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The Sacrality of The Mountain

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The Sacrality of the Mountain

The Sacrality of the Mountain

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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Universidad de Chile
Bachelor in History, 2008

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the conception of the mountain as a “sacred space” based on the definition provided by Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and The Profane* and other works. I recognize three major elements in Eliadean sacral spatiality: a) order and orientation b) liminality and c) reality. Using various sources but mainly the oracle bones inscriptions, the *Yugong* (“Tributes of Yu”) of the *Shujing* (“Book of Documents”) and the *Shanjing* (“Classic of Mountains”) of the *Shanhaijing* (“Classic of Mountains and Seas”), I demonstrate how the three basic components of sacrality are to be found in each of the aforementioned sources, therefore showing the prevalence of the understanding of the mountain as a sacred space from the late Shang, through the Warring States, until the early imperial periods; and explaining its epochal variations throughout the course of early Chinese history. In doing this, I also argue that the acquisition of numinous properties from mountains was quintessential to the construction of religious power and political legitimacy in Early China.

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Dedication

*To my parents, Berta y Manuel,
and sister, Isadora*

“Everything that is not ‘our world’, is not yet a world”

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*

“Strange days have found us. Strange days have tracked us down”

Jim Morrison, “Strange Days”, *The Doors*

“Dear God, I wish that I could touch you.

How strange, sometimes I feel like almost do.

But then, I’m back against the glass again.

Oh God, what you keep out it keeps me in”

Jim James, “Dear God”, *Monsters of Folk*

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Introduction:

Considering the persistence of the understanding of the mountain as a sacred space throughout Chinese history, it is surprising that no systematic study to trace its roots in early Chinese religious culture has ever been attempted. I am not speaking here of studies dedicated to late Han, medieval, early or late modern China, but to surveys devoted to delve into the origins of the widespread and traditional admiration the Chinese have professed for mountains, and which has expressed in the poetry of Li Po (701-762 CE) and Wang Wei (701-761 CE)¹, the paintings of Lu Guang (late 14th c.), Weng Jia (1501-1583) Dong Bangda (1699-1769) and Wang Yun (1652-1735)², the literature of hermits and recluses³, the religious scriptures of Taoism⁴ and Buddhism⁵ as well as in the mountain pilgrimages of villagers and emperors in early modern China.⁶ In order to trace the origins of the beliefs which originated these literary, poetic or religious creations, we must turn our attention toward the formative ages of Chinese civilization. Therefore, in this study I have covered the period spanning from the late Shang, through the late Zhou and until the the early imperial dynastic eras in an attempt to identify the sprouts of the enduring idea of the mountain as a “sacred space”.

¹ Hinton (2005)

² Munakata (1991)

³ Vervoorn (1990), Berkowitz (2000)

⁴ Verellen (1995), Raz (2009)

⁵ Robson (2009)

⁶ Naquin & Yü (1992)

I can only count a few works which have come close to do something like this in the past. About twenty years ago Terry Kleeman wrote a brief but suggesting article entitled “Mountain Deities in China: The Domestication of the Mountain God and the Subjugation of the Margins”⁷, that is still widely quoted. However, this study, which covers an extensive period of time in only a few pages, dedicates very little space to pre and early imperial ideas about mountains. Kleeman’s article serves as an excellent introduction to the subject of the sacrality of the mountain in Chinese religious culture but is of little help for those attempting to obtain a more precise understanding of early Chinese religious conceptions on mountains. Something similar occurs with “Unto the Mountain: Toward a Paradigm for Early Chinese Thought”⁸, an obscure article written by Franklin Doeringer which focuses on certain repetitive cosmographic and cosmological concepts (centricity, circularity and circumfluency) in the diviner’s (*shi*) boards and TLV mirrors of the Han dynasty. While the article succeeds in suggesting a relationship between the mountain and the ordering of space, it does not read this in religious terms as it is mostly preoccupied with identifying a general rationale (“paradigm”, “matrix”) for early Chinese philosophical reasoning. Probably the single most solid article written so far regarding the sacred character of mountains in early China is Kenneth Brashier’s “The Spirit Lord of Baishi Mountain: Feeding the Deities or Heeding the yinyang?”⁹, a detailed study of an inscribed stela dated to 183 C.E.¹⁰ which offers a comprehensive analysis of the mountain as a sacred site, describing the cosmological systems in

⁷ Kleeman (1994)

⁸ Doeringer (1990)

⁹ Brashier (2001-2002)

¹⁰ Brashier (2001-2002) p. 160.

which it participated, its numinous abilities and the diverse ritual procedures used to appropriate them, with a view to assert the coexistence of theistic and correlative cosmologies during the late Han period. The stela which the article analyses, however, belongs to a historical period which is beyond the scope of this work and that differs from late Zhou and early Han conceptions of mountains on certain points, mostly because of the great importance which correlative cosmology plays in the cosmological and ritual systems associated with Lord of Baishi Mountain.¹¹ Therefore, notwithstanding Brashier offers a meticulous research on the “ritual landscape” which mountains defined, his work is not useful for an investigation into the origin and character of the most pristine Chinese ideas about mountains.

Besides from these articles there are a few books which dedicate at least one chapter or an entire section to the subject of the sacrality of the mountain. Kiyohiko Munakata's *Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art*¹² dedicates several pages to analyze the sacral character of mountains by reviewing various pictorial and iconographic materials, drawing connections between their symbolic import and the descriptions of mountains in the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (“The Book/Classic of Mountains and Seas”), the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (“Master from Huainan”) and the *Chuci* 楚辭 (“Songs of the Chu”). The language Munakata uses, however, is too often highly technical and his shamanistic interpretation of both the graphic and written sources he reviews, specially the *Shanhaijing* and the mountain iconography of late Zhou ceramic vessels, is questionable inasmuch as that the actual shamanistic character of early

¹¹ Contrarily to the late Han period, the late Zhou and early Han eras granted more importance to theistic than to correlative cosmologies. See Puett (2002) pp. 225-258.

¹² Munakata (1991)

Chinese religion is a highly controversial issue¹³. Therefore, the approach adopted by Munakata to address the sacrality of the mountain is debatable and probably deficient. Nevertheless, his work deserves credit for considering a vast array of sources –including the oracle bone inscriptions– and it constitutes the earliest systematic attempt to offer a panoramic view of mountain worship from the late Shang to the Eastern Han dynasties. More recently, similar tasks have been pursued by Julius Tsai and James Robson. Robson assigns the first chapter of his book *Power of Place*¹⁴ to an evaluation of the sacred nature of mountains and its relations to Chinese imperial religion. The chapter starts by offering a brief description of the ways in which the sacrality of mountains was conveyed throughout the history of pre-modern China and then proceeds to trace the evolution of the concept of *yue* 岳 (“sacred mountain” or “peak”) from the oracle bone inscriptions, through various cosmographical schemes until the formation of the Five Peaks (*wuyue*) system during the late Warring States and early imperial periods. Robson offers a concise, knowledgeable and up-to-date survey of the sacrality of the mountain during early and medieval China. His study, however, is largely circumscribed to a revision of the various systems of imperially sanctioned sacred mountains, hence adhering to a rather restricted definition of mountainous sacrality as depending on governmental recognition. This view is debatable. As I shall explain throughout this work, not only the mountains admitted as sacred by the imperial administration but all mountains were understood as possessing a sacral quality, an idea which can be traced back to the late Shang dynasty.

¹³ For a review of arguments which challenge the plausibility of the shamanistic character of early Chinese religion see Keightley (1998) & Boileau (2002).

¹⁴ Robson (2009)

Compared to Robson's book, Tsai's *In the steps of emperors and immortals*¹⁵ adopts a much broader definition of the sacrality of the mountain, reading it as "womb of the wild", "zone of demons, beasts and barbarians", "home of the immortals", "cosmic chamber of commerce", "naturalized ancestral hall", "the site of the bureaucracy of the dead" and a "grotto". Tsai provides an ever more comprehensive account of the sacred character of mountains in early and early medieval China. Nevertheless, inasmuch as he brings together chronologically diverse materials, his study is not particularly useful to distinguish Warring States and early Han ideas from late Han and early medieval conceptions about mountains. Specifically, Tsai makes no efforts to clarify that mountains came to be associated with heavenly ascension (immortals, the death) and vacuity (grotto) rather late in history and that these beliefs do not belong to the earliest stratum of religious ideas related to mountains.¹⁶ The daemonic and monstrous aspects to which Tsai calls attention to have also been studied in Muchou Poo's *In Search of Personal Welfare*¹⁷ and Von Glahn's *The Sinister Way*¹⁸. Poo has addressed this by succinctly studying the appearances and abilities of the monsters and spirits of the *Shanhajing* in the context of an inquiry into Han esoteric and divinatory almanacs. For his part, Von Glahn devotes an entire chapter, entitled "Mountain Goblins", to tracing the origins of medieval ideas about mountains and their creatures back to the Warring States and early Han periods, convincingly relating them to the practices of the *fangshi*, the descriptions of the *Shanhajing* and

¹⁵ Tsai (2003)

¹⁶ A similar complaint could be said of Munakata (1991)

¹⁷ Poo (1998)

¹⁸ Von Glahn (2004)

the esoteric capacities attributed to Da Yu (“Yu the Great”). Most of the chapter, however, focuses not on ancient but on medieval religious practices and believes.

