court. In order to solve this dispute, the rival sides seek the advice of the Chief Minister. After hearing both side of the argument, he responds:

君入而語僕之言於君王：君王之騷從 今日以瘥 . . . 君王元君，不以其身變釐尹之常故；釐尹爲楚邦之鬼神主，不敢以君王之身變亂鬼神之常故。夫上帝鬼神高明甚，將必知之。君王之病將從今日以已。

“Please go back and convey these words to the king. Tell him that from today he will start to recover from his illness. . . . The king is a good ruler. He did not change the fixed rules of divination for his own sake. You, diviner, control the [sacrifices] to the ghosts and spirits in the state of Chu. You also did not dare to change the fixed rules only for the sake of your ruler thereby creating disorder among the ghosts and spirits. Shang Di, the ghosts, and the spirits are highly discerning. They will surely recognize this. Thus, from this day, the king will start to recover from his illness.”

(Ji, Yuan and Chen 2007: 75)

As in the *Great Drought of Lu*, this passage suggests that the most natural reaction to a state of drought at the time was to perform a rainmaking sacrifice directed at natural deities. In addition, it also gives us of more information about the structure of these rituals, the identity of the ritual specialists who performed them, and the religious framework that was used to explain them. According to this passage, the sacrificial procedure begins with a divination designed to ascertain the identity of the responsible deity and locate the appropriate location for the sacrifice. Ritual is perceived as a repertoire of techniques placed at the disposal of the ritual specialist in order to create a sacred space in which interaction with the divine is possible. The ultimate success of the sacrifice depends on the ritualist's ability to use his repertoire to manipulate the deities into reciprocating. This type of trial-and-error *du-et-des* model associated with Shang and Western Zhou religiosity was thus still quite pervasive during the Warring States (Sterckx 2007: 32–37).

As the *Drought of the Great King of Jian* suggests, however, the practical model advocated by natural experts and ritual specialists was criticized by the new aspiring elite thinkers, who offered their own model of ritual efficacy focused on piety to a fixed ethical system of practice. Like Zichan and Zigong before him, the Chief Minister stresses the overall devotion to the system as a whole over the performance of a specific ritual. The state of Chu, he argues, has fixed rules about sacrifice. Changing them for the sake of the king's selfish wish for divine blessings will not only harm him politically but will also create chaos in the divine realm. Devotion to this holy fixed system of rituals, on the other hand, will not escape the eyes of the Lord-on-High and other divine powers. These deities will repay such religious piety by healing the king and, by extension, his state.

Xunzi's Moral theology

The examples from the *Zuozhuan* and the Shanghai Museum manuscripts reveal the emergence of a moral mode of religiosity that links the efficacy of sacrifice to a sustained adherence to a strict ethical, political, and ritual system. Nonetheless, they also demonstrate that this mode of thinking about the relationship between the human and the divine was by no means homogeneous at that time. On one side of the spectrum, we have Zigong, who vehemently denies the possibility of an interaction between humans and ghosts and spirits. Supernatural beings, he argues, do not need our offerings. The whole notion of swaying them through prayer and sacrifice is therefore completely useless. On the other side, we find figures such as Court Scribe Guo, Scribe Yin, and the Grand Minister, who still believe in a universe in which ghosts and spirits can be convinced to bestow their blessings and avoid causing harm. The only viable way to sway them, however, is by remaining devoted to the *li* ritual system and the ethico-religious principles it represents. The text associated with the late Warring States thinker Xunzi [荀子, ca. 310–218 BCE], which contains the most comprehensive and influential criticism against the *du-et-des* mode of religiosity, leans toward the skeptical side of the spectrum, similar to the views articulated by Zigong in the *Great Drought of Lu*.

