

Problem and Theory

Chinese history was traditionally seen as a succession of dynasties. Each dynasty had a cyclical pattern. The first king established his right to rule by his virtue. This right was then transferred hereditarily as long as the king's descendants were virtuous—or at least not overtly immoral. If they did engage in improper behavior or oppressed the people, the dynasty came to an end, the king was overthrown, and a virtuous man of another family became ruler and passed the rule to his own descendants.

Closely related to the cyclical interpretation of history was the theory of *tian ming* 天命, a heavenly decree or “mandate of heaven” (as it is conventionally translated). According to this theory, heaven's command determined the ruler. Heaven normally transferred its mandate hereditarily, but if a king violated the principles of heaven, he lost his moral imperative, and the right to rule was bestowed on another (regardless of whether the ruler's heir was virtuous).

The idea of a dynastic cycle and the theory of a changing mandate of heaven occur in the earliest historical texts available to us, those chapters of the *Shang shu* 尚書 thought to have been written in the early Western Zhou.¹ These chapters not only contain references to the virtue of the first

1. *Da gao* 大誥, *Kang gao* 康誥, *Jiu gao* 酒誥, *Luo gao* 洛誥, *Duo shi* 多士, *Jun shi* 君奭, *Duo fang* 多方. For the dating of these seven chapters, see Homer H. Dubs, “The Archaic Royal Jou Religion,” 224, 227–29, n. 2; and H. G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, vol. 1, 449–53. In *Early Archaic Chinese*, W. A. C. H. Dobson uses the first five of these chapters and the *Shao gao* 召誥 as samples of texts from the first sixty years of the Zhou dynasty.

Shang king,² the immoral behavior of the last Shang kings, and their consequent loss of mandate,³ they refer to this sequence of normative events as part of a repeated pattern that occurred in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou.⁴ In the *Duo shi* 多士 and *Duo fang* 多方 chapters, the Zhou appealed to historical precedent in order to persuade the Yin people of the legitimacy of their rule. The following speech, for example, is traditionally attributed to Zhougong 周公, who speaks in lieu of Cheng Wang 成王:

The king has spoken to you thus: You, Yin's remaining many officers! The merciless and severe heaven has greatly sent down destruction on the Yin. We Zhou have assisted the decree, and taking heaven's bright majesty we effected the royal punishment and rightly disposed the mandate of Yin: it was terminated by [the Lord on High]. . . .

You know that the earlier men of Yin had documents and records of how Yin superseded the mandate of Xia.⁵

王若曰。爾殷遺多士。弗弔旻天大降喪于殷。我有周佑命。將天明威致王罰。敕殷命。終于帝. . . .

惟爾知惟殷先人有册有典殷革夏命。

Although various scholars have advanced the view that the theory of *tian ming* was a Zhou innovation,⁶ to the extent that such speeches

2. *Kang gao*, vol. 20; *Jiu gao*, vols. 9–11; *Shao gao*, vol. 10; *Duo shi*, vols. 6–7; *Jun shi*, vols. 7–9; *Duo Fang*, vols. 8–10—all in B. Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," 40, 45, 49, 55, 61, 64.

3. *Jiu gao*, vol. 11; *Duo fang*, vols. 12–17 (Karlgren, "Documents," 45, 64). A parallel is made here with the last Xia ruler.

4. *Shao gao*, vols. 11, 17, 23; *Duo shi*, vols. 5–7 19–20; *Duo fang*, vols. 4–19 (Karlgren, "Documents," 49, 51 55 62–65).

5. *Duo shi*, vols. 2, 19 (Karlgren, "Documents," 54–56). Emended translation. I have changed the romanization in this and other quotations to *pinyin* for the sake of uniformity throughout the text.

6. Qi Sihe 齊思和, "Xi Zhou shidai zhi zhengzhi sixiang" 西周時代之政治思想, 37, stated that it was the "most distinctive aspect of Zhou thought." Dubs, 236–37, attributes it to Wen Wang because Wen Wang is "stated to have received the mandate," and Wu Wang and Zhougong speak with a unanimous voice. However, Creel, *Statecraft*, 82, states, "We cannot tell how early the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven was in existence," and remarks (n. 82) that he cannot see the force of Dubs's argument.

were effective as propaganda, the Shang must have accepted their basic premises. The stress on the transferability of the mandate was undoubtedly new in that age, as it would not have been in the interests of the hereditary rulers of Shang to promote that aspect of the theory, but they may have believed their rule depended on the grace of Shang Di 上帝 and that, as suggested in the *Shang shu*, a Xia Dynasty had preceded the Yin.⁷ Whether or not the theory had its roots in Shang thought, it was generally accepted after the Western Zhou, and it became a fundamental theorem of Chinese political thought until modern times.