Finally, there are a few works which have studied the sacrality of early Chinese mountains primarily in relation to the sacrality of space. Vera Dorofeeva-Litchmann has pioneered in this field. In his article “Conception of Terrestrial Organization in the Shan hai jing”¹⁹, Dorofeeva-Litchmann explains how in the *Shanhaijing* mountains were portrayed as tracing territorial routes which defined a cardinally-oriented and hierarchical territory, and identifies Yu the Great as the mythological figure responsible for establishing these routes. Describing in detail the different cosmographical and numerological systems which Yu used to this. The article emphasizes that this “conceptual organization of space” –which expressed in the layout of the text itself– was effected by means of spatial movement, defining it as a “process-oriented scheme” and suggesting the fact spirits presided over the different mountain ranges which defined the structure of the world signals this was conceived as a “spiritual landscape”.²⁰ The survey on “mountains and world models” proposed by Mark Edward Lewis’s *The Construction of Space in Early China*²¹ has relied heavily on this and other articles of Dorofeeva-Litchmann.²² Lewis, however, has also characterized the *Shanhaijing* as a text dealing with liminality, hybridity, ritual activity, distant cosmography, mythology and the ideological justification of absolute political power. In this way, Lewis account, which also considers the *Yugong*, is probably the

¹⁹ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995)

²⁰ Some of these ideas have been further developed in Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003), Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2005) & Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007)

²¹ Lewis (2006)a

²² As he himself has admitted. See Lewis (2006)a pp. 285-286.

most concise and complete survey on the sacrality of the mountain in Warring States and early imperial China, although it suffers from the same historiographical ambiguity than Tsai's study, making little –if no– efforts to distinguish late Zhou/Western Han from Eastern Han ideas on peaks. Versus, a recent work by Dorofeeva-Litchmann, entitled "Ritual practices for constructing terrestrial space (Warring States-early Han)"²³, focuses only in the former period, recounting different versions of the *Yugong* in terms similar to those in which she explained the *Shanhajjing*. According to Dorofeeva-Litchmann, these versions depict the construction of an orderly space by divergently describing the spatial route Yu the Great traced across mountains. Comparing the type of space structured in the *Yugong* with that organized in the *Shanhajjing*, she has concluded that the former was "a purely administrative version of Yu's actions", defining hence a contrast between a text which uses the mountain for secular purposes and another one which employs it for religious goals.

In sum, most of the works which either focus on or deal with the sacrality of the mountain in early China are insufficient whether in terms of theoretical assumptions, profundity and/or scope, hence being useless for a successful identification and analysis of the primal conceptions of mountainous sacrality. Furthermore, the majority of the works actually preoccupied with the period of my concern (late Shang to early Han) have been unsystematic in their treatment of the sacral nature of the mountain in early China, adhering to various types of reductionist approaches. The only exception to this rule is the work of Dorofeeva-Litchmann. Contrarily to the abovementioned studies, not only she deals exclusively with the corpus of texts –the *Shundian*, *Yugong* and *Shanhajjing*– which I consider to be essential for an study of

²³ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009)

the mountain as a “sacred space” in Early China, but also her understanding of mountainous sacrality is intimately related to spatiality, a view which concurs with mine. However, as I shall explain throughout this work, the definition of sacral spatiality proposed by Dorofeeva-Litchmann is still deficient in many points. To explain, the definition of “sacred space” which I have adopted here does not regard the presence of spirits as the sole evidence for the existence of sacrality. Spirits, indeed, belong to only one of the aspects which, according to Mircea Eliade, define sacrality, namely, liminality. Besides liminality, sacrality also entails order, orientation and reality. The exploration which I have undertaken here is grounded on this definition of sacrality. In each chapter of this work, I attempt to identify each of these three components of sacrality: a) order and orientation, b) liminality and c) sacrality. This approach has the virtue of defining the specific nature of the sacrality of the mountain in each of the periods surveyed, situating it in the context of a defined religious culture, relating it with religious and political elements traditionally understood as foreign to it and, at the same time, suggesting novel approaches for the study of early Chinese religion.

Chapter One: Mountains and the sacrality of space in late Shang 商 religion:

The suitability of the Eliadean frame.

Since very early in their history, the Chinese thought of mountains as sacred spaces. This sacral character of mountainous landscapes resulted from the understanding of them as liminal zones and cosmographical markers. Mountains, indeed, were conceived as connecting Heaven and Earth, serving as bridges between the heavenly and the terrestrial realms, spaces where the gods could “come down to us” and where humans could “climb up to them”. Thus they were liminal zones inasmuch as in them the divine and the human realms met each other. However, mountains were also regarded as having the ability to provide order and orientation to space and hence as serving as cosmographical agents. Either one or both of these conceptions can be found in the oracle bone inscriptions as well as in several ancient texts, such as the *Yaodian* 堯典 (“Canon of Yao”) and *Yugong* 禹貢 (“Tributes of Yu”) chapters of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (“Book of Elders”) or *Shujing* 書經 (“Book/Classic of Documents”), the *Shanjing* 山經 book of the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (“The Book/Classic of Mountains and Seas”), the *Mengzi* 孟子 (“Mencius”) and the *Shiji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”), among a few others. Most of these texts concur in depicting mountains as giving structure and orientation to the world in reference to different numerical-cosmographical schemes based on the four cardinal directions and the center (composing systems of either four or five, depending on the period) and which imply specific regional divisions (five, nine or twelve provinces, depending on the numerical system); these texts therefore characterize mountains as having an

important cosmological role, that is, as being of central importance in the organization of the world as a *cosmos*, that is, as an ordered space. Although sharing this cosmological focus, not all these documents are, however, identical, the *Shanhajjing* standing out for adding a series of esoteric and mantic elements, aspects which are majorly absent in the rest of the early Chinese literature that refers to mountains. The contrasts existing between the *Shanhajjing* and texts such as the *Yaodian* and the *Yugong* is one of the most intriguing aspects of the early Chinese conception of mountains and speaks of diverging understandings of sacral spatiality. Considering that all these texts were an integral part of the corpus of classical writings and were hence located at the center of Chinese political and religious culture as it was systematized during the early imperial era, it is not surprising that the ideas about mountains, and the world in general, attested in them prevailed all throughout Chinese dynastic history, only changing in the late modern period with the penetration of Western ideas. Consequently, in China, from ancient times and until the late nineteenth century, mountain ranges were understood as having a liminal nature and a cosmological role. As I shall explain throughout this chapter, the first of these ideas finds its roots in the religious culture of the Shang 商 dynasty .

In defining the mountain in early Chinese religion as a "sacred space" I rely on Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and The Profane* -from now on simply *The Sacred*. In this text, Eliade defines the sacrality of a space as encompassing three major characteristics: 1) order/orientation, 2) reality and 3) liminality. In order to fully understand the concept of "sacred space" is mandatory that we review each of these concepts. As I proceed to introduce them, I will be addressing the issue of the

applicability of the Eliadean framework to Shang商 religion, specially in reference to the first of its abovementioned components.

Order and Orientation

According to Eliade, a sacred space or hierophany is defined by its capacity to render order and orientation, providing an univocal reference scheme and a definitive spatial framework, in such way ending with the chaotic, formless homogeneity of the profane space:

"In the homogenous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center"²⁴

This ordering capacity of sacrality distinguishes two major aspects: 1) centrality or "the symbolism of the center" and 2) directionality or "the symbolism of the four directions".²⁵ The latter can not exist without the former, existing a dialectical relationship between them:

"... nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation-and any previous orientation implies acquiring a fixed point"²⁶

Therefore, the possibility of a sacred space depends on the production of orientation:

²⁴ Eliade (1957) p. 21.

²⁵ I adopt the term "directionality" from David Keightley's *The Ancestral Landscape*. See Keightley (2000) ch. 5 & 6, *passim*.

²⁶ Eliade (1957) p. 22.

"...the elaboration of techniques of orientation..., properly speaking, are techniques for the construction of sacred space"²⁷

For Eliade, orientation is a requisite for the construction of a sacred space. In turn, orientation depends on the establishment of directions which, at the same time, depend on the fixation of a center. The relationship between centrality and directionality is causal, as it is that existing between orientation and sacrality: Starting from the center, directions are defined and orientation achieved. As a result, sacrality can take place. All these different categories build upon the other, sacrality over orientation, orientation over directionality, and directionality over centrality. In this manner, sacrality finds its ultimate origin in centrality.

Turning now to the issue of the suitability of this framework to Shang religiosity I find several theoretical problems in previous and current scholarship. After dedicating some time to the understanding of the Eliadean notion of sacrality I have noticed that scholars have failed to use this concept properly, developing rather defective understandings and dismissing the utility of Eliade's work on insufficient grounds. Firstly, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the concept of centrality, disconnecting it from those of directionality, orientation and sacrality and, therefore, misinterpreting it. Secondly, this misunderstanding has led them to believe that centrality is restricted to the presence of a single mountain, temple and/or city, devoting themselves to the search of any of these sites as definitive proof for the existence of a center in early China and, more specifically, in Shang civilization. Thirdly, both critics and supporters of this search have based their views on a misreading of Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return* or *Cosmos and History-*

²⁷ Eliade (1957) p. 29.

which I shall refer simply as *The Myth-*, specifically the third section of its second chapter, entitled "the symbolism of the center", which has been profusely quoted in the specialized scholarship from the late seventies until very recently.