The “Discourse on Heaven” [Tianlun, 天論] chapter has often been described as the fullest and most systematic version of the philosophical skepticism and critical attitude toward the popular belief in ghosts and spirits or in a sentient and compassionate Heaven that is actively engaged in human affairs. One of Xunzi’s main goals in this chapter is to clearly distinguish between the natural and the human world. Each realm, he claims, has its own rules and mechanisms: Heaven’s Way [Tiandao, 天道] and the Human Way [Rendao, 人道] are discrete realms, and there is no way to communicate between the two spheres, let alone manipulate this communication to our advantage. According to this world view, calamities do not arise due to malicious supernatural powers or a disgruntled Heaven:

星隊木鳴，國人皆恐。曰：是何也？曰：無何也！是天地之變，陰陽之化，物之罕至者也。怪之，可也；而畏之，非也。夫日月之有食，風雨之不時，怪星之黨見，是無世而不常有之。

When stars fall and trees cry, all the people in the state are afraid. They ask: why is this happening? I answer: for no particular reason. Those things occasionally occur due to the transformation of Heaven and Earth and the transformation of *yin* and *yang*. We may be surprised by them but we should not fear them. Solar and lunar eclipses, unseasonable rains and winds, and dubious sightings of strange stars – these things have been quite common throughout the ages.

(Wang 1988: 313)

This argument can be likened to other anti-portent arguments found in the *Zuozhuan*. Omens, argues that author, are inevitable. We cannot avoid them by appealing to supernatural beings. The only way to do so is first to understand the pattern and movement of Heaven and then to use this acquired knowledge to our advantage. This can be gained through observing the course of Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons empirically, recording its configuration, sequence, and movements. These type of assertions have led many modern scholars to hail Xunzi as a staunch critic of religion and the forebear of rationalist thought in China (Feng 2007: 232). Reading this passage against the backdrop of the Shanghai Museum texts, however, offers us an opportunity to contextualize his theory of ritual within the larger Warring States religious discourse as a mature articulation of an emerging new theology designed to reassert the authority of the fixed body of religious practices known as *li*. Set against the *du-et-des* model of their rivals, this elite mode of religiosity seeks to create an indissoluble link between ritual as a system of ethical and sociopolitical guidelines and its divine cosmic origin. Xunzi’s critique of the popular theory of ritual efficacy is presented in the following passage from the “Discourse on Heaven” chapter:

雩而雨，何也？曰：無佗也，猶不雩而雨也。日月食而救之，天旱而雩，卜筮然後決大事，非以為得求也，以文之也。故君子以為文，而百姓以為神。以為文則吉，以為神則凶也。

If a rainmaking sacrifice is held, and then it rains, what of it? I say, there is no reason. It would still rain even if we do not hold the sacrifice. When the sun and moon are eclipsed, a sun-saving rite is performed; when Heaven sends a drought, a rainmaking sacrifice is performed; before deciding upon serious matters, tortoise shell and milfoil divinations are performed. These [rituals] are not held in order to get a result, but in order to establish a pattern. Thus, the gentleman takes [ritual] as a matter of establishing a pattern while the common people take it as a matter of [sacrificing to the] spirits. To take [ritual] as creating a pattern is auspicious. To take it as [sacrifice to the] spirits is ill-fated.

(Wang 1988: 316)

It is important to note that Xunzi does not object to the performance of these rituals but to the religious mentality that underlies them. Instead of the old mechanical mode of ritual interaction in which rituals are performed for the sake of the spirits, Xunzi's model strives to portray ritual participation as an activity that establishes a pattern. Writing for a new elite audience of educated scholar-aspirants, Xunzi wishes to establish a new mode of religiosity based on an absolute sense of devotion to the system of *li* and the ethico-religious values it represents. The efficacy of ritual, he argues, is not based on its ability to mollify supernatural beings but on its ability to promote two interrelated religious goals: individual ethical, physical, and spiritual transformation and the maintenance of harmony between the human and the divine.

In addition to the shifts in the realm of religious thought and the emergence of new theoretical models of ritual and sacrifice, the late Warring States period also witnessed the rise of new religious practices, such as meditation, sexual regimens, and calisthenics, designed to achieve a variety of personal goals, from the prolongation of life to the attainment of divine-like powers (Harper 1998; Roth 1999; Despeux 2004). The dissemination of these practices and the self-divinization claims they embodied was aided by rising literacy rates and the development of an active manuscript culture (Tavor 2016). This process, however, represented a clear threat to ritual specialists, whose status and authority were based on the notion that their services were the only viable way to mollify the spirits and solicit their blessings (Puett 2002: 155–116). As a ritual specialist himself, Xunzi responded to this challenge by portraying ritual as an efficacious technique of self-cultivation that can induce a physical and cognitive transformation and achieve the same bounties promised by proponents of self-divinization practices but at the same time also promote social, as well as cosmic, harmony (Tavor 2013). This idea is clearly articulated in the following passage from the “Discourse on Music” [Yuelun, 樂論] chapter:

君子以鐘鼓道志，以琴瑟樂心；動以干戚，飾以羽旄，從以磬管。故其清明象天，其廣大象地，其俯仰周旋有似於四時。故樂行而志清，禮脩而行成，耳目聰明，血氣和平，移風易俗，天下皆寧，美善相樂。

The gentleman utilizes the bells and drums in order to create correspondence between his consciousness and the Way and the zithers and lutes to gladden his mind. He moves wielding the shield and battle-axe. Adorned with oxtails and plumes, he follows the rhythm of the chime stones and pitch pipes. In his purity and brilliance he models himself after Heaven, in his greatness and vastness he models himself after Earth, and in his posturing and movements he models himself after the Four Seasons. Thus, when music is performed, his will becomes pure, and when ritual is cultivated his conduct is perfected. His hearing becomes acute and his vision clear, the flowing of his blood and *qi* harmonious and uniform, his practices altered and his customs changed. All under Heaven is made tranquil and everybody joins together in the joy of beauty and goodness.

(Wang 1988: 381–382)

This description is important for several reasons. First, it clearly shows that for Xunzi, ritual is an embodied religious activity that can produce a bio-spiritual transformation on a communal level. Secondly, it also articulates a new notion of the interaction between the human and the divine that presents ritual not as a tool for mollifying the spirits but as a vehicle for humans to participate in the workings of the cosmos. Ritual performances, argues Xunzi, allow us to use the components of the cosmos as models for our mental attitude and bodily movements. By following the ritual script and playing the part of a deity, natural force, or a cultural hero, humans are thus able to enter into a relationship with the divine. Moreover, as opposed to the

mechanical *du-et-des* mode, in this relationship humans are equal parts in a triad with Heaven and Earth [參於天地矣] (Wang 1988: 443) instead of mere blessing-seekers. All of this is due to the cosmic origin of ritual:

水行者表深，表不明則陷。治民者表道，表不明則亂。禮者，表也；非禮，昏世也；昏世，大亂也。故道無不明，外內異表，隱顯有常，民陷乃去。

Those who cross waterways mark them where it is deep. If the markers are not clear, the people will drown. Those who govern people mark the Way. If the markers are not clear, disorder will arise. Ritual is the marker. Opposing ritual means throwing the world into darkness. Casting darkness upon the world will bring great disorder. Thus, when the Way has nothing which is not clear, when different markers are set to distinguish between the inner and the outer and when darkness and light are constant, then the things which cause people to drown would be eradicated.

(Wang 1988: 318–319)

Rituals, argues Xunzi, are not arbitrary. The system of *li* functions as a set of markers left by sages, a script that can be used as a guiding light for the rest of humanity to follow. Moreover, since rituals are based on the fixed patterns of the Way, one must adhere to the ritual system of *li* without attempting to alter it. Xunzi's attitude concerning the Way can thus be best understood as one of religious reverence or devotion. By creating an indissoluble link between the structure of the universe and the system of *li*, Xunzi offers an explicit theological justification for a new mode of elite religiosity focused on a commitment to a body of ethico-religious behavioral guidelines. According to this moral theology, rituals are not performed in order to seek an anticipated result from a supernatural deity. Instead, the performance of rituals of the Way is a pattern-establishing activity that denotes the religious devotion and the moral stature of the practitioner.

Early imperial religion and the cosmic nature of ritual

While Xunzi did not live to see the unification of China under the rule of the Qin dynasty [221–206 BCE], his philosophical theories played a significant role in shaping the newly emerging imperial ideology, especially during the early decades of the Western Han [206 BCE – 9 CE] (Goldin 2007). The new sociopolitical circumstances brought forth a new wave of religious innovation. In their desire to augment their power and announce their supremacy, autocratic emperors such as the First Emperor of the Qin [Qin Shi Huangdi, 秦始皇帝] and Emperor Wu of the Han [漢武帝] embarked on ritualistic tours of inspection, offering cult to a variety of deities and announcing their ascent to both the human and divine realms. In addition, they relied on the services of religious experts to design new rituals, such as the Feng [封] and Shan [禪] sacrifices on Mount Tai [泰山], to the Yellow Emperor [Huangdi, 黃帝] at Yong [雍], and to the deity the Grand One [Taiyi, 太一] at Ganquan [甘泉] (Kern 2000; Lewis 1999; Bujard 2009). These rituals, which were centered on the figure of the emperor as a semi-divine figure and his own personal quest for immortality (Puett 2002: 258), attracted much criticism from educated literati who saw themselves as guardians of the old ritual system of the Zhou. Alarmed by these grandiose attempts at religious innovation, they sought to offer their own model of imperial religion that incorporated many elements of Warring States elite religiosity, including the emphasis on piety to the overall system of *li* and the moral theology that stood at its base. One of the best examples of their efforts is the *Records of Rites* [*Liji*, 禮記].

