Theism or Egoism

The Perpetual Struggle for Supremacy in Chinese Traditions

By

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Introduction

In Chinese history, no other era commands as much acclaim among the Chinese people as that of Yao 堯 (c. 2356 - 2255 BC), Shun 舜 (c. 2294 - c.2184 BC), and Yu 禹 (c. 2200 - 2101 BC). It was an age replete with exemplary heroes, who aimed high and accomplished much, thereby laying the lasting intellectual and spiritual foundations for the Chinese people. Confucius paid Yao the highest tribute: "Great indeed was Yao as a sovereign! How majestic was he! How mighty is heaven! And Yao modeled upon it. How vast was his virtue! People could find no name for it 大哉，堯之為君也！巍巍乎！唯天為大，唯堯則之。蕩蕩乎！民無能名焉."[1] Mencius exalted Yao and Shun in the same vein whenever occasion served: "When speaking, he [Mencius] always made laudatory reference to Yao and Shun 言必稱堯舜."[2] Mozi (501? - 416? BC) hailed Yao, Shun, and Yu as exemplary kings: "Do you not know that the sage kings in ancient times including the Three Dynasties, Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu are paragons of virtue? With respect to this, all the people of average intelligence and above would say, 'The sage kings in ancient times and the Three Dynasties are all paragons of virtue 不識若昔者三代聖王堯舜禹湯文武者，足以為法乎？故於此乎，自中人以上皆曰：若昔者三代聖王，足以為法矣."[3] Although Yao, Shun, and Yu have enjoyed supreme prestige in orthodox Chinese tradition, their epoch, "a

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[1] "Taibo 泰伯" in *Lunyu* 論語, *Sishu jizhu* 四書集註 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1966), ch. 8, p. 54. Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations in this book are mine. When a passage is cited from the *Lunyu*, the name of the chapter along with the page number is given so as to facilitate the process of locating the original text. Following the format of biblical citation, the current format of citing a passage from the *Lunyu* relying on the numbers of chapters and passages can be time-consuming and confusing. Unlike the Bible, which provides a specific number for every verse therein, the original text of *Lunyu* offers no such convenience. A reader must count and sometimes recount the passages from the beginning of the chapter to the passage cited. The process of counting and re-counting, especially when the citations are many, can be lengthy and tedious. Therefore, I follow the conventional wisdom of offering the names of the chapter and the page number for the documentation.

[2] "Tengwengong I 滕文公上" in *Mengzi* 孟子, *Sishu jizhu*, ch. 5, p. 64.

[3] Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Jiaobu dingben Mozi xian'gu*校補定本墨子閒詁 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 藝文, 1981), vol. 1, p. 449.

golden age in Chinese history"[4] deeply steeped in theism, remains for the most part a mystery to modern critics immersed in egoism.

The difficulty modern critics experience in studying ancient Chinese culture based on extant materials lies on one hand in the language the ancient Chinese had utilized and on the other hand in the thought they had expressed. Undoubtedly, the ancient Chinese language in its different ideographic form and syntactic structure poses a challenge to modern critics. As will be shown, all modern scholars have erred in deciphering some fundamental passages in ancient classics including the *Shangshu*, *Xunzi*, and *Han Feizi*. Likely because of the difficulty of the ancient Chinese language, many English books on Chinese history choose to evade antiquity. Wolfram Eberhard, for example, wrote nothing in his book titled *A History of China* on this significant part of Chinese history.[5] Neither did Steven Warshaw discourse on the antiquities before the Shang dynasty (c. 1600-c. 1046 BC) in his book, *China Emerges: A Concise History of China from Its Origin to the Present*.[6] Likewise, Patricia Buckley Ebrey shuns this golden age of Chinese history in her *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*.[7] J. A. G. Roberts devotes only two short passages to the said period in his book titled *The History of China*, and, alas, even his brief account is not free of error when he refers to Yu: "Yu, whose reign according to tradition began in 2205 BC, allegedly founded the Xia dynasty, the first of the three dynasties of ancient China."[8] On this part of the origin of Chinese civilization, David Curtis

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4 J. A. G. Roberts, *A Concise History of China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 3.

5 Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

6 Steven Warshaw, *China Emerges: A Concise History of China from Its Origin to the Present* (Berkeley: Diablo Press, 1990).

7 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

8 J. A. G. Roberts, *A Concise History of China*, p. 3. The anonymous Chinese who wrote *An Outline History of China* cannot seem to make up his mind on this issue: "The Xia dynasty is traditionally supposed to have begun with the reign of Yu… According to an ancient version of history, however, it was not Yu, but his son Qi, who founded the dynasty" (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1980, p. 57). The second chapter of this book makes clear that Qi, Yu's son, was actually the person who founded the Xia dynasty.

Wright composed a few more passages in his *The History of China*, but retained the same error when he referred to Yu: "Yu was the founder of the Xia dynasty."[9] Three years later, Morris Rossabi contributed about two more pages to this period in his book, inheriting the same error regarding Yu: "Earlier Chinese legends traditionally attributed the founding of a state to a much earlier period and to a heroic man or god named Yu, who, according to long-held beliefs, reputedly founded the Xia, the first dynasty."[10] Two more years later, in 2016, Philip Ball decided to give Chinese antiquity a chapter of its own, presenting it as fiction or myth rather than history while reiterating the same mistake: "He [Yu] is universally venerated in China… as the founder of the Xia dynasty."[11] In 2017, John S. Major and Constance A. Cook's *Ancient China: A History* includes a chapter each on the archaeological findings in the stone and bronze ages, disputing the veracity of the documented history of Chinese antiquities before the Shang dynasty and repeating the same, old error: "Yu is regarded as the founding ruler of the Xia dynasty."[12] A special mention should be made of *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*, which is a collection of 14 miscellaneous essays composed by the same number of authors. Of pertinence to my book is its opening essay penned by the Harvard archaeologist Chang Kwang-Chih, who was knowledgeable enough to avoid the aforementioned error, yet ill-informed nevertheless in his account of the succession of ancient Chinese rulers: "Shun in his turn, was succeeded by Yu, despite Yu's effort to have Yi, the son of Shun, rule."[13] As the historical convention has it, the name of Shun's son

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[9] David Curtis Wright, *The History of China* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2011), p. 12.

[10] Morris Rossabi, *History of China* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 12.

[11] Philip Ball, *The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016), p. 61.

[12] John S. Major and Constance A. Cook, *Ancient China: A History* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 68.