With a view to reinstating the possibility of effectively using Eliade to understand Shang religion, and the place of the mountain as a "sacred space" in it, I shall trace the origin of this misunderstanding, stressing its shortcomings and suggesting alternative interpretations. As I have said, the applicability of Eliade to Shang religion has been reduced to the plausibility or implausibility of a central temple, city or mountain. In fact, this has been a dominant characteristic of scholarship devoted to Shang religiosity. However, this locative focus is the result of an incomplete reading of the following passage:

"The architectonic symbolism of the center **may** be formulated as follows:

1. The Sacred Mountain-where heaven and earth meet, is situated at the center of the world.
2. Every temple or palace-and, by extension, every sacred city or royal residence- is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a center.
3. Being an *axis mundi*, the sacred city or temple is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell"²⁸

This passage is quoted by Paul Wheatley (p. 428, n. 16, 21) and Sarah Allan (p. 98, n. 31), the two major proponents of the existence of a central Shang site, and is indirectly referred to by Nancy Price (p. 104, n. 35) and Aihe Wang (p. 38, n. 35) through Jonathan Z. Smith (p. 14, n. 42), the two major opponents of this view, who advocates the existence of a mobile center, and whom I ultimately adhere to Smith's

²⁸ Bold is mine. Eliade (1959) p. 12 & Eliade (1958) p. 375. Bold is mine.

criticism of Eliade. While Wheatley has defended the existence of a sacred city, Sarah Allan has asserted the actuality of a sacred mountain, and both authors have done this in reference to the "symbolism of the center" as explained in *The Myth*, borrowing this expression to entitle the book sections they have dedicated specifically to this issue and using such concept to locate the center in specific sites. Opponents of this view have criticized this locative focus and challenged the plausibility of a fix center, proposing a mobil one in the form of the Shang king, capital and/or kingdom. Nonetheless, both supporters and opponents of Eliade have erroneously assumed that the possibility of centrality is necessarily restricted to the presence of a central site. By doing this, supporters have believed that to find that specific geographical site amounts to definitively confirm that the Shang believed in a center and opponents, arguing that such fix center did not exist, have assumed that this denotes the absolute impossibility of a Shang fix center.

In order to evaluate the validity of the assumptions of both supporters and opponents of Eliade, lets now recall the definition of sacrality provided above. In doing this, we shall immediately notice that, so far, the entire discussion around the suitability of the Eliade's work for Shang religion have been entirely focused on the issue of centrality. What I find problematic about this, however, is not this focus on centrality in itself but the fact that is has been grounded in a deficient understanding of centrality as restricted to the presence of a mountain or city. The problem with this reductionist approach is that it does not do any justice to the richness and suggestiveness of to Eliade's initial propositions. And the fact is that if we carefully read Eliade's work, and specifically his book *The Sacred* we shall realize that the possibility of centrality is not necessarily restricted to the presence or absence neither of a city nor of a mountain,

and that Eliade's insistence on the importance of centrality is less concern with centrality itself as it is with the overall issue of orientation, as soon as the specific theme of "the symbolism of the center" always participates of the much broader themes of directionality, order and sacrality. In the light of these considerations, I argue that, independently of the factuality of encountering a fix center for Shang civilization, the fact that it developed such a strong preoccupation for directionality already assumes the existence of a fix center, and whether we have yet been able to locate it or not is a rather different issue. And if we are indeed interested in asserting or discarding the suitability of the Eliadean scheme to early Chinese religion, these two issues are not to be confused and the complexities that the concept of centrality entail are to be acknowledge.

Reinstating the suitability of the Eliadean framework, however, not only depends on recognizing that scholars opposing the possibility of Eliade's applicability to Shang religion have confused the inability to finding such location with the actual absence of such center and rushed on discarding its theoretical efficacy in an effort to prove the existence of a mobil one, but also on understanding that they have done this based on the analytical weaknesses of the supporters themselves, which have failed to understand the complexities and nuances contained in the notion of centrality by disconnecting it from the questions of orientation and sacrality. In other words, the reevaluation of Eliade's hypothesis requires that we accept that while supporters have failed to fully comprehend and apply the Eliadean framework, restricting the probability of centrality to the presence of a Shang site, opponents have unjustly concluded that this framework is incompetent. Moreover, my own view does not implies a total rejectment of both opponents and supporters' views as much as a

shifting of the entire discussion from centrality to orientation and sacrality. On one hand, I agree with opponents in that the center is not located neither in a city nor in a mountain, but I do not think this implies to deny all possibility of the existence of Shang center and, furthermore, I do not believe that the prospect of a mobile center (whether in the form a city or a king) necessarily exclude the plausibility of a fixed center. I find myself incline to conclude that both types of centers were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. On the other hand, I agree with the supporters in their interest of making good use of Eliade to analyze Shang religion, however I believe they have done this insufficiently, restricting themselves to the issue of centrality and, therefore, misinterpreting it. It is my conviction that Eliade is still quite useful for an analysis of not only Shang but also Zhou and early imperial (Qin, Han) religion.

Returning to the necessity of coming to terms with the suggestiveness of Eliade's propositions, it is mandatory we realize that, for the Romanian scholar, centrality was not an isolated issue but a component of the broader ancient preoccupation for orientation and sacrality. In fact, as soon as Eliade is concerned with the overall problem of orientation he dedicates as much space to directionality as it does to centrality. However, passages which refer to directionality and, more importantly, passages that reveal the inherent interconnection between directionality and centrality as parts of a general interest in orientation are rarely quote, certainly as a result of the insistence in treating centrality as a self-contained theme and the prevalent neglect of its affiliations to orientation and sacrality. The reason for this is that scholars appear to have assumed that the single passage quoted above is the most definite statement on Eliade's thought. This assumption, however, is mistaken

and it does not do justice to the richness of his work, ignoring the many nuances and ramifications associated to the concept of centrality. These nuances, that I have already introduced above, are explained in several other passages:

"The sacred.... makes orientation possible... it founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world"²⁹

"... it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation"³⁰

According to Eliade, the function the center, and the origin of its entire symbolism, is that of making orientation possible. Nevertheless, scholars have not acknowledge this, preferring to understand centrality as residing exclusively in a city, temple and/or. There is certainly room for such a conclusion in the abovementioned passage, precisely because in it Eliade appears to assert that the mountain is indeed restricted to certain types of sites. Nevertheless, as I shall explain, this emphasis is not the result of a theoretical proposition but a consequence of the very narrative structure of *The Myth*, the text in which such passage is contained. Is specifically this book that has been systematically referred to by scholars advocating or disapproving Eliade. The treatment of centrality which authors such as Paul Wheatley, Sarah Allan, Jonathan Z. Smith, Nancy Price and Aihe Wang have developed has been almost exclusively based on this text which, as I have said, they have quoted profusely. But again, what is questionable about this is not that they have restricted themselves to this one book but the fact that the have done this while ignoring several other important works of Mircea Eliade, in which he further developed many of the

²⁹ Eliade (1957). p. 30.

³⁰ Eliade (1957). p. 21.

arguments on support of his thesis of the "symbolisms of the center", which he initially introduced in *The Myth*. Originally published in 1949, *The Myth* is actually one of the earliest systematic texts of Eliade, reflecting his primal attempts to explain different themes that Eliade recognizes as repetitive in several ancient civilizations, such as the Indian, Chinese, Mesopotamian, Iranian, Hebrew, etc, and whom that, implicitly through myth, ritual and symbol, inform us of "... a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that can be regarded as constituting a metaphysics" (Myth p. 3), and that Eliade terms "archaic ontology". This book, hence, is designed as an exploration of this ancient metaphysical system and is organized around different topics that are thought to be central to it. Along these lines, the section which Eliade dedicates to centrality, entitled "the symbolism of the center", actually consists of several examples of central mountains in ancient Eastern religions, which are recalled in response to his interest in demonstrating the prevalence and universality of the belief in a sacred mountain located in the center of the earth and the universe. However, when treating the same subject in a different work, Eliade assures:

"The most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Centre is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the universe, and upholding the three worlds upon the axis."³¹

After this statement, the author proceeds to recount various examples of "central trees" in archaic and/or "primitive" religions. In doing this, his interest lies, once again, in revealing a pattern of centrality which, in this case in particular, is defined in

³¹ Eliade (1961) p. 44.

relation not to the mountain but to the tree. In other words, is not that in each of these books Eliade assumes that centrality is restricted neither to the mountain nor to the tree, is that while in the former he chooses the mountain to illustrate the pattern of centrality, in the latter he chooses the tree to do the same. While the reasons for these different choices are not entirely clear, this focus on recurrences and patterns seems to be a predominant characteristic of Eliade's work, and the emphasis he gives to one or another topic appears to be the result of certain narrative preferences rather than of defined theoretical assumptions. The famous passage I have quoted above, however, does not reflect this clearly, giving the impression that Eliade is actually limiting sacrality to only three major forms: mountain, temple and city. I believe, however, this is an impression, not a fact. In another work published in the same year than *The Myth* (1945), *Traité D'Histoire des Religions* (translated as *Patterns in Comparative Religion*), Eliade relates centrality to other two modes: tree and pillar. In this work, the section entitled "the symbolism of the 'centre'" starts in this way:

"There is a mass of myths and legends in which a Cosmic Tree symbolizes the universe... a central tree or pillar upholds the world, a Tree of Life or a miraculous tree confers immortality upon all who eats its fruit... Each one of these myths and legends gives its own version of the theory of the "centre", in as much as the tree embodies absolute reality, the course of life and sacred power, and therefore stands at the centre of the world"³²

In the light of this passage is possible to appreciate that by the time Eliade wrote *The Myth* he already understood centrality as encompassing not only mountains, cities and temples but also trees and pillars. That he did this, however, is hard to recognize

³² Eliade (1958) p. 380.

in the *The Myth* itself since its section on “the symbolism of the center” is exclusively dedicated to recounting sacred mountains in different religions. However, even in this book Eliade indirectly associates centrality to a fourth mode: territory. In the section preceding that of centrality, entitled “Celestial Archetypes of Territories, Temples and Cities”, Eliade treats territory as an equivalent to both city and temple, explaining how these spaces were all modeled on ‘celestial prototypes’, assuring that

“According to Mesopotamian beliefs, the Tigris has its model in the star Anunit and the Euphrates in the star of the Swallow... In Egypt, places and nomes were named after the celestial ‘fields’: first the celestial fields were known and then they were identified in terrestrial geography”³³

After providing various other examples, he concludes:

“Man constructs according to an archetype. Not only do his city or his temple have celestial models, the same is true of the entire region he inhabits”³⁴

Although he initially equates city, temple and territory as responding to the same principle of celestial imitation, immediately after this, as he proceeds to address the issue of centrality, he suddenly forgets about territory:

“Paralleling the archaic belief in the celestial archetypes of cities and temples.... we find, another series of beliefs, which refer to their being invested with the prestige of the Center”³⁵

³³ Eliade (1954) p. 6.

³⁴ Eliade (1954) p. 10.

³⁵ Eliade (1954) p. 12.

The fact that territory is implicitly excluded from participating in the “the symbolism of the center”, however, should not lead us to conclude that is altogether prevented from doing so. Actually, and as I shall explain, in other works of Eliade territory does appear as participating of centrality. This inclusion is indeed logical, and what is intriguing is its apparent exclusion. I assert is logical because as soon as Eliade equates territory, temple and city in archetypical terms, and since centrality is introduced as “paralleling the archaic belief in the celestial archetypes of cities and temples”, it is natural to conclude that already in *The Myth* Eliade understood territory as another valid form of centrality, regardless of the fact that he did not explicitly stated this. Additionally, by the same time Eliade clearly established the interrelation between centrality and orientation, as it is explained in the section on ‘the consecration of space’ of *The Patterns*:

“... the place is never ‘chosen’ by man; it is merely discovered by him... sometimes effected through the medium of a traditional technique operating out of and based upon a system of cosmology. One such process used to “discover” these sites was the *orientatio*... the spot is always indicated by something *else*, whether that something be a dazzling hierophany, or the principles of cosmology underlying *orientatio* and geomancy...”³⁶

By the time mentioned, hence, Eliade conceived the construction of a sacred place as intimately related to the ability of defining directions and achieving orientation. Consequently, the Eliadean understanding of centrality, as a close reading of both *The Myth* and *Patterns in Comparative Religion* reveals, was much more complex and nuanced than usually believed, surpassing that which have been traditionally inferred from a single passage. For Eliade, centrality was articulated not only through

³⁶ Eliade 1958. p. 369.

mountains, cities and temples, but also by means of trees, pillars and territories, simultaneously comprising orientation and sacrality. In none of those two works, however, he succeeded in effectively communicating the complexities that centrality entailed, such goal would be reached only in later stages of his intellectual production.

In fact, when compared with later works such as *The Sacred*, many of the subjects in *The Myth* appear to be in a stage of relative underdevelopment, treating each theme separately, making only minor efforts to establish connections between them. Oppositely, the structure of *The Sacred* -written in 1956, seven years later than *The Myth*-, revolves around the concept of "the sacred", allowing Eliade to efficiently draw the relations between these themes. As a result, in this work, the symbolism of the center is never treated in a separate section, but always as part of the more general subject of orientation and, moreover, as an integral component, together with liminality and reality, of the much more comprehensive issue of sacrality. Therefore, the fact that scholars have limited solely to *The Myth*, while ignoring *The Sacred*, have seriously limited their understanding of Eliade's postulates. More specifically, have caused scholars to believe that the existence of a sacred space is given only by the existence either of a sacred mountain or a sacred city. However, for Eliade the mountain, temple and/or are only some of the many different modalities of centrality, an idea which is suggested in several passages of *The Sacred and The Profane*

"...communication with heaven is expressed **by one or another** of certain images, all of which refer to the *axis mundi*: pillar..., ladder..., mountain, tree, vine, etc."³⁷

³⁷ Eliade 1957. p. 37. Bolds are mine.

"**whether** that space appear **in the form** of a sacred precinct, a ceremonial house, a city, a world, we everywhere find the symbolism of the Center of the World"³⁸

As it can be inferred from these assertions, the sacred mountain and the sacred city are only two samples of a variety of symbols that refer to the *axis mundi*, which can also take the shape of, for example, a ladder, a pillar, a tree, a temple and even an entire region ("a world"). As the passage that immediately follow these statements suggests, for Eliade the mountain is only one the various forms that centrality (or the symbolism of the center") can adopt:

"We shall begin with **an example** that has the advantage of immediately showing not only the consistency but also the complexity of this type of symbolism—the sacred mountain"³⁹

Furthermore, the idea that the sacred mountain is solely one of the various modes of centrality is also suggested in the very introduction to the influential passage from the *The Myth*:

"The architectonic symbolism of the center **may** be formulated as follows"⁴⁰

The reason why Eliade, when speaking of the central mountain, city or temple, chooses to use expressions such as "by one or another of certain images", "whether in the form of", "an example that" and "may be formulated as", is because he does not understand centrality as restricted to these specific sites but rather sees them as

³⁸ Eliade 1957. p. 37. Bolds are mine.

³⁹ Eliade 1957. p. 38. Bold is mine.

⁴⁰ Eliade 1959. p. 12. Bold is mine.

distinct variations of "the symbolism of the center". In fact, besides from the mountain, the temple and the city Eliade mentions several other examples such as the ladder, the vine, the tree, the pillar and the territory, all of which function as an *axis mundi*. If Eliade chooses the theme of the sacred mountain to do this, it is because he considers it as probably the most notorious example of a pattern he recognizes as prevalent in archaic religions, not because he believes that centrality is restricted to this particular theme. Therefore, the emphasis on the sacred mountain motif in the work of Eliade is grounded in methodological rather than theoretical reasons. This is particularly true in reference to *The Myth*, where Eliade assigns an entire chapter to the symbolism of the center, emphasizing the preeminence of the sacred mountain, city and temple but deemphasizing other motifs such as territory, ladder, tree, and pillar that he does mention, instead, in *The Sacred*. Therefore, most of the nuances in Eliade's argumentation that I have just exposed are absent in the former book and present in the latter, this is certainly because these two works are organized in a rather different way.

In the light of these considerations, it is very clear that, in the view of the famous Romanian scholar, centrality was not restricted to none of the sites traditionally adduced by scholars as definitive proof to either assert or deny the existence of a Shang central site. Given the obvious faultiness of the traditional view, the possibility of applying Eliadean centrality to Shang religion should be reassessed based on an examination of the plausibility of other sites, moreover, this effort should focus in defining the liaisons of these possible sites not only with centrality but also with directionality, orientation and sacrality. I believe there is no real possibility of truly addressing the issue of the suitability of the Eliadean framework for Shang religion

without first implementing this reevaluation. In order to advance this proposition I argue that it is mandatory to move the discussion from the issue of centrality to that of directionality and orientation, to interpret the Shang concern for the definition of a center (*zhongshang* 中商) and the establishment of directions (*sifang* 四方, *situ* 四土, *siwu*) as an overall concern for orientation, to understand this effort in achieving effective orientation (*lizhong*) as one directed to the creation of a sacral spatiality (*zhongshang* 中商), to view this spatiality as related not only to directionality and centrality but also to liminality through the recognition of the religious conception of a multiform and comprehensive numinous landscape (*yue* 岳 or *yang*, *he* 河, *tu* 土) and, finally, to understand the Shang insistence on an strictly ordered, centrally-situated, cardinally-oriented, territorially-grounded and spiritually-charged spatiality as concerned with the overall effort of creating a significant world and constructing a full-out reality characterized by its perpetual connection to the numinous realm.

Adopting the concept of sacrality for an analysis of Shang religion and with a view to developing a new understanding of the mountain as a 'sacred space' implies departing from the traditional use of the Eliadean framework, enriching the concept of centrality and looking for a new set of clues in the effort to address its plausibility. In order to this successfully is mandatory that we understand that for Eliade sacrality is defined not simply by a central locality but by three major aspects: 1) orientation (directionality/centrality), 2) reality and 3) liminality. In reviewing the plausibility of each of these aspects I shall turn back to the sources themselves. In the first place, I will concentrate on the issue of orientation.