Edited during the Western Han, based on some earlier material, some of it dating back to the Warring States period, the compilation of the *Liji* was part of an organized project led by a

group of literati designed to produce an ideal authoritative and standardized ritual framework for the new imperial religion (Riegel 1993; Nylan 2001). In addition to prescriptive descriptions of various rituals and sacrifices, the *Liji* also contains multiple passages that can be read as attempts to theorize ritual and explain the origin, nature, and function of the system of *li*. Following the line previously articulated in the writings of Xunzi, it depicts rituals as human artifacts created by the sages based on cosmic patterns (Puett 2009: 697). The “Meaning of Sacrifice” [Jiyi, 祭義] chapter, for instance, begins with the following assertion:

祭不欲數，數則煩，煩則不敬。祭不欲疏，疏則怠，怠則忘。是故君子合諸天道：春禘秋嘗。霜露既降，君子履之，必有淒愴之心，非其寒之謂也。春，雨露既濡，君子履之，必有怵惕之心，如將見之。樂以畋來，哀以送往，故禘有樂而嘗無樂。

Sacrifices should not be frequently repeated. Such frequency is indicative of importunateness; and importunateness is inconsistent with reverence. Nor should they be at distant intervals. Such infrequency is indicative of indifference; and indifference leads to forgetting them altogether. Therefore, the gentleman, in accordance with the ways of Heaven, offers the *di* sacrifice in the spring and *chang* sacrifice in autumn. When he treads on the dew which has descended as hoar-frost he cannot help a feeling of sadness, which arises in his mind, and cannot be ascribed to the cold. In spring, when he treads on the ground, wet with the rains and dews that have fallen heavily, he cannot avoid being moved by a feeling as if he were seeing his departed friends. We meet the approach of our friends with joy, and see them off with sadness, and hence the *di* spring sacrifice in spring includes musical performances, but not at the *chang* sacrifice in autumn.

(Sun 1989: 1207–1208; translation adapted from Legge 1885: 210)

This passage illustrates one of the main tenets of the *Liji* in particular and the new imperial religion in general – sacrifice is only effective when its performed at the right time according to the seasonal ritual schedule. In the Monthly Ordinances [Yueling, 月令] texts, a new genre that emerged in the third and second centuries BCE, we find detailed monthly schedules for the performance of state rituals. Materials pertaining to this ritualistic timetable can be found in the “Seasonal Patterns” [Shize, 時則] chapter of the *Huainanzi* and the “Monthly Ordinances” chapter of the *Liji*, but the most detailed version is depicted in the first part of the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*, also known as the “Twelve Chronicles” [shierji, 十二記]. Divided into twelve sections by month, each chapter provides ritual instructions for the ruler, including detailed descriptions of the changes in the ruler’s clothes, regalia, diet, and policies, all in correspondence to the monthly cycles. Failure to follow the schedule can thus result in disaster, as detailed in the opening chapter of the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*, 1.1/7:

孟春行夏令，則風雨不時，草木早槁，國乃有恐。行秋令，則民大疫，疾風暴雨數至，藜莠蓬蒿並興。行冬令，則水潦為敗，霜雪大摯，首種不入。

If summer ordinances are carried out in the early spring, winds and rain will not follow their proper timing, plants and trees will wither prematurely, and terror will sweep across the state. If autumn ordinances [are carried out in the early spring], the common people will suffer great plagues, strong winds and torrential rains will frequently occur, and pestilent weeds will flourish. If winter ordinances [are carried out in the early spring], floods and monsoons will bring calamity, frost and snow will wreak ferocious havoc, and the first-sown crops will fail to grow.