The cyclical interpretation of history embodies an inherent contradiction between the principles of rule by hereditary right (represented by dynastic continuation) and rule by virtue (represented by dynastic change). The theory of a mandate of heaven attempted to explain this contradiction and to regulate its manifestations, but in any manifestation there was always the potential for conflict with the opposing principle. Any new ruler might be considered a usurper for having breached the hereditary right of the former ruler. Similarly, any hereditary ruler could be accused of having lost his moral authority. In practical political terms, the hereditary ruler had to contend with the possibility that a rebel or usurper would claim that the mandate had been transferred. On the other hand, the rebel had to show not only that he was worthy of the rule, but also that the previous hereditary cycle had come to an end. The new ruler stressed the principle of rule by virtue; the entrenched ruler, hereditary right. But the alternative principle was always present as a possibility.

Hypothesis

In the following paper, I will examine the sets of legends that surround the crucial periods of change or continuation of rule from Tang Yao 唐堯

7. See Tsung-tung Chang, *Der Kult der Shang Dynastie im Spiegel der Orakelinschriften*, 239, for discussion of Di 帝 as an impartial god. Chang holds that although the theory of the Mandate of Heaven was given form by the Zhou, its origin lay in the Shang. Similarly, David N. Keightley, reviewing Creel, *Statecraft*, in *Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 3 (May 1971): 658, states, "The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven (though not the moral content, which was apparently a Zhou contribution) thus has its origin in pre-Chou times." The supposition that the Shang accepted the tradition of a prior Xia Dynasty must rest with the interpretations of the early chapters of the *Shang shu*. For my later considerations of this issue, see Sarah Allan, "The Myth of the Xia Dynasty," and *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art and Cosmos in Early China*, 63–64.

to Cheng Wang as recorded in Chinese texts from the fifth to the first centuries BC. The periods under consideration include: (1) the transfer of rule from Yao 堯 to Shun 舜, (2) the transfer of rule from Shun to Yu 禹, (3) the succession of Qi 啓 to Yu (the establishment of a hereditary Xia Dynasty), (4) the transfer of rule from Jie 桀 to Cheng Tang 成湯 and the succession of Tai Jia 太甲 (the defeat of the last Xia king and the establishment of a hereditary Shang Dynasty), and (5) the transfer of rule from Zhòu 紂 to Wu Wang 武王 and the succession of Cheng Wang (the defeat of the last Shang king and the establishment of a hereditary Zhou Dynasty).

A legend set will include all accounts of the transfer of rule or the establishment of hereditary succession at any one period and any other legends that are related to this passage of rule in the texts (for the major figures in each legend set, see Chart A).

The study begins with the legend set surrounding the transfer of rule from Yao to Shun because these are the first legends in which our texts discuss the transfer of rule. Earlier rulers do occasionally occur in the texts, but their manner of succession is not described, nor are they included in the parallels the texts make with the later transfers of rule. The study closes with the legend set surrounding the founding of the Zhou Dynasty because this is the last dynasty founded before the first of the texts was written.

The texts will include the philosophic texts *Lun yu* 論語, *Mozi* 墨子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Mengzi* 孟子, *Xunzi* 荀子, and *Hanfeizi* 韓非子; the anthologies *Guo yu* 國語, *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子; the historical texts *Guben zhushu jinian* 古本竹書紀年 and *Shi ji* 史記; and the “Tian wen” 天問 and “Li sao” 離騷 sections of the *Chu ci* 楚辭 corpus. These comprise the major works within the period of the fifth to first centuries BC.⁸ Legendary material in ancient Chinese texts is always difficult to date because it is frequently copied from one text to another. The texts themselves are usually composite works compiled from various sources or by more than one hand rather than the product of a single author. However, almost all of the material in these texts can reasonably be assumed to have come from the designated period, most of it from the Warring States period (475–222 BC).

8. Other texts, including texts from before and after the designated period, have of course, been consulted and will occasionally be cited in the notes. These are listed with the designated texts in the bibliography under primary sources. However, these texts are used as supportive material rather than as a basis for establishing transformations.

The heart of the corpus is the philosophic texts compiled by Warring States philosophers and their disciples. These will be discussed individually in chapter 6. Although there are later insertions in many of these texts, the insertions are almost entirely from the Western Han. The references to history in these texts are sometimes in the form of anecdotes, but more frequently historical examples are encapsulated and placed within philosophic and political arguments. The encapsulated examples have usually been ignored in other studies of Chinese historical legend because they provide little if any factual information that is not in the anecdotes or other narrative material. But they do provide information about what the author considers to be the meaning of the legend, and because they are frequently set side by side to show similarity or contrast, they reveal the underlying structure of the legends. The analysis of these encapsulations will be an essential part of this study.