Orientation, according to Eliade, is defined by two major aspects: a) directionality b) centrality or “the symbolism of the center/centre”. In order to decide if orientation occurs in Shang civilization is mandatory to identify at least one of these two aspects. I shall argue that, for the Shang, both of them are to be found.

Directionality has been recognized as one of the major characteristics of Shang religiosity by several scholars, specially David Keightley, (which is from whom I have taken the term “directionality”). In his *The Ancestral Landscape*, Keightley dedicates several pages to the issue of directionality, assuring that

“The Shang elites employed a series of overlapping and reinforcing categories, both religious and political, to give shape and meaning to the world that surrounded their cult center... they divided their domain into four areas, known as *situ*, “the Four Lands,” or *tu*, “the Lands,” named for the cardinal directions”⁴¹

“The Shang referred to the lands not included in their central domains as *fang*, a word that, in political contexts, is best translated as ‘side, border, country or region’”⁴²

“The Four Fang were also identified individually by their cardinal directions”⁴³

“The impulse to impose some kind of quadrate order on the land can also be seen in the ritual attention the Late Shang paid to the directional Powers known as Wu”⁴⁴

Keightley identifies, in this way, three major politico-cosmological schemes for Shang civilization: *situ*, *sifang*, *siwu*. In doing this, Keightley diverge from some of his

⁴¹ Keightley 2000 p. 61.

⁴² Keightley 2000 p. 66.

⁴³ Keightley 2000 p. 69.

⁴⁴ Keightley 2000 p. 72.

colleges, which have offered various interpretations of *tu*, *fang* and *wu*, tending to focus almost exclusively in the first of these schemes, the *sifang*. In his groundbreaking *The Shape of the Turtle*, Sarah Allan assigns an entire section to this concept, which she translates as “the four quarters”:

“In Shang oracle bone inscriptions, the four quadrates are mentioned collectively, as the *sifang*, and individually, as the eastern quadrate, western quadrate, southern quadrate, and northern quadrate. They are the objects of the *di*-sacrifice and the homes of the winds”⁴⁵

While Allan and Keightley agree on the cardinal nature of the *tu*, they differ on their definition of the *fang*:

“...whereas *tu* were real lands to the north, south, east and west of the Shang from whom they received harvest grain, the *fang* were primarily important as spiritual entities”⁴⁶

What Allan reads as spiritual entities, Keightley, however, interprets as spatial dimensions, defining *fang* as “the lands not included in their central domains” and *tu* as the lands located in Shang territory (see above). Aihe Wang, author of *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, rejects Allan’s view and agrees with Keightley:

“Moving from Allan's graphic analysis of *fang* to the context in which the graphic was used, I would argue that in Shang oracle bone inscriptions *fang* is primarily a concept of political geography. *Fang* most often describes alien polities, referred to either as “x *fang*” indicating a specific polity, or simply as “*fang*” or “many *fang*”... In this political context, Keightley's translation of *fang* as “side, border, country, or region” best conveys the primary meaning of *fang* as a

⁴⁵ Allan 1991 p. 75.

⁴⁶ Allan 1991 p. 84.

boundary marker of the Shang world, differentiating the Shang from all the alien, hostile, or unknown others.”⁴⁷

Aside from the controversies involved in the definition of such terms, all of these specialists agree on the importance of directionality in the Shang world:

“... northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest also occur in the oracle bone inscriptions, so the Shang recognized eight directions altogether...”⁴⁸

“*Sifang* as a cosmological structure classified all forces of the universe, including spirits, beings, and natural powers, as well as alien polities, on the basis of the four cardinal directions”⁴⁹

“The squareness of the Shang cosmos is suggested by the fact that there were four sides to the Shang world... by the emphasis on the four cardinal directions... Regions like the *tu* and the *fang* might thus be identified by their cardinal directions, as we have seen, or by coupling physical feature to a cardinal direction”⁵⁰

Additionally, scholars generally agree that the Shang emphasis on cardinality assumed the existence of a center, and that cardinality and centrality were two interrelated categories:

“The four *tu*... were lands, which lay to the north, south, east and west of the Shang. The central position of the Shang is evident in the expression ‘Central Shang’ (Zhong Shang 中商)...”⁵¹ (Sarah Allan)

⁴⁷ Wang 2000 p. 26.

⁴⁸ Allan 1991 p. 75.

⁴⁹ Wang 2000 p. 30.

⁵⁰ Keightley 2000 p. 81.

⁵¹ Allan 1991 p. 83.

“...in cosmological terms the Shang conceived of a square world, oriented to the cardinal points, and surrounding the central area known... as Zhong Shang 中商, “Central Shang””⁵² (David Keightley)

“The domain of the Shang was composed of an “inner area” and a “outer area”. The former was called the “Zhong Shang 中商” or “*zhong tu* 中土”- the Central Shang or central land, including the ancestral capital, the present capital and the royal hunting area... The center and its outer domain were further defined by many *fang* who lived outside of the four lands, and who were most often alien to the Shang. In this context, *fang* represented “otherness” and “outerness” in contrast to the centrality of “us”; the centrality of a homogenous “us” was defined in turn by contrast to the heterogenous “others” - *fang*...”⁵³ (Aihe Wang)

Interestingly enough, although these scholars have succeeded in recognizing the interrelation between centrality (*zhongshang/zhongtu*) and directionality (*sifang, siwu, situ*) in Shang politico-religious culture, they have failed to understand that this interconnection is, precisely, one of the most outstanding features of the Eliadean ‘sacred space’, still preferring to analyze centrality or “the symbolism of the center” as an independent topic, disconnected from directionality and limited to the presence or absence of a fix site. When effecting this turn, scholars are at once concerned with either approving Eliade and asserting the existence of a fix Shang site or with disapproving him and discarding the plausibility of such site. This is true for the cases of Wheatley, Allan, Price and Wang.

“These basic modes of symbolism which are manifested in the ideal-type city of much of the traditional world, that is pre-eminently the capital city, and which are indicative of the cosmo-magical basis of the genre of urban forms, have been systematized by Mircea Eliade as follows... Reality is achieved through participation in the Symbolism of the Center as expressed by some form of *axis mundi*...

⁵² Idem

⁵³ Wang 2000 pp. 26-27.

Each of these modes of traditional symbolism is apparent to a greater or lesser degree in the planning of the Chinese city”⁵⁴
(Paul Wheatley)

“Eliade stressed the significance of the sacred mountain as the symbol of the center and place of the earth’s origin... the central mountain was Song Mountain in Henan Province, the central peak of the five sacred peaks... In Shang oracle bone inscriptions, the *di* rite was performed to *Yue* (the Peak) and *He* (the river) as well as the four *fang* and the high ancestors. *He* is easily identified as the Yellow River. The identity of *Yue* is less certain, but I believe it to be Songshan”⁵⁵ (Sarah Allan)

“Paul Wheatley argued for the origin of the city as a ceremonial complex... focused as well on the symbolic dimension of the “center” as the “axis mundi” and the place where heaven and earth meet... following Mircea Eliade, and using such metaphors as mountain or navel, Wheatley placed further emphasis on the fixedness or permanent link to place... the late Shang cosmology , organized according to the basic principles of the cardinal points and not centered on a specific “permanent” locale, suggests accommodation to mobility by means of orientation to the framework rather than to any specific place within it”⁵⁶ (Nancy Price)

"The royal ancestral line in the world of the Shang was seen as the cosmological center and as the juncture of the four fang. Influenced by Marcel Eliade's theory of the symbolism of the center as the zone of the sacred, some scholars have tried to locate this center geographically in China by looking for a sacred mountain. Others, also conceiving the center as a specific place, have tried to locate it at the capital of the kings, an effort best represented by Wheatley's monumental work. But, since the Shang kings moved their capitals frequently, the geographic location of the central capital remains a problem... the center of Shang political power resided in the king's body and his ritual connection to his ancestors. This centrality and connection to the king's ancestral line are further supported by Nancy Price's recent comparative study... Price has proposed a model of a “moving” center, in which power is not necessarily fixed at a particular place but rather is mobile. Using this model to explain Shang history, the centrality of the Shang king is defined not by a

⁵⁴ Wheatley 1971 p. 418.

⁵⁵ Allan 1991 p. 99.

⁵⁶ Price 1995 pp. 104, 116

specific fixed locality but by means of orientation to the abstract framework defined by *Sifang*⁵⁷ (Aihe Wang)

As it can be inferred from these passages, the received wisdom on the Shang center revolves around a definition of centrality as restricted to the probability of a site, which is allegedly based on Eliade but that is intriguingly disconnected from the discussion on the *sifang/zhongshang*, and therefore from the issues of directionality and orientation. This view is shared by both supporters and opponents of a immovable Shang center. On the one hand, the supporters of Eliade champion the existence of a central Shang city or mountain, providing textual and/or archeological evidence in support of a specific site. On the other hand, the opponents of Eliade question the validity of such evidence and the plausibility of a central Shang city or mountain, dismissing the possibility a fixed Shang center. The divide, however, remains the same even in the case of the opponents, whom although emphasize the importance of directionality and orientation, maintain these issues unconnected from the theme of centrality, precisely because they have previously dismissed it. In this manner, so far the debate over the Shang center has functioned in dualistic terms. If scholars emphasize centrality, they deemphasize or ignore directionality. If they accentuate directionality and orientation, they reject centrality. What I would like to propose here is a non-dualistic, dialectic understanding of centrality and directionality based on the Eliadean thesis of the ancient preoccupation for orientation, which I believe applies to Shang politico-religious culture.