[13] Zhang Kwang-Chih, "China on the Eve of the Historical Period" in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*, ed. Michael Lowe and Edward Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 71.

in question was "Shangjun 商均,"[14] not Yi. The examples above show that the study of ancient Chinese history can indeed be a challenge.

Although daunting, linguistic technicalities nevertheless can nearly always be overcome by indefatigable research. While Western historians generally shun Chinese antiquity, their counterparts in China, likely because of their better command of the ancient Chinese language, choose to write book after book on the origin of their civilization. A good knowledge of the ancient Chinese language, however, by no means ensures a full understanding of ancient Chinese thought. In fact, a much greater challenge to the study of ancient Chinese culture lies, I have found, in the unwillingness, if not inability, of modern Chinese critics, who avail themselves by and large of this-worldly mindset, to approach their otherworldly ancestors objectively or to empathize with them. As a result, the vast majority of modern Chinese critics, who are atheists, simply fail to penetrate ancient Chinese beliefs, which were deeply rooted in the divine spirit called Shangdi上帝 (The Lord on High). Instead of exploring the subtlety and complexity of the religious ideas of their ancestors, modern Chinese critics more often than not impose upon them peremptorily a simplistic theory, either of a Confucian or Marxist character, relegating them to the sphere of senseless superstition or worthless rubbish. For example, Chen Anren 陳安仁 states: "In ancient times, people were unenlightened… They thought that there must be many deities in charge of heaven and earth. Sages exploited this, forming the idea of what God's way should be and inculcating it to keep people from perpetrating evil. Kings also exploited it so as to raise their own status and force people to fear and revere them 上古時民智未開……以為天地之間，必有許多的神明主持之。古代聖人遂利用之，以為神道設教，使人民不敢為惡；君后亦利用之，以提高地位，使人民尊敬畏服."[15] Similarly, Ding Shan 丁山 ascribes the origin of ancient religious culture in China to ignorance: "The ancient Chinese

[14] Han Fei, *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解, edited by Wang Xianshen王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 405; and Sima Qian司馬遷, "Zhou benji 周本紀" in *Shiji*史記 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1990)，vol. 1, p. 20.

[15] Chen Anren 陳安仁, *Zhongguo shanggu zhonggu wenhuashi* 中國上古中古文化史 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938), p. 61.

did not understand the natural law of 'metabolism.' Bewildered, they thought that God and spirits were secretly at work; consequently, sacrificial rituals seeking blessings arose 古代人不明「新陳代謝」的自然規律，疑惑有神靈在暗中主持，所以發生禳祈的祭典."[16] Evidently, in his view, all those who understand the law of metabolism should renounce God, a theme to which, I fear, no orthodox Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists or Daoist priests, for that matter, will subscribe. Li Xueqin 李學勤 in the *Zhongguo gudai lishi yu wenming* 中國古代歷史與文明 dismisses categorically the religion of the Shang dynasty as superstition: "The Shang dynasty was given to the superstition of ghosts and God 商王朝迷信鬼神."[17] Wang Hui 王暉 in the *Shang Zhou sixiang wenhua bijiao yanjiu* 商周思想文化比較研究 sees religion as the tool utilized by the Shang dynasty to effect a more absolute control of feudal lords and commoners alike: "By 'leading people to serve God,' the Shang royal household could hold an effective control over the Shang people and the fiefdoms 借助「率民以事神」來取得對商民和其他方國部族的有效統治."[18] Liu Zhiqing 劉志慶 simply characterizes the religion of the Shang dynasty as illusion: "The Shang people and the Jews… created, respectively and without consulting each other, the illusory God transcending nature."[19] One of the most prominent modern scholars, Qian Mu 錢穆 went so far as to deny even the significance of the part which religion has played in Chinese culture: "As we can find no obvious place for religion in Chinese history and culture, which has lasted for four or five thousand years to date, what is its common belief? 中國歷史文化四五千年來維持到今天，我們既然找不到宗教的明顯地位，那麼他的共同信仰是怎樣的呢？"[20] He seemed to have forgotten, to say the

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[16] Ding Shan丁山, *Zhongguo gudai zongjiao yu shenhua kao* 中國古代宗教與神話考 (Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chubanshe, 2011), p. 610.

[17] Xueqin 李學勤, *Zhongguo gudai lishi yu wenming:Shangshi yu Shangdai wenming* 中國古代歷史與文明: 商史與商代文明 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2007), p. 147.

[18] Wang Hui 王暉, *Shang Zhou sixiang wenhua bijiao yanjiu* 商周思想文化比較研究 (Beijing: Beijing renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 107.

[19] Liu Zhiqing 劉志慶, "Yinren yu Youtairen de Shangdi guan ji qi lishi quxiang 殷人與猶太人的上帝觀及其歷史取向" in *Yin Shang wenming lunji* 殷商文明論集, ed. Guo Xudong 郭旭東(Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學, 2008), p. 297.

[20] Qian Mu錢穆, *Shijie jushi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 世界局勢與中國文化 (Taipei:

least, that the Shang civilization, as demonstrated by the large number of oracle bones unearthed during the past two centuries, stood on the very foundation of their religious beliefs. My study, proceeding as it does against the grain of the mainstream beliefs of modern scholars, explores the otherworldly essence of ancient Chinese civilization and examines its varied and sometimes quite surreptitious transformations into disparate forms of this-worldliness, demonstrating the significance of the ancient Chinese theistic belief to the formation of the civilization of China and the adverse effect of the egoistic mindset upon the later development of Chinese culture.

Dongda tushu gongsi, 1977), p. 304.

Chapter 1

Theistic Devotion: The Sage Kings

In orthodox Chinese tradition, no other human beings appear more lofty, sublime, and supreme than the sage king Yao, whose accomplished talents and virtues appear to be constantly marveled at but never actually surpassed by later generations. Most notable among his accomplishments is perhaps his unflagging recruitments of similarly talented people, who were to devote their lives, singly and collectively, to the advancement of Chinese civilization. The Confucian classic *Shang Shu* 尚書 (*The Book of History*) pays Yao the highest possible homage that a sovereign may ever receive after his death: "His light pervades the four corners of the world and reaches the high and the low alike 光被四表，格于上下."[21] Confucius (551-479 BC), a most influential authority on ancient Chinese rituals, noted a close spiritual bond between Yao and heaven: "Great indeed was Yao as a sovereign! How majestic was he! How grand is heaven! And Yao modeled upon it. How vast was his virtue! People could find no name for it 大哉，堯之為君也！巍巍乎！唯天為大，唯堯則之。蕩蕩乎！民無能名焉."[22] The Grand Historian of the Han dynasty Sima Qian (c. 145-c. 86 BC), whose ancestors were the two mighty priests who cleared China proper of demons prior to the era of Yao, likened Yao's love to that of heaven: "His love is like that of heaven 其仁如天."[23] In both of their minds, Yao clearly appeared to be a man of theistic devotion, walking in complete accord with the mandate