I have supplemented the philosophic texts with similar material from anthological texts and from the *Zuo zhuan*. The authorship of the *Guo yu*, *Zhanguo ce*, and *Zuo zhuan* is subject to question, but most scholars agree they include mainly material from the Warring States period. At the latest, insertions were made during the Xin Dynasty (6 BC–AD 24).⁹ The *Lüshi chunqiu* was compiled under the patronage of Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (290–235 BC); the *Huainanzi*, in the court of Liu An 劉安, Prince of Huainan (d. 122 BC).¹⁰ Both works are eclectic, but the absence of Han names in the passages under consideration indicates that these too

9. The arguments concerning the nature and authorship of these three works are voluminous and have been summarized by Cho-yün Hsü, *Ancient China in Transition*, 183–86, 191–92, and Creel, *Statecraft*, 475–78. The theory of Kang Youwei 康有為 that the *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu* were forgeries of Liu Xin 劉歆 during the Xin Dynasty (see *Xinxue weijing kao* 新學偽經考) has been largely discounted, though it does not seem impossible that Liu Xin may have changed or added an occasional passage. Other opinion places these two texts in the fourth or third, or at latest, second centuries BC. On the basis of grammatical analysis, Karlgren (“On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan,” 64–65) dates the *Zuo zhuan* to the period 468–300 BC, and the *Guo yu* to roughly the same period. On the basis of content, Liu Rulin 劉汝霖 (Zhang Xincheng 張心澂, *Weishu tongkao* 偽書通考, 408–409) dates the *Zuo zhuan* to 375–340 BC. William Hung (*Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde* 春秋經傳引得, xcii–xcv, lxxxii–lxxxvi), dates the *Zuo zhuan* to the second century BC and the *Guo yu* to the third. Probably neither text was compiled from a single source at a single time, but both may be reasonably assumed to belong to the designated period. Similarly, the *Zhanguo ce* probably derives from various sources, but was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向, from Warring States sources (see Zhang Xincheng, 543–44, Hsü, 194).

10. These dates (and those of other pre-Qin philosophers given in this paper) are from Qian Mu 錢穆, *Xian Qin zhuzi xinian* 先秦諸子繫年.

derive mainly from the Warring States period. The “Li sao” and “Tian wen” from the *Chu ci* corpus include references to myths and legends from the southern state of Chu. The “Li sao” was written by the fourth century poet Qu Yuan 屈原 and the “Tian wen” is also attributed to him. The origin of this unusual work is uncertain, as is its interpretation, but it probably reached its present form near the time of Qu Yuan, and the questions often reveal paradoxes in the legends.¹¹

The historical texts provide further interpretations of the legends. The *Guben zhushu jinian*, often called the “authentic Bamboo Annals,” was originally buried with a ruler of the state of Wei in 296 BC. When it was compiled is not known, but it too is probably of Warring States origin.¹² It will be discussed in chapter 6 together with the *Hanfeizi*, which includes similar references to the legends. Finally, no interpretation of references to historical legend would be complete without recourse to the more extended narratives in the *Shi ji* of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?–90? BC). I have taken this as the final work of the corpus.

By analyzing the textual references to these periods of dynastic change and continuation, I will demonstrate that the contradiction between rule by hereditary right and rule by virtue represents an inherent structural conflict, repeatedly expressed and mediated by the legends that surround these crucial periods of Chinese “history.” The conflict appears in the texts in various transformations: between such figures as heir and sage, king and minister, minister and recluse, regent and rebel; and between such concepts as aristocratic privilege and appointment by merit, and obligation to kin and responsibility to the state. Actual social conflicts other than those between the contradictory principles of rule also underlie these transformations. The ruler, who usually achieved his power by heredity, shared it with a prime minister and other officials who were increasingly appointed by merit during this period. The officials came in turn from clans, tribes, and extended families with hereditary interests which often conflicted with those of the state. During the Warring States period, from which most of the material comes, the rising *shi* 士 class competed for office with the established nobility.¹³

The period from the fifth to the first century BC was critical in Chinese history. It was the classical period of Chinese philosophy in which

11. David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South*, 45.

12. H. G. Creel, *Statecraft*, 484–85.

13. Hsü Cho-yün, 34–52.

“one hundred schools of thought” contended for favor first in numerous small states and then in a few large kingdoms, each school hoping to find the key to the establishment of a new and lasting dynasty. It was also a period of great social change. The pre-imperial dynasties, the Shang and Zhou, were tribal in origin and tended to rely on kinship ties, the system of ancestral reverence, and the loyalty of aristocratic families to maintain their power. New states such as Qin introduced mechanical and legalistic means of organizing the state that eroded the power of the noble families. In all parts of China the crisis of the Warring States allowed an unusual amount of social mobility as ambitious and able men took advantage of the opportunities that unsettled conditions offered them. Some of the philosophers promoted this new mobility; others saw it as a threat and stressed the familial ties of the traditional order. Even after the beginning of the Han Dynasty, forces that looked back to the familial patterns of the pre-imperial period contended with those that favored the new system.¹⁴

Changing social patterns in the Warring States period contributed to the philosophers’ concerns, but in any society that differentiates one kinship group from another there is an inherent conflict between the obligation to one’s own family or kinship group and the obligation to the larger community or state that includes other kinship groups. The texts continually poise and counterpoise these principles of heredity and worth in attempted resolution of this conflict. History, then, as it appears in these texts, will be shown to function like myth to expose a logical contradiction and mediate between conflicting principles.