(Chen 1984: 2)

Much like the *Xunzi*, this passage can be read as a representation of a new mode of religiosity that focuses on the human instead of the divine. Whereas in the *du-et-des* model natural disasters are seen as an outcome of a disgruntled divine being, according to the new theory, calamities are caused by the inability of humans to abide by the correct ritual schedule created by the sages based on cosmic patterns. Religious innovation, attempts to appeal to ghosts and spirits through sacrifices that are not a part of the system, is thus posited as the cause for misfortune, rather than the remedy. Another good example for this attitude can be found in the “Evolution of Ritual” [Liyun, 禮運] chapter of the *Liji*, an essay that contains one of the most comprehensive theories of the origin and function of ritual in early China (Ing 2012; Puett 2010). It begins with a dialogue between Confucius and one of his disciples, Yan Yan, after they attend the seasonal *zha* [蜡] sacrifice, which marks the end of the lunar year. Confucius uses this occasion to lament the waning status of the system of *li* and explain its extreme importance in ensuring sociopolitical, as well as cosmic, order. In order to prove this point, he offers his disciple a detailed account of the evolution of ritual, going back to ancient times:

夫禮之初，始諸飲食。其燔黍捭豚，污尊而抔飲，蕡桴而土鼓，猶若可以致其敬於鬼神。及其死也，升屋而號，告曰：皋！某復！然後飯腥而苴孰。

As for the origin of ritual, it started with various acts of offering drink and food [to the spirits]. These included broiling millet, slicing and roasting pork, digging small holes in the ground and using it as goblets, and using the *kui* plant to fashion drumming sticks in order to pound on the earthen drums. [The ancients believed that through these offerings] they can extend their reverence to the ghosts and spirits. When somebody died, they climbed on the roof of their houses and shouted: “Oh! Come back!” and then put uncooked rice in the mouth of the deceased and presented him bundles of cooked food.

(Sun 1989: 586–587)

The passage identifies the offering of food and drink to the ghosts and spirits, which is conducted according to the *du-et-des* mode of religiosity, as an important phase in the development of ritual. It is important to note, however, that the author is careful to situate this scene in the remote past, before the development of complex societies. In ancient times, people lived in caves and straw huts, gathered fruits and nuts, ate the raw meat of animals, and dressed themselves in simple clothes made out of feathers and animal pelts. This situation, however, changed with the appearance of the sage-rulers, whose cultural innovation helped the common people improve their situation. They taught them how to use fire, produce tools and utensils, process hemp, and erect permanent dwellings. In addition, they also constructed a *system* of ritual based on cosmic patterns:

夫禮，必本於大一，分而為天地，轉而為陰陽，變而為四時，列而為鬼神。

The ritual system is surely based on the Grand One, which separated to become Heaven and Earth, rotated to become *yin* and *yang*, transformed to become the four seasons, and it arrayed to become the ghosts and spirits.

(Sun 1989: 616; Puett 2010: 366)

Xunzi’s basic claim that *li* were markers left by sages based on their knowledge of the patterns of the Way is expanded in this passage into a more comprehensive claim about the cosmic origin of ritual. By identifying the evolution of the Zhou system of *li* with the evolution of universe, the “Liyun” author is positing it as the only viable tool for achieving correspondence

between the human and the divine, thereby confirming the continued prosperity of human society:

聖王所以順，山者不使居川，不使渚者居中原，而弗敝也。用水火金木，飲食必時。合男女，頒爵位，必當年德...故無水旱昆蟲之災，民無凶饑妖孽之疾...故天降膏露，地出醴泉，山出器車...則是無故，先王能修禮以達義，體信以達順，故此順之實也。

The sage-kings used [the ritual system] to create concordance. They did not send the mountain dwellers to live next to the river; neither did they send the island dwellers to live in the central plains. They used water, fire, metal, wood and various foods and drinks according to the right timing. They approved marriages and assigned titles and official positions according to age and moral virtue... Thus, there were no calamities of floods, droughts, and pestilence. The common people did not suffer from the afflictions of starvation and scourge. Heaven sent down its luscious dew, Earth sprouted its sweet springs, the mountains provide resources for making tools and chariots... All of this was a result of the former-kings' ability to promote rightness through cultivating ritual and to promote concordance through embodying truthfulness. These are indeed the fruits of concordance.