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[21] "Yao dian 堯典" in *Shang Shu*, *Han Wei Gu Zhu Shisan Jing* 漢魏古注十三經 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), vol. 1, p. 3. Most scholars believe today that the events recorded in the *Shang Shu* (Book of History) were written during the Warring States period or the early Han dynasty. After studying the Oracle Bone Script of the Shang dynasty (c. 1600-c. 1046 BC) unearthed largely during the twentieth century, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 and Hu Zhenyu 胡振宇concluded in the *Yinshang shi* 殷商史 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2003) that the writing of the *Shang Shu* "matches nearly completely" the Oracle Bone Script (p. 566). Their findings, which differ from the orthodox view, prove that the *Shangshu* should be a highly reliable source of information regarding the history of Yao, Shun, and Yu.

[22] "Taibo 泰伯" in *Lunyu*, ch. 8, p. 54.

[23] Sima Qian 司馬遷, "Wudi benji五帝本紀" in *Shiji* 史記 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1990)，vol. 1, p. 9.

of heaven. Because of his lofty character and judicious leadership, according to tradition, Yao enjoyed an enduring reign of seventy years.

In marked contrast to Yao's theistic conduct, his oldest son Danzhu 丹朱, however, showed an excessive interest in himself, indulging in sensual pleasures in an inordinate fashion: "Fond of only sensual pleasures, he pursued an arrogant and ruthless course day and night without ceasing 惟慢遊是好，傲虐是作，罔晝夜頟頟."[24] According to the second most influential Confucianist Mencius (372-289 BC), all the other eight sons of Yao, like Danzhu, equally failed to live up to his high principle: "The emperor placed his nine sons and two daughters, all the officials, oxen and sheep, granaries and storehouses at the service of Shun in the channeled field 帝使其子九男二女，百官牛羊倉廩備，以事舜於畎畝之中."[25] Therefore Yao decided to pass the throne, not to his sons, but to Shun, who was deemed "magnanimous, wise, gifted, and brilliant 濬哲文明."[26] This incident epitomizes the spirit of the time, which set great store by theistic virtue and conduct rather than by personal relations and connections, the leap of which into prominence in later Chinese culture will be discussed in due order.

According to the Confucian classic *Mencius*, Shun grew up in an unusually hostile family: "Shun's parents told him to repair a granary, to which, the ladder having been removed, Gu Sou [Shun's father] set fire. They also made him dig a well. He got out, but they, not knowing that, proceeded to cover him up 父母使舜完廩，捐階，瞽瞍焚廩。使浚井，出，從而揜之."[27] When Shun was young, his mother died, and his father Gu Sou 瞽叟 married again and had another son by the name of Xiang 象. After Shun grew up, his father, step mother, and half-brother, plotted together against him, hoping to put a swift end to his life. At one time, as the text of *Mencius* cited above indicates, when Shun was working on the roof of a barn, his father and half-brother set fire to the building, expecting

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[24] "Yi Ji 益稷" in *Shang Shu*, vol. 1, p. 13.

[25] "Wanzhang shang 萬章上" in *Mencius* 孟子, *Sishu jizhu* 四書集注 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1966), p. 126.

[26] "Shun dian 舜典" in *Shang Shu*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[27] "Wanzhang shang" in *Mencius*, *Sishu jizhu*, p. 128.

him to be consumed by the flames. Shun however escaped unscathed. In deference to the Lord on High rather than to his parents, Shun refused to yield himself to the wicked scheme of his kin and fled from the scene: "Every day he cried out to High Heaven 日號泣于旻天."[28] At another time, Gu Sou and Xiang led Shun into a dry well, where they attempted to bury him alive. Yet to their surprise, Shun escaped unscathed again. Although constantly persecuted, Shun sought no vengeance upon them and continued to comport himself with consideration toward them. Waiting upon the Lord on High, Shun eagerly sought deliverance from his hostile kin and eventually found favor in the sight of the Lord: "In the early days, when Emperor Shun was living by Mount Li, he went to work in the field, and daily cried with tears to High Heaven... His heartfelt pleas moved God 帝初于歷山，往于田，日號泣于旻天……至誠感神."[29] Shun's faith in God was such that he insistently pleaded with him until his blessings fell upon him.

Incidentally, Shun's impassioned plea to God[30] for mercy is reminiscent of David's prayer when he was ruthlessly persecuted by the king of Israel Saul:

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[28] "Dayu mo大禹謨" in *Shang Shu*, *Han Wei Gu Zhu Shisan Jing* 漢魏古注十三經 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), vol. 1, p. 11.

[29] "Da Yu Mo大禹謨" in *Shang Shu*, vol. 1, 11. According to the *Liji*, "Confucius disliked those who cried in the open fields 孔子惡野哭者" ("Tan'gong I 檀弓上" in *Liji*, vol. 1, *juan* 2, p. 28). Confucius would feel a personal aversion for Shun when he was apprised of Shun's wailing in the field.

[30] Ever since Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 identified "Shangdi 上帝" in *The Book of Odes*, a term which denotes the meaning of "The Lord on High," as God in the Bible, this term has been commonly used by the Chinese to refer to God: "An examination of Chinese history shows that from the time of Pan Gu to the Three Dynasties, kings and commoners alike worshipped God 歷考中國史冊，自盤古至三代，君民一體皆敬拜皇上帝也" (Youwen Jian 簡又文, *Qing shi Hong Xiuquan zai ji* 清史洪秀全載記, [Hong Kong: Jianshi mengjin shuwu. 1967], 29). James Legge (1815-1897), a prominent sinologist during Hong's era and the first Professor of Chinese at Oxford University, affirmed his idea: "*T'ien* has had much of the force of the name Yahve, as explained by God Himself to Moses. *Ti* has presented that absolute deity in the relation to men of their lord and governor. *Ti* was to the Chinese fathers, I believe, exactly what God was to our fathers, whenever they took that great name on their lips. Thus the two characters show us the religion of the ancient Chinese as a monotheism" (*The Religions of Ancient China: Confucianism and Daoism, Described and Compared with Christianity* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880], pp. 10-11). See also Yang Dongsheng 楊東聲, *Xianqin siwei wenhua yanxi* 先秦思維文化研析 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2019), pp. 41-59.