Of all the texts under consideration, only the *Shi ji* and the *Guben zhushu jinian* record the events of these periods as part of a chronological sequence. The other texts usually encapsulate the events and present them as the medium of philosophic thought or political argument. These encapsulations are often listed in parallel form to demonstrate an underlying principle, which may then be made explicit. At other times, they are juxtaposed as contrasting possibilities in a similar situation or alternative answers to a given problem. As the political and philosophic attitudes of the writers differ, so too do the encapsulations of the events. The variation, however, is limited and reflects an underlying structure.

The contrasts between the *Shi ji* and the *Guben zhushu jinian* are the most marked. In the *Shi ji* Yao abdicated to Shun twenty-eight years

14. Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: 1974).

before Yao died; in the *Guben zhushu jinian* Shun imprisoned Yao in the last years of Yao's life. The other texts include a full range of positions from voluntary cession of the throne by Yao to forceful overthrow by Shun, but they maintain a certain consistency, and the variation is limited: all of the texts agree that the rule passed from Yao to Shun, and that Shun was not Yao's son but his son-in-law married to his two daughters.

Furthermore, the variants are not arbitrary, but represent regular transformations within a larger system. The account that a writer gives of one event in one period necessarily determines his approach to other events. For example, a writer who states that Yao abdicated to Shun will, if he happens to mention the next transfer of rule, also state that Shun abdicated to Yu; he will never say that Yu overthrew Shun. If he adds that Yao raised up Shun from the fields before abdicating to him, he may also say that Tang raised up Yi Yin 伊尹 from the kitchen, and that Wen Wang 文王 raised up Taigong Wang 太公望 from the butcher's market or fishing banks. If he holds the opinion that Shun went to farm at Li Shan in a deliberate attempt to transform the people who had quarreled over the boundaries of their fields, he will also hold the opinion that Yi Yin and Taigong Wang were eremitic gentlemen waiting for a true king.

These limitations and the regularity of variation within an apparent system I take as evidence of structure, defined by Jean Piaget as follows:

We may say that a structure is a system of transformations. Inasmuch as it is a system and not a mere collection of elements and their properties, these transformations involve laws: the structure is preserved and enriched by the interplay of its transformation laws, which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements that are external to it. In short, the notion of structure is comprised of three key ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation.¹⁵

My hypothesis, then, is that the sets of legends surrounding each crucial period of change or continuation of rule serve as models to resolve the opposition between the conflicting principles of rule by heredity and rule by virtue. These legends are furthermore part of a larger system in which a change or transformation of any one legend will effect regu-

15. J. Piaget, *Structuralism*, 5.

lar changes in the entire system, the structural balance of the system remaining the same.

In accordance with the idea of wholeness, I will make no distinction between myth and history, but regard all textual references as equally valid manifestations of the same structure. I use the term *legend* for this historical myth—or mythical history, as the case may be—to avoid confusion. In so doing, I do not mean to imply that none of the events actually happened as recorded. Indeed, history may have been enacted in accordance with the structure as well as interpreted in its light. My purpose is simply to show that the records are structured.

Theory

My hypothesis that these legends provide a model to resolve a contradiction is derived from the theories of the structuralist school of myth analysis founded by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. However, the theories and methods of this school are not directly transferable to the Chinese materials, which are different in both type and level of sophistication from the primitive tribal myths normally subjected to structuralist analysis. Therefore, I turn to the early theoretical formulations of Lévi-Strauss for exegesis, which may shed light on the Chinese materials.¹⁶

The world in which the Chinese writers lived and worked was possibly as different from that of the modern African, Australian, and American tribal cultures studied by Lévi-Strauss as it is from the European-American society in which I live and think today, and its concerns are correspondingly different. Since in some areas agriculture had been practiced for thousands of years and the writers mainly lived in urban centers, they were primarily interested in the organization of society or in the relationships between man and man rather than in the relationship of man to nature. Nor were they concerned with metaphysics, but rather with ethics and politics. These concerns are reflected in the texts. Nevertheless, as Lévi-Strauss implies, there are certain elemental ways of thought universal to all mankind. Principles that he establishes with relation to the “mythical thought” of primitive societies can be used to illuminate the meaning and function of “history” in these Zhou and Han texts.

16. The most useful of Lévi-Strauss's works for my purposes is *The Savage Mind*.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the logic of mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, but it differs from scientific thinking in the nature of the things to which it is applied and in its purpose.¹⁷ Lévi-Strauss explains the material of mythical thought by analogy with the treasury of a French *bricoleur*, a type of odd-job man who collects things because they may “come in handy.”¹⁸ In working on a project, the bricoleur surveys his treasury for things he can use. He is limited, however, by the extent of his treasury and by the features of his pieces, already determined by their previous history and use in another context. The significance of his choice lies in the possible alternatives and in the structural reorganization implied by the choice of placing any one piece in any one place. Mythical thought also builds its projects from a treasury of prestrained elements—“the remains and debris of events: in French ‘des bribes et des morceaux,’ or odds and ends in English, fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or society.”¹⁹ Like the bricoleur and unlike the scientist who could at least attempt to design new elements in conjunction with a preconceived plan, mythic thought is limited by the characteristic features and previous history of its elements, and the significance of its choices also lies in rejected alternatives and in the consequent effect of both what is chosen and what is rejected on the resultant structure.