(Sun 1989: 622)

Conclusion

This chapter surveyed the development of religious thought from the Shang to the Han. The changing sociopolitical reality in the mid-to-late Western Zhou and the decline of the ritual system associated with it opened the door for religious innovation. The sources surveyed here suggest that the old ritual system of the Zhou was no longer seen as entirely sacred and authoritative but instead open to change. This challenged the religious authority of its guardians, which, in response, began to develop a theoretical framework designed to instill new meaning into religious practice and conserve the authority of the ritual system of *li*. In order to reassert its legitimacy, they had to come up with new ways to justify it and explain the source of its efficacy. Their solution was to present ritual as the earthly human counterpart of cosmic order, the only viable way to maintain harmony between the human and divine realms. In the early imperial period, this mode of religious thought culminated in the creation of a textual ritual canon. In that sense, works like the *Liji* can be seen as the clear outcome of Xunzi's previous endeavors, as they are prescriptive texts that outline a comprehensive and standardized ritual system and include a built-in theology.

The rise of moral religiosity, however, did not signal the disappearance of the *du-et-des* mentality. The sources analyzed in this chapter were written by highly educated elite scholar-officials and were intended for an elite audience. As "ideological explanations by the intellectual elites that are aimed at explicating particular ideological positions," they do not represent the popular perception of the supernatural (Poo 2003: 295). While the architects of the new imperial religion of the Han dynasty utilized the moral theological framework to construct an official state cult in which the emperor's performance of grand sacrifices is seen as instrumental to the maintenance of social, political, and cosmic harmony, the a-moral practical theology associated with the Warring States ritual experts did not die out. Recent studies of Han religion clearly demonstrate that personal religious practices aimed at obtaining individual practical benefit, which did not belong to the official system of *li*, continued to flourish on all levels of society, from the common people to the emperor. Much like the Shang and Western Zhou rituals, they were

not accompanied by an explicit theology, but the world view they depict seems to be devoid of moral concerns, and their conception of human–divine interaction is primarily practical in nature (Poo 1998; Harper 2004).

The tension between these two modes of religiosity that emerged in early China became one of the key features of Chinese religious discourse and was instrumental in the subsequent formation of organized religious traditions such as Daoism and Buddhism. After the fall of the Han, for example, this tension manifested itself in the rhetoric used by the followers of a new religious movement, Celestial Masters Daoism [Tianshi Dao, 天師道], who attempted to undermine the popularity of their religious rivals – local cults. One of the main strategies used by the Celestial Masters in asserting the superior efficacy of their rituals was to claim that their system of practice was based on a moral theology sent down to earth by the deified Way. By establishing a link between the bureaucratic organization of the celestial realm and their earthly ethico-religious codes, the Celestial Masters were able to identify their system as orthodox [*zheng*, 正] and the rituals of rival local cults as heterodox [*xie*, 邪] (Lai 1998: 11–13). Understanding the development of religious thought and its competing modes of religiosity in early China is thus instrumental, as it offers us new ways of understanding the religious traditions that are still practiced in the Chinese cultural sphere today.

Notes

- 1 For more on this sacrifice, which is sometimes rendered as 酉彜, see Liu 2004: 108–116.
- 2 For similar accounts, see Lord Wen 15.5 (5), Lord Cheng 2.4 (5), and Lord Xiang 2.3 (3) in Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016: 547, 725, 895.
- 3 For an alternative reading of this process, which depicts the creation of the system of *li* as a distillation of normative sociopolitical and ethical principles from the collapsing Zhou religious framework, see Pines 2000.
- 4 The Shanghai Museum corpus includes more than 1,200 inscribed bamboo strips purchased in 1994 by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antiquities market. Written in archaic script that was identified as originating in the state of Chu [楚], these manuscripts, which include alternative versions of texts that were preserved in the received tradition, as well as many previously unknown texts, were assigned the approximate date of 300 BCE. See Ma 2001: 1–4.
- 5 Reading 敏 as 說. This interpretation is suggested by both Liu Lexian and Li Xueqin (Liu 2003: 60–61 and Li 2004: 98).
- 6 For more on self-exposure and rainmaking rituals in Ancient China, see Cohen 1978 and Schafer 1951.

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