> I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me. Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me. (Ps 142:1-8 NIV)

Although the psalm above was composed by David, who had no knowledge of Shun, the sorrow it depicts and the hope it expresses could have most likely been shared by Shun as well. In response to their pleas, the Lord on High not only delivered Shun and David from the persecutions of their enemies but also made them kings in their respective countries.

Unlike David, who had a jealous king that was quick to rebel against God, Shun had a godly king who was eager to make the optimum use of talented people in the public interest. Conceivably, Yao pondered long and hard on the issue of succession and searched far and wide for an ideal candidate for the throne. As his children were in no fit state to serve the kingdom, he broached the subject with his seasoned Minister of the Four Mountains:

> The Sovereign said: "Greetings! Siyue (Minister of the Four Mountains), I have been on the throne for seventy years, and you have been able to carry out my commands. I should like to entrust the throne to you." Siyue said: "My inadequate virtue may be a disgrace to the throne." The Sovereign said: "Exalt the enlightened one from among the low and humble classes." The Minister said to the Sovereign: "There is an unmarried man among the lower people, called Shun of Yu." The Sovereign said: "Good! I have heard of him. What is he like?" Yue said: "He is

> the son of a blind man. His father was obstinately unprincipled; his mother was unkind; and his brother Xiang was conceited. He has been able, however, by his filial piety to live in harmony with them, enabling them to exercise self-control and to stay aloof from evil." The Sovereign said: "I will try him; my two daughters will marry him, and I will observe his behavior with the aid of my daughters." Accordingly, he arranged and sent down his two daughters to the bend of the Gui River, to be Shun of Yu's wives. 帝曰：「咨！四岳。朕在位七十載，汝能庸命，巽朕位。」岳曰：「否德忝帝位。」曰：「明明揚側陋。」師錫帝曰：「有鰥在下，曰虞舜。」帝曰：「俞？予聞，如何？」岳曰：「瞽子，父頑，母嚚，象傲；克諧以孝，烝烝乂，不格姦。」帝曰：「我其試哉！女于時，觀厥刑于二女。」釐降二女于嬀汭，嬪于虞。[31]

Few people, if any, in history would reject the offer of the Chinese crown as the Minister of Four Mountains did. Even more unusual than his frank refusal of the throne was perhaps his splendid recommendation of the much more virtuous and talented Shun for the position, an act that bespeaks the good repute of Shun among the people as well as the minister's altruistic spirit.

Purportedly, Yao also considered passing the crown to a reclusive figure by the name of Xu You, who was believed to have rebuffed his suggestion as well: "Someone said that Yao yielded the world to Xu You, but Xuyou declined, and, feeling insulted, fled into hiding 而說者曰堯讓天下於許由，許由不受，恥之逃隱."[32] Yao's prudent character, however, made it quite unlikely for him to bestow the crown rashly upon Xu You, who, unlike the Minister of Four Mountains, enjoyed no distinguished record of public service. Whether or not Yao actually made an offer to Xuyou, the tale in question clearly indicates that the former searched high and low for a worthy successor to his throne. Even after he iden-

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[31] "Yaodian堯典" in *Shangshu* 尚書, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing* 漢魏古注十三經 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), vol. 1, p. 4.

[32] Sima Qian 司馬遷, "Boyi liezhuan 伯夷列傳" in *Shiji* 史記 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1990), vol. 3, p. 1312.

tified Shun as a favorable heir to the throne, Yao continued to assess the suitability of his candidacy by subjecting him to a further, rigorous process of scrutiny. Apart from his good repute, which commended itself to Yao, Shun must nevertheless still prove himself in a sure-footed way to Yao before gaining the final approval from him for the legitimacy of his succession.

The tests Shun received were twofold, involving humans and God alike. The first kind of test Yao administered, stressing as it did on his interpersonal relationships with various kinds of people, was to verify Shun's leadership skills:

> Shun set wonderful store by the five ethical relationships, and they came to be universally observed. He supervised a hundred departments, and the affairs of the hundred departments proceeded in good order. He received personages at the four gates of the city, and the four gates carried with them an aurora of glamor. 慎徽五典，五典克從；納于百揆，百揆時敘；賓于四門，四門穆穆。[33]

Yao assigned to Shun different leadership roles in the government, and whatever assignment Shun undertook, he could always discharge his obligations with consummate skill and aptness. After satisfying the requirements in respect of interpersonal relationships, he would then need to substantiate his good relationship with God; consequently, on an inclement day when gale-force winds, thunder, and rain smote the earth, Yao placed Shun in the wooded mountains: "Being sent to the great wooded mountains, notwithstanding the tempests of wind, thunder, and rain, he did not go astray 納于大麓，烈風雷雨弗迷."[34] Thus Shun emerged from the twofold test concerning, respectively, his relationships with humans and God an ever more trusted leader.

Having demonstrated his outstanding aptitude for sociopolitical leadership under the aegis of Yao for twenty-eight years in the government,

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[33] "Shundian舜典" in *Shangshu*, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[34] "Shundian" in *Shangshu*, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing*, vol. 1, p. 5.

the last eight of which saw him at the helm of the state as Yao's proxy, Shun ascended the throne after Yao's death. Shun's smooth and peaceful succession to the throne set a precedent for the exemplary transition of political power in Chinese history to the marvel of the Chinese ever since. Like the sons of Yao, Shun's nine sons also lacked adequate leadership skills. In the end, Shun followed the example of Yao and passed the throne, not to his sons, but to the talented Yu. The precedent Yao and Shun together established in passing the throne to a virtuous and capable person rather than to a none too good son commended itself to later Chinese as a classic example of fairness, sharing, and justice: "Yao had ten sons, and passed the throne, not to his sons, but to Shun; Shun had nine sons, and passed the throne, not to his sons, but to Yu. They are supremely selfless figures 堯有子十人，不與其子而授舜；舜有子九人，不與其子而授禹；至公也."[35] Yao and Shun stand henceforth in Chinese history as the embodiment of the selfless spirit devoted to the good of the public.