Lévi-Strauss borrows the term *sign* from linguistics (Saussure) to further explain the nature of mythical thought. He speaks of *bricolage* and signs:

Each represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are “operators” but they can be used for any operations of the same type.

The elements of mythical thought similarly lie half-way between percepts and concepts. It would be impossible to separate percepts from the concrete situations in which they appeared while recourse to concepts would require that

17. “The Structural Study of Myth,” in *Structural Anthropology*, 202–27 (226–27).

18. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17, translator’s note: “The ‘bricoleur’ has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a jack-of-all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but as the text makes clear, he has a different standing from, for instance, the English ‘odd-job man’ or handyman.”

19. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 21–22.

thought could at least provisionally put its projects (to use Husserl's expression) "in brackets." Now there is an intermediary between images and concepts, namely signs; . . . images and concepts play the part of signifying and signified respectively.

Signs resemble images in being concrete entities but they resemble concepts in their powers of reference. Neither concepts nor signs relate exclusively to themselves; either may be substituted for something else. Concepts, however, have an unlimited capacity in this respect, while signs have not.²⁰

Concepts, in other words, have an infinite power of reference whereas the permutations of signs are limited by the possible uses of the images that signify them.

Mythical thought uses these signs to build up slates, each different from the other and from any instrumental set. By their repetitions, however, they make their structure apparent. Lévi-Strauss states:

A myth exhibits a "slated" structure, which comes to the surface, so to speak, through the process of repetition. However, the slates are not absolutely identical. And since the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real), a theoretically infinite number of slates will be generated, each one slightly different from the others.²¹

Science, which has recourse to concepts, builds up structures that are one step removed from reality. By its hypotheses and theories, it creates its own events and continually tries to go beyond the boundaries of its particular state of civilization, but "mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and reordering in its search to find them a meaning."²² The difference is not qualitative, but lies in the means and the purpose.

In applying Lévi-Strauss's theory to the Chinese materials, the manner in which the philosophers and persuaders manipulated the structure

20. *Ibid.*, 18.

21. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 226.

22. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 22.

must be distinguished from the structure itself. The Chinese philosophers and persuaders manipulated the legends according to the transformation laws of the system. They were at least intuitively aware that the legends were structured and deliberately brought out the repeating themes of legends of different periods in order to derive principles from them. These principles, formulated by the writers in conceptual terms, were then used as the medium of philosophical and political argument. The manner in which the legends were manipulated, however, implies structure, and within this structure the legends function as mythical thought.

The ancient Chinese philosopher or persuader who wished to make an argument may be compared to the bricoleur at work on a specific project. We may suppose that he would begin by surveying his treasury of legend for pieces which he could use. His treasury, like that of the bricoleur, was limited, and each piece was preconstained by its previous history and connotations. If he referred to Yao and Shun, for example, he would bring to mind various legends about their background and relationship (e.g., that Shun was the son of the blind man Gu Sou 瞽瞍, that he married Yao's two daughters) and a network of related legends (e.g., that Yu succeeded Shun). He might define the legend in various ways, but he could not exceed these preconstraints. He could say that Yao yielded or abdicated to Shun, that Shun forced the rule from Yao, that the people turned to Shun, but he could never say that Shun was really Yao's son. The significance of his choice, like that of the bricoleur, lay in the possibility of alternatives, and he too would have to reorganize his entire structure accordingly (if he stated that Yao yielded to Shun, he would also have to state that Shun yielded to Yu).

The Chinese writer's references to legend fit Lévi-Strauss's definition of signs, but they are one step farther removed from the concrete than the narrative units that Lévi-Strauss and other structural anthropologists take as the elements of mythical thought in their analyses of primitive societies, and they are used in conjunction with thought forms which Lévi-Strauss associates with scientific thought. In saying that "Yao gave the rule to Shun," the writer is using a concrete image to signify a concept. That image is as valid for the sophisticated society of ancient China as the statement "the jaguar gave the girl meat" is for the Bororo Indians, and as relevant to its concerns. Neither statement is likely to be a direct account of history, but both are made up of the "remains and debris of events."