In my view, is mandatory that we reassess the discussion over the Shang center, and this is only possible if we first recognize that it has hitherto orbited between two

⁵⁷ Wang 2000 pp. 37-38.

extremes: centrality and directionality. These themes themselves are unproblematic when sufficiently understood, the real problem residing in the fact that scholars have understood them in mutually exclusive terms, therefore making minor or simply no efforts to explore the interrelations between them. As I have explained above, it is precisely this disconnection that has hampered the understanding of Eliade's propositions, which actually invite us to understand centrality and directionality as concepts that are inextricably related to each other as constitutive parts of a general interest in achieving effective orientation and ending the homogeneity of landscape.

The lack of this dialectic approach is ever more intriguing considering that the entire discussion on the *sifang* and the *zhongshang*, which I have briefly quoted above, assumes an spatiality that can be easily interpreted as one defined by a dialectic of directionality and centrality. However, and as I have explained, when scholars refer to these subjects, and despite the, sometimes timid, recognition of the spatial complementarity of the *sifang/zhongshang* scheme, they choose to emphasize one of them using rather different theoretical frameworks. Consequently, centrality is understood in purely locative terms (as a fixed site) and directionality in a strictly theoretical fashion (as an abstract framework of reference). The problem I reckon in these analyses is that they are somehow divorced from the textual data available in the oracle bone inscriptions, appearing to be grounded in theoretical assumptions that are importantly incapable of successfully interpreting it. One of the most notorious researchers of the Shang oracle bone corpus, David Keightley, and whom has remained largely apart from these debates, offers radically important clues in identifying the specifics of this dissociation. Drawing on Keightley's *The Ancestral Landscape* as the most reliable source of information on the Shang politico-religious

worldview as explained in the oracle bones, and using his conclusions as a contrast to the debate I have just introduced, have invited me to conclude six major things:

- 1) The sources themselves, i.e., the oracle bone inscriptions speak of a central space in terms of neither a mountain nor a city but of a territory known as *Zhongshang* or *Zhongtu*, an assertion that is also partially accepted by Sarah Allan and Aihe Wang. Therefore, the Shang center was not a site but an entire space.
- 2) The *sifang*, which indeed served as a framework for orientation, was not merely an abstraction but also a territory (or a series of territories) which was defined in direct reference to a central space known as *Zhongshang*.
- 3) Considering that the sources do speak of a central space for Shang, the fact that hitherto we have been unable to identify by means of which specific marker or central reference point this space was defined should not lead us to deny the existence of such central space known as *Zhongshang*. Furthermore, following Keightley, it is highly possible that this marker was not located in the territory but in the heavens.
- 4) The existence of a central space (*Zhongshang*) does not exclude the possibility of a mobile king. However, this mobility was mostly reduced to the central land of the Shang, the *Zhongtu*.
- 5) The relation between the *Sifang* and the *Zhongshang* is best interpreted as one between directionality and centrality that pertains to a general concern for the accomplishment of effective orientation. Recognizing this preoccupation in orientation reveals the sacral character of the Shang world. This sacrality was given not only by the centrality of the *Zhongshang* and the directionality of the *Sifang* but also by the liminality of the Nature Powers, particularly the Mountain

Power, of the Shang pantheon, which were territorially-grounded spiritual entities responsive to the Shang king and located exclusively in his central domains. The mountain, therefore, had an important role in the sacralization of the Shang territory and was understood as a 'sacred space'.

6) The Eliadean categories of sacrality can be successfully applied to Shang politico-religious organization and beliefs.

The oracle bone inscriptions, indeed, refer to centrality exclusively in terms of the *Zhongshang*. This, however, occurs in only three occasions. Keightley advances that the reason for this is that the centrality of the Shang territory was taken for granted. Moreover, this centrality is already implied in the *Sifang* since, as Eliade assures, the definition of the four directions (cardinal points) can only be achieved once a central point has already been established, regardless of what this point was. On the other hand, that this "Central Shang" refers to a territory is implied by the fact that the *fang* were territories, although extraneous and peripheral. It is unlikely that the *Zhongshang* could have been something importantly different from the *Sifang* as these two categories were part of one indivisible scheme designed to organize the space. There is little probability that the *Zhongshang* referred neither to a city nor to a mountain or temple, and indeed the sources do not speak of any central temple, mountain or city. Nevertheless, they do speak of a central territory. Therefore, it is more reasonable to conclude that if the *fang* referred to territorial divisions outside of the Shang king's authority, then the *Zhongshang* designated the territory under the control of the Shang ruler. It should be stressed that this relationship between centrality and royal authority does not exclude royal mobility, just as the centrality of Imperial China did not prevent the Chinese emperor from overseeing his domains in the "tour of inspection". In fact, the oracle bone inscriptions refer to the constant

movements of the king across his domains. However, the fact that the king moved around did not imply that his territories ceased to be central. That the centrality of the Shang domain was independent from the various royal displacements, and that the center was a fixed place, is suggested by the anxiety the ruler and his advisers experienced when he had to move *into* or *out* of his domains:

“The king should not enter into the East”⁵⁸

“The king should today, *dingsi* (Day 54), go out.”/“It should not be today, *dingsi*, (that the king), goes out.”⁵⁹

“If the king enters into Shang, there will not be (some Power) making disasters.”/“If the king enters into Shang, there may be (some Power) making disasters.”⁶⁰

“Crack-making on *xinmao* (day 28), Que divined: “On the coming *xinchou* (day 38), the king should enter into Shang”⁶¹

The fact the oracle bones simply speak of either “going out”, “coming in”, “entering into X direction” or “entering Shang” assumes these movements are taking place from fixed locations. These locations appear to be the *fang*, the *tu*, and the Shang, an hypothesis reinforced by the fact that besides cardinally located locations, the only other locale that is mentioned is Shang. That in these cases the diviner chooses to speak of Shang rather than *Zhongzhang* also suggests that the centrality of this location is implied since the displacement is occurring from one of the different spaces whose location is defined in reference to this central space. In other words, the known centrality of the Shang territory and its referential nature makes the usage

⁵⁸ Keightley 2000 p. 74.

⁵⁹ Keightley 2000 p. 75.

⁶⁰ Keightley 2000 p. 75.

⁶¹ Keightley 2000 p. 76.

of the prefix *zhong* unnecessary. On the other hand, the fixity of this territory is indicated by the very nature of these royal displacements, which were of access or egress, implying the existence of established, immovable boundaries. In this way, the vocabulary used to describe the royal displacements suggest the prevalence of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* scheme. However, contrarily to Wang's assertion, this vocabulary does not suggest that these categories were understood as mobile, quite the contrary, it appears to indicate that they were conceived as fixed. In fact, the mobility of the king not only left the centrality of the Shang realm unaffected but gave place to major anxiety when it implied displacements to areas outside of his central domains, as these were thought to be much less secure than Shang territory (*Zhongtu*).

On the other hand, the territorial fixity of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* scheme is also suggested by the fact the sources constantly refer, either explicitly or implicitly, to the existence of an spatial complementarity between the *Sifang* and the *Zhongshang*, evidence which reinforces the hypothesis that these categories were necessarily related to each other. Therefore, the Eliadean, dialectic understanding of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* that I am championing here seems to concur with the one existing in the sources themselves. This understanding, as I have suggested above, constitutes an invitation to understand Shang directionality and centrality as two interrelated spatial categories; to depart from approaches based either on locative interpretations of centrality or abstract conceptions of directionality, and, finally, to reject their treatments of “the symbolism of the center” and the *Sifang* as two separate, unrelated concepts. Effectively understanding this interrelation implies recognizing that these categories share a concern for the attainment of a sense of direction in the landscape. And although several authors have recognize the importance the Shang

gave to both directionality and centrality, David Keightley, however, has been the only one to interpret this as reflecting a general concern for spatial orientation. Furthermore, Keightley has identified orientation as a prevalent characteristic of Early Chinese religion, with its roots in Neolithic beliefs. Ironically, he has done this without relying on Eliade -as he has remained largely apart from the debates over centrality and directionality-, and by merely drawing on the available sources:

“Evidence for cosmological orientation appears in the early Neolithic record in China.... Throughout much of the Neolithic, the dead buried in Eastern graves lay with their heads oriented in a range between north and east... In contexts of death and cult, in short, the inhabitants of Neolithic and Shang China consistently oriented themselves according to some kind of cosmo-religious grid”⁶²

In the case of the Shang, this “cosmo-religious grid” was no other than the *Sifang/Zhongshang* scheme. Keightley assertively reads this grid -and with that the spatial interrelation between the directionality of the *sifang* and the centrality of the *zhongshang*-as revealing a great interest on the accomplishment of effective orientation and the construction of an ordered space. Important as it is to recognize this, I believe there is much more. As I have explained at the beginning of this chapter, orientation and order are two of the most distinctive features of the “sacred space” as defined by Eliade. From an Eliadean perspective, therefore, the very orientational capacity of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* system expresses the sacral quality of the Shang territory, as soon as one of the major characteristics of the sacred is that it “...makes orientation possible”⁶³. Making orientation possible was precisely what the directionality of the *Sifang* and the centrality of the *Zhongshang* did for the

⁶² Keightley 2000 pp. 83-84.