Modern Revolt against the Legends of Yao and Shun

At the turn of last century, when the prestige of China sank to its nadir, some modern scholars began to question the value of their own culture, including particularly the historicity of the peaceful transfer of political power from Yao to Shun and the accompanying selfless spirit that marked such a transfer. This selfsame issue had actually been raised previously more than two millennia before during the Warring States period (481-221 BC), which saw unprecedented turmoil and dreadful carnage similar to those the twentieth-century had witnessed. Han Fei 韓非 (279-233 BC) was the first person known to us who noted in writing what appeared to him as a guileful re-interpretation of the transfer of political power from Yao to Shun:

> If a wicked man is appointed to a high office and given a high recompense and the numbers of his partisans and adherents

[35] Lü Buwei 呂不韋, "Qusi 去私" in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋（Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1, p. 56.

> have increased, and if he also happens to have vicious and wicked motives, his wicked subordinates will try all the more to please him by saying: "The so-called sage rulers and enlightened kings of antiquity succeeded their predecessors not as juniors succeeding seniors in the natural order, but because they had formed parties and gathered people and thereby intimidated their superiors, murdered their kings, and consequently acquired interests and privileges." "How do you know that?" he will ask. In reply they will say: "Shun intimidated Yao, Yu intimidated Shun; Tang banished Jie, and King Wu attacked Zhou. These four kings were all ministers who committed regicide on their rulers, but the whole world has extolled them. The feelings of these four kings, if observed carefully, displayed nothing but the motive of covetousness; their conduct, if weighed closely, was simply violent and rebellious. 夫姦人之爵祿重而黨與彌眾，又有姦邪之意，則姦臣愈反而說之，曰：「古之所謂聖君明王者，非長幼弱也及以次序也。以其搆黨與，聚巷族，偪上弒君而求其利也。」彼曰：「何知其然也？」因曰：「舜偪堯，禹偪舜，湯放桀，武王伐紂，此四王者，人臣弒其君者也，而天下譽之。察四王之情，貪得人之意也；度其行，暴亂之兵也 」。[36]

The first sentence of the statement cited above uses the word "wicked 姦" three times to emphasize Han Fei's intense hatred of the wicked, who, in his view, espoused a new and distorted reading of the eras of the famed sage kings to advance their own vile political agenda. In the Warring States period (481-221 BC), according to Han Fei's observation, when a wicked minister rose in power, his subordinates would be inclined to incite him to murder the king with the deceptive tale of their concoction that "Shun intimidated Yao, and Yu intimidated Shun" and that Shun and Yu also "committed regicide on their rulers," respectively.

Insofar as I know, all the modern scholars who study the history of Yao and Shun have mistaken the tale fabricated by the evil minister's

[36] Han Fei, "Shuoyi 說疑" in *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *juan* 17, p. 405.

subordinates for Han Fei's own view. For example, the famed scholar Li Xueqin wrote: "Han Fei speaks of 'Shun's intimidation of Yao and Yu's intimidation of Shun' in the same breath with 'Tang's banishment of Jie and King Wu's attack on Zhou,' saying that they were 'all ministers who committed regicide on their rulers and the whole world has extolled them 韓非更將「舜逼堯、禹逼舜」與「湯放桀、武王伐紂」相提並論，說都是「人臣弒君也，而天下譽之」."[37] Contrary to the repeated assertions of modern critics, Han Fei, like all the orthodox philosophers of his time, actually espoused the traditional view of a peaceful transfer of power from Yao to Shun: "Yao joyfully ceded the throne, and Yu Shun accepted it… Shun in turn joyfully ceded the throne to Yu 堯禪天下，虞舜受之……舜禪天下而傳之於禹."[38] Unlike what modern scholars claim, Han Fei actually exalted Shun, whom he characterized as a "sage king and wise sovereign 聖王明君," and took pains to discredit the theory that Shun committed regicide on Yao:

> Yao planned to pass the throne to Shun. Gun remonstrated, saying, 'How inauspicious! No one should pass the throne to a commoner! ' Yao, however, rejected Gun's view and led an army to terminate him in the vicinity of Mt. Yu… When Confucius studied this episode, he said, "It was not difficult for Yao to recognize Shun's virtue. It was difficult, however, for him to persist in passing the throne to Shun to such an extent that he would even terminate Gun." 堯欲傳天下於舜，鯀諫曰：「不祥

[37] Li Xueqin 李學勤, *Zhongguo gudai wenming yu guojia xingcheng yanjiu* 中國古代文明與國家形成研究》 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1997), p. 206. Cf. Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒, *Xianqin shi lungao* 先秦史論稿 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992), p. 28; Zhang Tingxi 張廷錫, *Xinbian Xianqinshi gangyao* 新編先秦史綱要 (Nanchang: Jiang'xi renmin chubanshe, 2004), p. 28; Zheng Jiexiang 鄭杰祥, *Xinshiqi wenhua yu Xiadai wenming* 新石器文化與夏代文明 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), p. 485; Yin Rongfang 尹榮方, *She yu Zhongguo shanggu shenhua* 社與中國上古神話 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), p. 56; and Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016): "Their descriptions of the use of force for dynastic change seem more realistic to modern scholars than the historical patterns attributed to a morally ordered cosmos… However, the consistency of the manner in which the legends have been transformed in *Han Feizi* and the *Annals* suggests that the texts had a shared understanding of history" (p. 7).

[38] Han Fei, "Shiguo 十過" in *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *juan* 3, pp. 70-71.

> 哉！孰以天下而傳之於匹夫乎？」堯不聽，舉兵而誅殺鯀於羽山之郊……仲尼聞之曰：「堯之知舜之賢，非其難者也。夫至乎誅諫者，必傳之舜，乃其難也。」[39]

The passage above indicates that Han Fei not only takes no exception to the integrity of Shun but also commends Yao for his persistence in executing the decision to pass the throne to Shun.

Apart from misreading the *Han Feizi*, all the modern scholars, insofar as I know, have similarly erred in reading a remark by Xunzi 荀子(336?-236? BC) on the peaceful transfer of rule from Yao to Shun: "Xunzi criticized it, saying: 'It is empty talk, passed on by shallow people and offered by simple-minded fellows 荀子則批判它是「虛言也，是淺者之傳，陋者之說也」."[40] What Xunzi means by "empty talk" is not the historicity of the incident at issue but the wording, "shanrang 擅讓," which people utilized in his time to describe the said event. Significantly enough, the word "擅 (to act arbitrarily)," which Xunzi faults, differs from the character "禪 (to offer sacrifices)," which is used in all orthodox accounts of the historical event at issue. Unlike the term "禪," which indicates in a positive manner a sacrifice made to heaven, its homonym "擅," to which Xunzi objects, suggests a willful, self-centered act without the involvement or endorsement of others. In Xunzi's view, Shun's ascendance to the throne occurred as a result of his virtues, talents, and feats: "The Son of Heaven is a supreme ruler who has no rival in the world. Who then can cede the throne to him? With pure and complete virtue and brilliant wisdom, he faces the south and hears the world. All human beings cannot but tremble and follow him 天子者，埶位至尊，無敵於天下，夫有誰與讓矣？道德純備，智惠甚明，南面而聽天下，生民之屬莫不震動從服以化順之."[41] None could, according to Xunzi, bestow upon Shun the throne that was rightfully his in the

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[39] Han Fei, "Shiguo" in *Han Feizi*, *juan* 3, p. 324.