However, the Chinese writer seldom places his statement in a narrative context. Rather than telling a story, he refers to one or two events and lets these stand for the entire legend. He indicates his permutation

by his manner of reference (e.g., Yao gave the rule to Shun, the people went from Yao to Shun) and may further bring the conceptual significance of his permutation to the forefront by paralleling his statement with a reference to another legend of another period. This will be an “operator of the same type” similarly permuted (e.g., Yao gave the rule to Shun, Shun gave the rule to Yü). Or he may contrast the sign with one of opposite significance from the same or another period (e.g., Yao gave the rule to Shun, but Tang took the rule from Jie). He may even draw a conclusion using conceptual terms (e.g., “these were [examples of] cession”; “this was [due to] heaven”; “this was fate”).

The relationship of these concepts to the signs, however, is not precisely that which would be expected in Western logic. In “The Logic of Confucian Dialogues,” A. S. Cua compared the role of concepts and historical examples in the dialogues of certain Confucian texts to their role in the Socratic dialogues. He states:

In the Socratic dialogues, concepts are determined not by particular examples of their uses or denotation. It is the concept that must ultimately determine the significance and classification of examples. . . . The Confucian methodology, on the other hand, regards the examples as inherent in the use or understanding of concepts. . . . The so-called examples are not really exemplifications of concepts or general principles, but are exemplars.²³

This distinction between the Socratic and Confucian uses of concepts resembles Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between scientific and mythical thought. He argued that science builds up its own events by its theories and hypotheses, whereas mythical thought is imprisoned in the events and experiences of the past, which it never tires of reordering. When the legends are used in the Chinese manner to illuminate expressed concepts, the concepts are bound by the possible permutations of the legends. They are nevertheless concepts and not signs, for they are not tied to any particular representations or imagery, but they may be used for events past, present, or future.

That the Chinese had recourse to forms of thought that fit Lévi-Strauss’s definition of scientific thought may be seen most clearly

23. In John K. Ryan, ed., *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, 29–30.

in the logical arguments of the Neo-Mohists and Logicians. The esoteric arguments about whether a white horse is a horse, for example, were neither an attempt to classify horses nor a story of mythical ancestors, but an exercise in logical method, "thought put in brackets." Questions of argumentation were discussed in these and other texts, and rules of logic not unlike those of the West were recognized and formulated.²⁴

Thus, scientific and mythical thought were not mutually exclusive in ancient China. In using myth in political and philosophical argumentation, the Chinese writer operated at a higher level of abstraction and with greater self-consciousness than is normally associated with mythical thought. He did not narrate legend but abstracted from it. Aware that the legends were structurally similar, he paralleled them to make the repeating themes apparent and continually sought to derive the concepts associated with the signs.²⁵

Underlying the writer's manipulation of the legends, however, is a level at which the signs function as the elements of mythical thought and the legends serve as myth. To borrow terminology from Chomsky and the transformational-generative linguists, the references to the legends in the texts are "surface structures."²⁶ These surface structures may be used in a manner that is far removed from their meaning within the system of mythical thought, and this is not my concern. The limited range of the

24. See Chung-ying Cheng, "Aspects of Classical Chinese Logic," 213–35, and Janus Chmielewski, "Notes on Early Chinese Logic," for recent studies on the formulation of logical method in classical Chinese texts.

25. In *The Raw and the Cooked*, 11, Lévi-Strauss states, "Although the possibility cannot be excluded that the speakers who create and transmit myths may become aware of their structure and mode of operation, this cannot occur as a normal thing, but only partially and intermittently." However, in a discussion with John Weightman ("A Visit to Lévi-Strauss," 39–40), he implies that the final test of his interpretation would be its acceptance by the Indians themselves and states that a native's explanation would be couched in different terms, but that he was capable of grasping the underlying philosophy of his myths. The question cannot be tested with regard to the ancient Chinese. Nevertheless, I have attempted to make a formulation that accords with that indicated by the grammatical relations to the texts themselves.

26. I use these terms borrowed from transformational-generative linguistics with some caution. To my knowledge, Lévi-Strauss never mentions the work of Chomsky or the other structural linguists. Chomsky, on the other hand, doubts the validity of the theories expressed by Lévi-Strauss in the *Savage Mind* (*Language and Mind*, 65–66). However, I use this terminology as the simplest manner of describing the relationship between the basic elements of the legends and the variants that actually appear in the texts, i.e., that the variants are transformations generated from the deep structures.

variation of the references implies underlying “deep structures,” a level from which specific variations of the legends may be derived, but only according to certain transformation laws. These deep structures are in turn generated from the themes of heredity and virtue, which are constant in each legend set. These sets, then, are like Lévi-Strauss’s “slates”; they continually repeat the same themes in the same structural order, but are different in their factual details.