⁶³ Eliade 1957. p. 30.

Shang. Therefore, not only these two categories were interrelated but they fulfilled the same orientational function. Furthermore, this function could have been accomplished only if the *Sifang* and *Zhongshang* referred two fixed and not mobile territories.

The *Sifang* was, indeed, a scheme whose ultimate purpose was to provide spatial orientation. However, it was not simply a theoretical construct but also an actual division of the landscape based in the establishment of defined spatial boundaries. At the same time, centrality was not reduced to a site, instead, it was a characteristic of an entire territory. This territory was defined in strict relation to the *Sifang*, with the *four* fang defining the contours of this central space, which might have encompassed a ritual and/or political center. In this way, the *Sifang* and the *Zhongshang* functioned as two indivisible spatial categories that conformed a single, interrelated territorial structure where the centrality of the Shang territory was defined in direct opposition to the directionality and peripherality of the four *fang*. This entire structure had not only a spatial functionality but also an ontological quality as soon as the definition of spatial boundaries not only permitted the organization of the territory but also gave it order and meaning. As Keightley has assertively noticed, the quadrate order the Shang imposed on the landscape was meant to furnish shape and meaning: “the Shang employed a series of overlapping and reinforcing categories, both religious and political, to give shape and meaning to the world

surrounding their cult center”⁶⁴. According to this Shang specialist, besides from the *Sifang*, directionality permeated several other categories of the Shang world, such as weather, lands (*Situ*), and spiritual powers (*Siwu*)⁶⁵. Wang, on his part, has interpreted this emphasis on directionality as a consequence of the prevalence of the *Sifang* in the Shang ritual system, highlighting how all the spiritual forces of the Shang world manifest predominantly through this quaternary structure⁶⁶. These scholars, therefore, concur in locating this quaternary directionality at the basis of the entire Shang system of signification. Furthermore, this interrelation between orientation and signification has already been identified by Eliade as one of the most distinctive characteristics of “the sacred space”: “....sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to ‘found the world’ and to live in a real sense”. I assure this was exactly the case with the *Sifang/Zhongshang* scheme: The *Sifang* was a structure of directionality defined in direct reference to the centrality of the *Zhongshang* which allowed the Shang to effectively orient themselves in the landscape. Because of its centrality, associated cardinality and orientational quality the *Zhongshang* was a sacred space. Furthermore, this ordered character made the *Zhongshang* qualitatively different from the space surrounding it, furnishing it with an aura of reality that was defined in opposition to the limitless, shapeless and chaotic unreality of the *Sifang*, as this one lacked from both the cardinality and centrality of the space inhabited by the Shang

⁶⁴ Keightley assumes the center of Shang civilization was their cult center -an hypothesis that I do not necessarily agree with-, understanding the expression “the world surrounding their cult center” as standing for the entirety of the Shang world, which, according to this scholar, acquired meaning through the implementation of parallel and corresponding categories such as the *Sifang*, *Situ* and *Siwu*. Keightley (2000) pp. 61, 82.

⁶⁵ Keightley 2000 pp. 55- 96, *passim*.

⁶⁶ Wang 2000 pp. 23-37, *passim*

people. Consequently the centrality, directionality, orientation and order of the *Zhongshang* literally shaped its reality, as "... the true world is always in the middle, at the center, for it is here that there is a break in plane..."⁶⁷. This fracture in the landscape was effected by the existence of limits. In order for the reality of space to take place, limits had to be established, and this depended firstly in the definition of a center. Once a center was identified, directions were established and effective spatial orientation was accomplished. In this way, the sacrality of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* cosmography was grounded in its exceptional ability to provide such boundaries through centrality and directionality, making "space" possible by imposing order and orientation on the landscape. The exclusivity of these features made the space inhabited by the Shang people distinct from all other space. The construction of space was not only a cosmographical but also, and most importantly, and ontological feat, as soon as the very possibility of a "world" rested on the capacity to create and maintain space. Because of this ability, the Shang territory, the *Zhongshang*, constituted a reality, defined in opposition to the the intangibility and obscurity of the *Sifang*.

Reality

⁶⁷ Eliade 1957. p. 42.

In sum, the sacrality of the *Zhongshang* manifested primarily as an ordered space, a *cosmos* in the original Greek sense: an order and a world⁶⁸; secondarily, it manifested in a unique ontological status derived from this order: reality. As Eliade asserts, reality is born only after orientation has been accomplished, hence the world as such results necessarily from the establishment of limits and boundaries: Every sacred space is an ordered space, and every ordered space is a real space, a space that is qualitatively and essentially different from all the other spaces which lack from orientation and order. There is no possibility of a world without order, orientation “...founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world”⁶⁹. Furthermore, since orientation depends on centrality, it is only at the center that absolute orientation and total reality is possible. Consequently, the ordered world or, which is the same, the *cosmos*, is always located at the center. The centrality of the world, however, is not only geographical but also ontological and anthropological. In other words, at the same time we thrive to perceive ourselves as being spatially located at the center of the world and as enjoying from a privileged ontological status, we develop a sense of anthropological superiority which is defined in opposition to the onto-anthropological inferiority of the periphery: The world is

⁶⁸ Eliade uses *cosmos* as an equivalent to “sacred” drawing precisely on the original Greek signification of *κοσμος* as “order and/or world”. The usage of the term is tremendously appropriate since for Eliade one of the most distinctive characteristics of “the sacred” is its order. Furthermore, in his view, solely an ordered space can actually be a world, which can originate only after order and orientation have been achieved in the landscape. It is in this sense that Eliade speaks of the ordering of space, through centrality and directionality, as “founding the world”. Understanding sacrality as defined by order, he characterizes profanity as chaotic. It is in this sense that Jonathan Z. Smith has stated that *The Sacred and The Profane* could easily be renamed *The Sacred and The Chaotic*. I shall use both *cosmos* and *chaos* precisely in this sense throughout this work. In reference to the Eliadean specificity in the use of these terms, I shall write them in *italics*. See Eliade 1957 pp. 20-65, *passim*. Smith 1972 p. 137.

⁶⁹ Eliade 1957. p. 30.

meaningful in the measure in which is central, unique and superior; these meanings, however, will emerge solely after orientation and order have been achieved. The world acquires signification and it becomes a *cosmos*, exclusively as a result of this ordering act, which develops parallel to the construction of a cultural identity. In this way, just as for a space to be inhabited it first has to be ordered and hierarchize, for a world to significant and intelligible, it necessarily has to be “our world”, because “...everything that is not our world is not yet a world”⁷⁰. Therefore, the assumption that a civilization is located at the center of the world, as the term *Zhongshang* suggests, has not only spatial but also, and most importantly, socio-cultural connotations.

As a matter of fact, the ordered and central spatiality of the *Zhongshang* also implied a sense of cultural preeminence defined in contrast to the unreality and chaotic nature of the *Sifang*. As Aihe Wang has noticed, “*fang* represented ‘otherness’ and ‘outerness’ in contrast to the centrality of ‘us’; the centrality of a homogenous ‘us’ was in turn defined by contrast to the heterogenous ‘others’ - *fang*”⁷¹. Although Wang discards the possibility of a Shang fixed center, his comments on the interrelation between centrality and peripherality in Shang politico-religious culture concur nicely with Eliade’s own remarks on the anthropological implications of archaic centrality, according to him, “one of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assumed between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the *cosmos*; everything outside it is no longer a *cosmos* but a sort of “other

⁷⁰ Eliade 1957 p. 32.

⁷¹ Wang 2000 p. 27.

world,” a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, “foreigners”⁷². In my view, this is precisely the case with Shang culture, the *fang* was far from being a mere spatial abstraction, it was a category that referred to a defined region characterized simultaneously by its peripherality (or outerness) and its onto-anthropological dissimilarity, and inferiority, to the assumed centrality of Shang civilization. Considering that for the Shang directionality/peripherality and centrality were not two independent but interconnected categories, the very notion of *fang* points to the prevalence of the Shang conviction that their world, the *Zhongshang*, was a *cosmos* -an ordered world- situated at the center of the universe. This centrality, however, was not only spatial but also socio-cultural and, most importantly, ontological. Both the cardinality and socio-cultural superiority the Shang associated with this central space -which was not reduced to any kind of particular site- defined its ontological uniqueness. In this manner, the concept of *Zhongshang*, as indivisible as it is from that of *Sifang*, fulfills the second characteristic of the Eliadean sacred space: reality. Furthermore, the politico-religious ascendancy of the Shang monarch resulted from participating in this spatial and onto-anthropological center: “The Shang king conceived of himself as standing at the core of a series of grids-familial, spiritual, geographical. His authority stemmed from his location at that core”⁷³

Liminality

A different aspect of the Shang territory’s sacrality is suggested by the sense of security the king appear to have felt when being at the *Zhongshang*. In my view, this

⁷² Eliade 1957 p. 29.