[40] Li Xueqin, *Zhongguo gudai wenming yu guojia xingcheng yanjiu*, p. 206. See also Yin Rongfang, *She yu Zhongguo shanggu shenhua*, p. 56; and Zhan Ziqing 詹子慶, *Zoujin Xiadai wenming* 走近夏代文明 (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue, 2015), p. 35.

[41] Xunzi 荀子, *Xunzi jianshi* 荀子柬釋, ed. Liang Qixiong 梁啟雄 (Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 1964), p. 241.

first place. That Xunzi had no doubt concerning the peaceful transfer of power from Yao to Shun can be seen even more clearly in a different chapter entitled "Chengxiang 成相," where he reiterated the traditional account concerning Yao and Shun:

> Yao and Shun exalted the virtuous, passing the throne to them… Yao passed the throne to the capable person and Shun was there at the opportune time. They both exalted the capable and virtuous, and the world was consequently well governed… Yao was virtuous. Without using force, he conquered the Sanmiao. He exalted Shun, who worked in the paddy field, and entrusted to him the reins of government 堯舜尚賢身辭讓……堯授能，舜遇時，尚賢推德天下治……堯有德，干戈不用三苗服。舉舜畎畝，任之天下.[42]

Contrary to what modern critics claim, Xunzi embraced the traditional account of a peaceful transfer of political power from Yao to Shun.

The only piece of evidence, if evidence at all, modern critics depend upon for falsifying the conventional account of Yao and Shun rests upon the bamboo slips unearthed in 281 AD, commonly titled *Guben zhushu ji'nian* 古本竹書紀年 (Ancient Bamboo Annals), more than two millennia after the occurrence of the said event: "In the past when Yao aged, he was imprisoned by Shun… Shun imprisoned Yao in Ping-yang and robbed him of his throne 昔堯德衰，為舜所囚也……舜囚堯於平陽，取之帝位."[43] As mentioned before, Han Fei of the Warring States period had already discussed a similar unconventional account regarding the succession of Yao and Shun, which he dismissed as a sheer fabrication crafted for the justification of an evil minister's usurpation of the throne. I tend to agree with Han Fei for a number of reasons. First, all the traditional accounts present Shun as a paragon of virtue and wisdom, who would assuredly reject the idea of such a heinous crime against his benevolent ruler. Second, it makes no sense for Shun

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[42] Xunzi, *Xunzi jianshi*, pp. 347-348.

[43] Fang Shiming方詩銘 and Wang Xiuling 王修齡, ed. *Guben zhushu ji'nian jizheng* 古本竹書紀年輯證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), p. 6.

to rebel against his patron, who had already chosen him as his heir to the throne. Third, before the death of Yao, Shun had actually already taken over the helm of the state in the capacity of his proxy. Shun would benefit from nothing if he chose to imprison Yao, who might die at any time in his old age. Fourth, if Shun had rebelled against Yao, which was quite unlikely, why was there no resistance to his usurpation of the throne? Why were all the upright ministers, who continued to serve in Shun's administration, eerily silent on the alleged usurpation? Did they collude with Shun in the said usurpation? Queries of this nature could continue endlessly. Unless a solid piece of evidence to the contrary can be presented, the traditional historical account of the peaceful succession of Yao and Shun, which has lasted for millennia, should stand.

Virtue is evidently a single most important reason for Yao and Shun to pass the throne, not to their own children, but to the chosen heirs. This selfless spirit of devotion to public good in the eras of Yao and Shun was but an inexorable expression of their religious belief in the Lord on High. As Mozi (470-c. 391 BC) explained: "In ancient times, the sage kings made the belief in the ghost and God a must and waited upon the ghost and God with zeal 古者聖王必以鬼神為[有]，其務鬼神厚矣."[44] "When ruling the country," he further stated, "The ancient sage kings tended, perforce, the ghost and God first, then humankind 古聖王治天下也，故必先鬼神而後人. "[45] According to the *Shangshu*, one of the methods Yao used in determining Shun's fitness for the throne, as discussed before, was to place him in the mountains at the mercy of inclement weather and thereby ascertained whether he met the approval of the Lord on High. Having successfully passed the ordeal: "he did not lose his way in fierce winds and a thundering storm烈風雷

[44] Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Jiaobu dingben Mozi xian'gu* 校補定本墨子閒詁 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1981), vol. 1, p. 453. Lang Qingxiao 郎擎霄 notes a similarity between Yu and Mozi in *The Philosophy of Mozi*: "Mozi's life bears a resemblance to that of Yu of Xia perhaps because he was under Yu's great influence. The fact that his book often discusses the episodes of Yu of Xia is a clear evidence 墨子的人生行為好似與夏禹相仿彿，這或者是墨子受了夏禹的印象很深的緣故。況且他的書中也常常引論夏禹的事蹟，這就是個明證" (Beijing: Beijing guojia tushuguan, 2003, p. 182).

[45] Sun Yirang, "Feiru II 非儒下" in *Jiaobu dingben Mozi xian'gu*, vol. 1, p. 452.

雨弗迷,"[46] Shun "offered a sacrifice to the Lord on High 肆類于上帝"[47] at his coronation as king to show alike his gratitude for God's favor and commitment to his teachings.