By analyzing the deep structures of the legends as well as the surface structures, we may begin to see “how myth operated in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact” rather than “how men think in myth.”²⁷ The analogy of the bricoleur is again applicable, but here the treasury includes all of the odds and ends of history and not simply the events of an already determined system of legend. The bricoleur deals in mythical thought; he is not an individual thinker, and the signs function in mediating the conflict between heredity and virtue rather than in extraneous argument. The choice that the bricoleur makes of a sign again implies others, and the significance lies in the possible alternatives. If, for example, the transfer of rule from Yao to Shun is nonhereditary and includes a ritual declining of the throne from Yao to Shun, this signifies giving precedence to virtue, especially when Yao’s son Dan Zhu 丹朱 is described as bad. This choice implies others, since unless the system is one in which virtue is given precedence over heredity, equivalent stress must be given to the principle of heredity—hence the other legends of the set (Shun was Yao’s son-in-law. Shun was devoted to his own father). Each choice further requires others, and the set is built up in this manner. Any particular representation at the surface structure level also has implications for the rest of the set, but the transformations will remain within the possibilities of the set. If, for example, the people went from Yao to Shun, the transfer is still nonhereditary and still signifies giving precedence to virtue, but since Yao did not abdicate and Shun did not accept his abdication, Shun did not need to rid himself of the taint of breach of heredity by further yielding the throne to the recluse Shan Juan 善卷.

In the present paper, I will demonstrate the manner in which these legends do indeed operate as signs within a structure. They will be shown to be concrete entities, permutable within a limited range and significant of concepts. Furthermore, they will be shown to fulfill the purpose of

27. Lévi-Strauss claims to show the former but not the latter (which is more properly the study of logic), in *The Raw and the Cooked*, 12.

myth, defined by Lévi-Strauss as “to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction,” in this case the contradiction between hereditary right and rule by virtue. Since the contradiction is real and can never be totally overcome, the model is continuously repeated with slates of different myths at each period of change, but the same structural elements are maintained.

Closely related to Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between mythical and scientific thought is a parallel distinction between “cold” and “hot” societies, “the former seeking by the institutions they give themselves, to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development.”²⁸ Natural cycles present no problem to the cold societies because they are “periodically repeated in duration without their structures necessarily undergoing any change.” The overall sweep of history, however, is not recognized by these societies. Instead, they postulate a period of mythical history in which there were ancestors whose nature was different from that of modern man. In modern times, these ancestors are imitated and ritual conjoins past and present, but the intervening passage of time is obliterated by the repetitiousness of all of man’s acts.

At first glance, the Chinese would appear to be in polar opposition to these primitive “peoples without history.” They have frequently been called the most history-conscious people in the world. The number of their historical texts remaining is greater than any other ancient civilization, and the accuracy of much of the material has recently been attested by archaeological discovery. On the other hand, the texts include an extreme paucity of the truly mythological (in the traditional sense of the supernatural). There are only enough references to myth and ritual to posit an earlier period of supernatural belief. Wolfram Eberhard, using later material as well as the early texts, has tied these references to local cultures, which, he believes, were joined together to become what we now recognize as Chinese culture.²⁹ Henri Maspero has attributed the paucity of myth to euhemerization, a process by which mythical figures are historicized and their supernatural features made to appear human.³⁰

28. *The Savage Mind*, 234.

29. Wolfram Eberhard, *Local Cultures in South and East China and Lokalkulturen im Alten China*.

30. Henri Maspero, “Legendes mythologiques dans le Chou King.”

However, the texts not only include euhemerizations of supernatural figures, they also include mythologized (euhemerized in the traditional rather than in Maspero's sense of the term) versions of ancient history. In a previous study, "The Identities of Taigong Wang 太公望 in Zhou and Han Literature," I compared the historical evidence concerning this minister of Wen Wang and Wu Wang of the Zhou Dynasty with the many references to him in Zhou and Han texts, and found these to be entirely contradictory.³¹ Historically, he was a nobleman of the Jiang 姜 clan, which traditionally intermarried with the Zhou royal family, and was possibly the uncle of Cheng Wang. In the popular tradition, however, he was always a poor man raised up from obscurity by Wen Wang to be his minister, though there are several completely different regional legends to this effect.

My theory is that Chinese writers from the fifth to the first centuries B.C. dealt with the problem of history neither by positing a mythical past and continuous indivisible present nor by viewing time as simply progressive, but by subjecting all of past time to cyclical laws. The cycles are similar in structure and provide a model to overcome the logical contradictions of the society, but since this society is the highly sophisticated and politicized world of the Warring States and the Han philosophers and persuaders, the legends reflect this world rather than presenting supernatural accounts taken from the remains and debris of a primitive history. Chinese society was, of course, still diverse. The occasional references to noneuhemerized myth are evidence that outside the courts and groups of literati, peasants and local cultures continued to build other structures more applicable to their own lives. However, for those who were concerned with political questions, this cyclical history came to function as myth.

This theory allows me to explain some phenomena that previously appeared confusing. For example, Karlgren has applied a "historical method" to much of this same material.³² This method enabled him to trace the development of the legends in time. However, certain types of legend variants, such as those concerning the transfer of rule from Yao to Shun, which range from Yao's voluntary cession to Shun to Shun's

31. This study was presented as my master's thesis at the University of California, Berkeley, in June 1966 and later published in *Monumenta Serica* 30 (1972-73): 57-99. It is included herein as Appendix 2, pp. 149-89.

32. Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China."

overthrow of Yao, coexist in the texts and cannot be adequately explained in terms of chronological development. Nonetheless, they can be understood as transformations of the same deep structure.

Maspero has effectively demonstrated that many of the predynastic figures which appear in the texts as though they were historical persons were originally supernatural creatures. Valid though this approach is, it does not provide a means for explaining why the legends were combined or euhemerized in the manner in which they occur in their later versions. The legends of Gun 鯀 and Yu, for example, were originally separate local flood myths, but when they were combined and the figures euhemerized, Yu became Gun's son. This manner of joining the legends meant that Yu came to serve his father's killer. This cannot be explained as a projection of social norms or ideals, since it violates them, but it can be effectively explained as a breach of heredity necessary to fulfill the structural requirements of the set.

The closest forerunner of this work is Marcel Granet's *Danses et Legendes de la Chine Ancienne*.³³ Granet was particularly concerned with the relationship between myth or legend and ritual. He also demonstrated that there are certain paradigms in ancient Chinese legends, such as the *minister-fondateur* or "founding minister," a term I have borrowed from him. My purpose in this work is to show the system or structure that underlies the paradigms and gives them their meaning. I have been influenced in my approach by Granet, who also influenced Claude Lévi-Strauss. But my analysis is based entirely on the texts themselves, from which I have tried to build up a system uninfluenced by the theories of later writers. Thus, I have deliberately refrained from reference to secondary sources except where they shed light on specific problems.

Finally, with regard to my own study of the identities of Taigong Wang, the difference between history and legend and the existence of several local legends with similar themes but totally different details can now be explained more clearly. The different local legends were "operators of the same type" that grew up independently, though in contradiction to historical fact, to fulfill the requirements of the legend set surrounding the founding of the Zhou Dynasty.

By suggesting that the Chinese subjected history to a cyclical interpretation, I do not mean to imply that they were unaware of chronological or progressive time. The situation is similar to that discussed above

33. Marcel Granet, *Danses et Legendes de la Chine Ancienne*.

with respect to signs and concepts. The ancient Chinese made use of the forms of mythical thought, although at a higher level of abstraction than in primitive societies, but they also had recourse to thought forms associated with logic. The Mohists, for example, discussed questions of universal and particular time.³⁴ Mythically, the idea of a life cycle was extended over long periods of time, and historical change was subjected to its laws. This is not only a question of interpretation but also of institutions, for dynastic change was a reality as well as an idea.

The ancient Chinese did assume that there was a period in the mythical past in which their ancestors were different from modern men. There are many culture heroes and supernatural feats and features associated with the mythical past. The earliest figures in our legend sets—Yao, Shun, and Yu of the predynastic period—are all heroes of this era. However, the structural model of dynastic change is projected onto these figures so that the transfers of rule from Yao to Shun and Shun to Yu are structurally identical to the changes of rule at the beginning of the Shang and Zhou. Each period follows the other in a progressive sequence (in this sense, chronological time is assumed), but the structure does not change. By this means, then, the mythical past is conjoined with the present, and the present acts of men are given legitimacy.

Method and Procedure

In the following study, I will use three primary methods in determining the meaning and structural configuration of the legends. First, I will attempt to determine the “deep structure” of each individual legend by examining the full range of textual variations and defining the common semantic elements within these variations. Second, I will determine the scope and structural configuration of each legend set by examining the manner in which the texts relate the legends surrounding each critical period of change of rule to one another—thus, a “legend set” is defined as the full range of legends that are related textually to the accounts of transfer of rule at any one period. My primary key in this respect is the manner in which the ancient Chinese texts present legend figures of the same period as contrasting examples. I assume that figures so juxtaposed are in structural opposition but have some common element. By this

34. Joseph Needham, *Time and Eastern Man*, 1–9.

means I will be able to show that each set contains a pattern of structural opposition in which the rulers function as mediatory figures between two extremes. Finally, I will determine the relationship between the legend sets by examining the manner in which the legends of one period are paralleled in the texts to legends of another period. Here I assume that the legend figures thus paralleled are structurally equivalent. I will thus be able to build up a system of structural relations.

Procedurally, I will begin by examining the legend set surrounding the transfer of rule from Yao to Shun and then proceed chronologically. In so doing I do not mean to imply priority of origin—this is merely an organizational device which could as easily have been reversed. Having determined the structural configuration and relations between each set, I will then examine the specific transformations of structure that appear in individual philosophic texts. For the convenience of the reader, I have also appended a series of charts describing the relationships between the major figures of each legend set. Occasional reference to these will be made in the following discussion, and the key to the charts includes a list of symbols used in both the texts and the charts. Since the number of figures discussed is large and the relationships complex, the reader may want to look these over before beginning the following discussion. All of the material contained in the charts, however, also appears in the text.

All references with a solidus (/) refer to the *juan* and page numbers of the *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 editions as originally published in Shanghai in 1919–1922. Other editions consulted are listed in Bibliography A.