Similarly, Yu's counsel to Shun concerning a sovereign's leadership centers around the submission of the self to the Lord: "Submit yourself to the Lord on High, and heaven will bestow blessings upon you 徯志以昭受上帝，天其申命用休."[48] Yu himself followed the commandment from heaven in extending assistance to people: "I observed the decree from heaven in sustaining people's lives with all my strength 吾受命於天，竭力以養人."[49] This ancient belief in the Lord on High was also recorded in another Confucian classic titled *Liji* 禮記 (The Book of Etiquette): "Therefore, the sage consults with heaven and earth, the ghost and God, in ruling the country 故聖人參於天地，并於鬼神，以治政也."[50] The paramount task Yao, Shun, and Yu set their hands to appeared to be the establishment of a harmonious relationship between the deity and humankind: "The Lord on High and humankind live in harmony 神人以和."[51] The belief in this deity evidently pervaded the entire country, for, according to the Confucian classic *Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Odes), a female commoner by the name of Jiang Yuan 姜嫄 was gracefully granted a son as a result of her devotion to the Lord: "She was able to offer sacrifices faithfully 克禋克祀."[52] Similarly, her son Qi 棄 also secured a loving relationship with the deity in his walk with the Lord: "The fragrance rose up from the sacrificial vessels to the delight of the Lord on High 于豆于登，其香始升，上帝居歆."[53] Even Shun's father made a zither for the Most High: "Gu Sou took the five stringed zither and made it into a fifteen stringed zither, calling it Grandeur

[46] "Shundian 舜典" in *Shangshu* 尚書, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing* 漢魏古注十三經 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), vol. 1, p. 5.

[47] "Shundian" in *Shangshu*, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[48] "Yi Ji 益稷" in *Shangshu*, *Hanwei guzhu shisan jing*, vol. 1, p. 12.

[49] Lü Buwei, "Zhifen知分" in *Lüshi chunqiu*，vol. 2, p. 1355.

[50] "Liyun 禮運" in *Liji*, *Hanwei guzhu shisanjing*, vol. 1, p. 81.

[51] "Shundian 舜典" in *Shangshu*, *Hanwei guzhu shisanjing*, vol. 1, p. 7.

[52] "Shengmin生民" in *Shijing zhuxi* 詩經注析, ed. Cheng Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Jian'yuan 蔣見元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), vol. 2, p. 800.

[53] "Shengmin生民" in *Shijing zhuxi*, vol. 2, p. 807.

and using it as a sacrifice to the Lord on High 瞽叟乃拌五弦之瑟，作以為十五弦之瑟。命之曰大章，以祭上帝."[54] The religious beliefs Yao, Shun, and Yu practiced not only pervaded their era but also continued into the later period, as demonstrated by the counsel King Taijia 太甲 (?-1557 BC) received: "The kings who were before you heeded the wise commandments of heaven in serving gods and spirits high and low 先王顧諟天之明命，以承上下神祇."[55] In commenting upon the passage cited above, Fu Peirong 傅佩榮 compared ancient rulers resourcefully to high priests: "Without exception, ancient sage kings were all priests who excelled in offering sacrifices古代聖王毫無例外地都是善於行祭的祭司."[56] His remark, however, explained only part of the essential feature of the ancient Chinese belief. To ancient Chinese rulers of the highest repute, sacrifices were not so much the requirements they were expected to fulfill as the expressions of their blameless conduct. After making a comprehensive study of the Oracle Bone Script, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 and Hu Zhenyu 胡振宇 asserted that the kings of the Shang dynasty (c. 1600-c. 1046 BC) "must speculate upon the will of the Lord on High and act accordingly 必須揣測上帝的意志而為之."[57] In other words, the kings of the Shang dynasty were without exception expected to observe the commandments of the Most High. Except a few rebellious kings who defied divine authority, life at this time, as history has shown, appeared to be marked generally by a strong faith in the Lord on High.

Cutting off the Communications between Gods and Humans

A few remarks should be in order concerning modern critics' interpretation of the religious practices in Yao's era. Impervious to the evidence demonstrating that the ancient Chinese enjoyed the freedom to worship the Lord on High during the reigns of Yao, Shun, and Yu, they maintain

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[54] Lü Buwei, "Guyue古樂" in *Lüshi chunqiu*，vol. 1, p. 289.

[55] "Taijia I 太甲上" in *Shangshu*, vol. 1, *juan* 4, p. 24.

[56] Fu Peirong 傅佩榮, *Rudao tianlun fawei* 儒道天論發微 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2010), p. 66.

[57] Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 and Hu Zhenyu 胡振宇, *Yinshang shi* 殷商史 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2003), p. 69.

that ancient sovereigns cut off the communications of the people with the supreme Divine Being. Wang Hui 王暉, for example, avers that Yao "made the right to communicate with the Most High the exclusive privilege of a ruler 把這種神權收為統治者自己專有."[58] Reiterating this view, Zhang Kwang-chih states that "shamanic paraphernalia came to be concentrated in the hands of just a few people, suggesting a monopoly of the ability to communicate with heaven."[59] Yu Yingshi 余英時 similarly remarks that the ruler's "monopoly of communication with 'heaven' or 'the Lord on High' had begun before the Three Dynasties 壟斷與「天」或「帝」的交通，早在三代之前便已開始了."[60] Their misinterpretation of the religious practice in ancient China stems from a misreading of the following passage in the *Guoyu* 國語, which delineates a picture quite different from their perception:

> King Zhao of Chu asked Guan Yefu, saying: "*The Book of Zhou* indicates that Zhong and Li blocked up the way which links heaven to earth. But why? If there was no such thing, can humans ascend into heaven?" He replied, "That is not what the text means. In ancient times, humans and gods did not intermingle… When the situation declined in Shao Hao's time, the Nine Tribes disrupted the virtuous government. Humans and gods intermingled, and one could not recognize things as they were. Every[61] person offered sacrifices, and every family produced a wizard. No one, however, had any sincere intention to hold a covenant. People made offerings, but instead of receiving blessings, they became impoverished. Sacrifices were made without propriety; humans and gods were treated in the same manner. People disdained covenants with no fear. Deities

[58] Wang Hui, *Shang Zhou sixiang wenhua bijiao yanjiu*, p. 106.

[59] Zhang Kwang-chih, "China on the Eve of the Historical Period" in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*, ed. Michael Lowe and Edward Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 70-71.

[60] Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Lun tianren zhi ji: Zhongguo gudai sixiang qiyuan shitan* 論天人之際:中國古代思想起源試探 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2014), p. 28.

[61] Some critics take this word "fu 夫" in the original text to mean "many." The parallel structure of the syntax here in this sentence, however, calls for the word "every."

> despised people's practices, condemning them as filthy. Crops were not blessed, and there was no food for sacrifices. Disaster after disaster befell people, and people could not live out their lives as they had expected. When Zhuanxu assumed power, he appointed Zhong to be the minister attending to the matters pertinent to gods, and Li the minister attending to the matters pertinent to people, restoring order and keeping humans and gods from abusing and insulting each other. This was called cutting off the communications between earth and heaven. 昭王問于觀射父，曰：「《周書》所謂重、黎實使天地不通者，何也？若無然，民將能登天乎？」對曰：「非此之謂也。古者民神不雜……及少昊之衰也，九黎亂德，民神雜糅，不可方物。夫人作享，家為巫史，無有要質。民匱于祀，而不知其福。烝享無度，民神同位。民瀆齊盟，無有嚴威。神狎民則，不蠲其為。嘉生不降，無物以享。禍災薦臻，莫盡其氣。顓頊受之，乃命南正重司天以屬神，命火正黎司地以屬民，使復舊常，無相侵瀆，是謂絕地天通。[62]

The passage above registers a dialog between King Zhao of Chu (? - 489 BC) and the high priest Guan Yefu regarding religious practices in ancient China. King Zhao of Chu mistook the phrase "絕地天通 *jueditiantong* (cutting off the communications between earth and heaven)" for the overall blockade of the passage between earth and heaven. After correcting the king's view, Guan Yefu explained that the original text refers to the wrongful intermingling of gods and humans, an aberration which gravely disrupted the order of the human world, led to serious conflicts between gods and humans, and spelled great disaster for humans. To protect humans from being unnecessarily harmed by these spirits called gods and to keep these spirits from being senselessly affronted by humans, special officials or high priests, Zhong and Li, who were the renowned Grand Historian Sima Qian's ancestors,[63] were appointed to regulate the matters related to their communications, relegating gods and humans to their proper and respective realms.

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[62] Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, "Chuyu 楚語" in *Guoyujijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), pp. 512-515。

[63] Sima Qian, "Taishigong zixu 太史公自序" in *Shiji*，vol. 4, pp. 2127-2129.

Although Guan Yefu offered no detailed account of any specific grievous events that took place during this turbulent period, the Bible shows that in ancient times some spirits had deviously intermingled with humans and forced women to be their wives: "When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose" (Gen 6: 2 NIV). The term "בְּנֵי-הָאֱלֹהִים sons of God"[64] has traditionally been interpreted to be either angels or men: "Possibly the godly line of Seth, or ungodly kings and kinglets of that day, or, more likely, a group of fallen angels."[65] Because the same term is used in the Book of Job 1: 6 and 2: 1 to refer specifically to angels: "One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them" (Job 1:6), I opt for angelic beings rather than humans. The Bible also indicates that humans, as in Uzzah's case, might have to pay the forfeit of their lives if they violate the prescribed rule regarding spiritual matters: "The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down" (2 Samuel 6: 7 NIV). The New Testament abounds in tales of demonic possession, a form of invasion which inflicts tremendous sufferings upon humans and in some cases results even in death. The following is one of many such episodes as recorded in the Gospel of Mark:

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything,

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[64] *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p. 8.

[65] *The Ryrie Study Bible: New International Version* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 15.

take pity on us and help us." "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. (Mk 9: 17-29)

A "deaf and dumb spirit τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα,"[66] as Jesus described him, invaded the body of a little boy and caused great harm to him and his family for years, even trying from time to time to extinguish his life. Jesus saved the boy by commanding the spirit to depart and not to possess his body again, separating the spirit from the human being.

The exorcism Jesus performed bears a resemblance, in my view, to Zhuanxu's or Yao's "cutting off the communications between earth and heaven." Communication between gods and humans was regulated by Zhuanxu and Yao, according to Chinese classics, in such a way that spirits and humans were kept "from abusing and insulting each other." In the original text of *Guoyu* as cited above, the word "神 shen," rendered as "gods" in small letter, is employed. Although "神 shen" as a common noun can refer to "帝 di," God with a capital letter, the former is different from the latter in that the former can also signify some powerful spirits, benevolent or malevolent, whereas the latter indicates only Almighty God in the spiritual realm.[67] Throughout the cited passage, no total ban was declared against the communication between gods and humans, let alone against an individual's worship of the all-powerful God.

Evidently, the aforementioned critics have failed to distinguish "神 shen (spirits)" from "帝 di (God)" and thereby misinterpreted the passage

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[66] *The Greek New Testament* (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), p. 154.

[67] During the later Shang dynasty, as this study will show, the Shang people began to address their sovereigns as "帝 di (God)."

in question. Like King Zhao of Chu, who misunderstood the ancient religious practice, modern scholars by and large have mistaken Guan Yefu's discourse for an interdiction of communication between spirits and humans, especially between the Lord on High and the people. The statement "絕地天通 (cutting off the communications between earth and heaven)" means, in their view, not the orderly communication between spirits and humans, but a ruler's monopoly of communication between God and humans. Their view appears to dominate modern scholarship. To show the prevalence of this concept, nay, misconcept, I will cite a few more examples. A prominent scholar in this field, Li Xueqin 李學勤 forcefully champions this view, asserting that "Zhuanxu undertook a religious reform called '*jueditongtian* [sic].'... making it possible for a small number of people to begin monopolizing religious affairs 顓頊進行了「絕地通天」的宗教改革……使宗教事務始為少數人壟斷."[68] Such is also the view of Su Bingqi 蘇秉琦, who states: "Communication with heaven has become the supreme rite. Only one person, the supreme ruler has this right… This practice is in keeping with Zhuanxu's 'cutting off the communications between earth and heaven' 與天交流已成為最高禮儀，只有一人，天字第一號人物才能有此權力……這與傳說中顓頊的「絕地天通」是一致的."[69] The additional example of Wang Hui, who wrote in a similar vein, should suffice to show the prevalence of such a misinterpretation: "'Cutting off the communications between earth and heaven'… signifies the ruler's monopoly of the sacrifices to heaven and gods 「絕天地通」……是說統治者把天神祭祀專管起來."[70] Nothing of the kind, however, had occurred during Yao's reign. Earlier, this study has shown the examples of how different individuals communicated faithfully with the Lord on High in Yao's era. Yao's imitation of heaven, Shun's plea with heaven for compassion, Yu's obedience to the Lord on High, and Qi's thanksgiving sacrifices to the Lord all indicate in one way or another the free communication between the Lord on High and his people. Although in later times, as this study will show, rulers began to monopolize the communication between the Lord on High and humans,

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[68] Li Xueqin, *Zhongguo gudai wenming yu guojia xingcheng yanjiu*, p. 203.

[69] Su Bingqi 蘇秉琦, *Zhongguo wenming qiyuan xintan* 中國文明起源新探 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1997), p. 124.

[70] Wang Hui, *Shang Zhou sixiang wenhua bijiao yanjiu*, pp. 106-107.