⁷³ Keightley 2000 pp. 84-85.

feel of safety was consequence not only of the ordering capacity of the *Sifang/Zhongshang* system but also of the spiritual character the Shang attributed to their landscape. The sacrality of the Shang territory, in fact, is reinforced by the belief on an numinous landscape defined by lands (*tu* 土), rivers (*he* 河) and, most importantly, mountains (*yue* 岳/*yang* 嶂).⁷⁴ This territorially-grounded numinosity was actually one of the major characteristics of the Shang realm as revealed by the preeminence the Nature Powers, to which I shall turn my attention later on, had in the Shang Pantheon, and it points to the third component of Eliadean sacrality as I have defined it before: liminality.

Besides from characterizing sacred spaces as centrally situated and onto-anthropological unique, Mircea Eliade has defined them as zones of interaction between the heavenly and the earthly realms, were thought to play a pivotal role in the structure of the world itself. In his groundbreaking work *The Sacred and The Profane*, Eliade has extensively and, in my opinion, assertively defined "sacred space" as a portal, a door, a limit, a boundary, a frontier which "...distinguishes and opposes two worlds-and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes

⁷⁴ The original Shang character for "mountain" was 𡵓, translated either as *yue* 岳 (peak) or *yang* 嶂. The first translation is the most widely accepted. If the Shang graph indeed meant *yue* 岳, then it would be the origin for the character that, during imperial times, was used to designate an officially sanctioned sacred mountain or "peak" in classical texts such as the *Shujing* 書經 (in the chapter *Shundian* 舜典), the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Master Zuo's commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 "Spring and Autumn Annals") and the *Guoyu* 國語 ("Discourses of the States"). See Eno (2009) p. 62. n. 54. Robson (2009) pp. 32-34.

possible”⁷⁵. Adopting Eliade's view, in this work I refer to this capacity of communicating the divine or numinous with the terrestrial or humane as "liminality". Liminality, as the most outstanding characteristics of sacral spatiality, refers to the belief that a space is sacred only in the measure in which possesses the capacity to serve as a portal to the numinous or divine. In this manner, “the sacred” is defined as a junction between these two realms and is not to be confused with the numinous. The sacred is not the numinous but a door that leads to it. Consequently, a sacred space is as divine as it is terrestrial, being simultaneously located in "this world" and "the other". It is in this sense that liminality is the quintessential characteristic of a "sacred space".

Continuing in my attempt to demonstrate the applicability of the Eliadean “sacred space” to Shang religiosity I assure that liminality is entirely attestable in the oracle bone inscriptions. This assertion itself is not a novelty as soon as one of the most essential characteristics of any religious pantheon is that of mediating between divinity and humanity. The uniqueness of the approach to liminality I would like to suggest here is that it emphasizes its spatial dimension. In my view, enough have been said about the liminal role ancestors had in Shan religion, however, scholars have tended to take for granted the fact that the most dominant powers of the Shang pantheon were not the ancestors but the Nature Powers, whose major characteristic was that they were territorially-grounded powers. In other words, the most powerful spiritual entities, besides *Di* itself (or himself), in Shang religion were located in the territory itself. The fact that these powers were territorial entities indicates that the territory itself was thought to have the capacity to mediate between the *Di* and the

⁷⁵ Eliade 1957 p. 25.

Shang, therefore implying that the *Di* was able to express himself effectively in these landmarks, impregnating the natural environment with his might. On the other hand, this reinforces the view that in Shang religion spatiality and territoriality had an important role not only in terms of the *Sifang* and the *Zhongshang* but also in reference to the Nature Powers, as all of these entities were not mere religious abstractions and ritual devices but, firstly and most importantly, territories. Furthermore, in the measure in which these territories participated actively in the Shang pantheon, they had an essentially mediumistic function, corresponding hence, according to the Eliadean definition, to sacred spaces.

Therefore, the totality of the Shang environment was understood as being permeated with divinity either in the form of spatial divisions or features of the landscape. Among these features, which were represented by the Nature Powers, mountains were particularly important, as suggested by the ritual preeminence of the Mountain Power, that conjointly with the River Power and the *Sifang* received the *di* 帝 sacrifice, which was “...the highest of Shang sacrificial rites”.⁷⁶ In this way, the Nature Powers, with the Mountain Power as the dominant one, were part of the High Powers, which were situated at the very top of the Shang pantheon. The High Powers comprised *Di*, the Nature Powers, and the Former Lords. Among these, *Di*, as Shang’s highest deity, was by far the most important. Below these spirits were the Lower Powers, which were formed by a variety of ancestors, classified by genre and longevity. At the very top of this entire structure was *Di*, whom, however, could not be approached directly, as he appear to have escaped from the influence the Shang

⁷⁶ Allan (1991) p. 78.

king was able to exert in the spiritual realm, remaining perpetually inscrutable and potentially dangerous.

Contrarily to both ancestors and Nature Powers, which through sacrifice and divination could be easily reached, *Di* was not as readily accessible. Precisely because of this inaccessibility is that the mediation of ancestors and/or Nature Powers acquired paramount importance in Shang religiosity, as these entities were the only ones capable of establishing direct communication with *Di*. This mediation was achieved by means of divination, which, therefore, had an essential role in assuring ancestral and natural intercession before the spiritual realm for the benefit of the community; the Shang truly believed they could communicate with both their ancestors and the Nature Powers through the fire-induced cracks on scapulas and turtle shells. Their preferred method of communication with the spiritual world was divination as they understood the cracks on scapulas and shells faithfully informed them of the will of the various Powers encompassed in the the Shang pantheon; both the offering of sacrifices and the performing of rituals were expected to persuade them of protecting and supporting the Shang king and his people. Insofar as the monarch and his diviners were the only ones considered capable of inquiring the Powers, the practice of divination was an exclusively regal prerogative that assured the Shang king a monopoly over the access to the spiritual realm. This unique ability to mediate before *Di* for the Shang people-with the assistance of the Powers- defined the Shang king's most prominent socio-political characteristic and implied that the major regal responsibility was that of maintaining effective communication with the divine domain and keeping his kingdom opened to the beneficial influences of the Powers and safe from their harmful intentions.

In this way, the very efficacy of the liminal functionality of the pantheon ultimately rested in the Shang monarch, as he served as the "lowest rank official" in the divine hierarchy and the highest rank in the terrestrial one, having the unique capacity to maintain the Powers in constant communication with the Shang community. This communication was sustained mostly, although not exclusively, through ancestor worship. In fact, Shang divination was primarily directed toward their ancestors, as these were conceived as being more accessible than any other Powers. Accordingly, the Shang pantheon was organized according to the degree of ancestrality of each entity, in such a way that the most recently deceased royal family members were situated at the bottom of the pantheon, while *Di*, with no ancestral status whatsoever, was located at the very top. Therefore, the ancestral character of the Powers was indirectly proportional to their religious prominence and genealogical closeness to the Shang royal house defined the hierarchy of the pantheon,, in such a way that the Shang ancestors and Former Lords were more ancestral than the Nature Powers, while *Di* had minimum, almost non-existent, ancestral qualities.⁷⁷This designed assured regal preeminence in numinous communications, sustaining the Shang monopoly over religious mediation at the same time that socially produced and ideologically justified the privileged position the Shang royalty had in the Shang community.⁷⁸ Furthermore, insofar as the exclusive access to the numinous world was achieved mainly through royal ancestors, the power of the Shang clan extended equally to the human and the spiritual realms, forming a lineage whose power did not

⁷⁷ Keightley 2004 p. 8.

⁷⁸ Eno 2009 p. 58.

distinguish the frontiers of the this-worldly from the otherworldly.⁷⁹ In this way, Shang religiosity was constructed as a projection of Shang society itself, and just as the living Shang lineage controlled and shaped the community, the deceased Shang lineage enjoyed special prerogatives in the spiritual realm, directly communicating with higher spiritual Powers. Considering that it was believed that the ancestors depended on the living to exist, specifically on the food offered to them in sacrifices⁸⁰, not all clans had the economic means to forge this human-spiritual interconnection, and the clans which were indeed able to do so presented themselves as having the capacity “to use” their ancestors for the benefit of the entire community.⁸¹ In this manner, the expensiveness the ritual paraphernalia of ancestor worship required both maintained the regal monopoly on religious contacts and provided an ideological justification for the socio-political and economic preeminence of the Shang elite. Moreover, the ascendancy of ancestor worship decided the entire configuration of Shang sacral spatiality.

In fact, the structure of the pantheon suggests that spiritual closeness to the king and his ancestors correlated to physical/geographical proximity to Shang settlements. Apparently, in the Shang mentality the farther away from the ancestrally-protected cities and villages the individual situated himself, the closer he was to potentially threatening non-ancestral powers such as mountains and rivers. Reversely, the closer he was to those sites, the closer he was to amicable ancestral powers. As I have explained above, this same sort of rationale is repeated in the onto-

⁷⁹ Keightley 2004 p. 4.

⁸⁰ Allan 1991 p. 19.

⁸¹ Liu 2004 pp. 71-72, 114-115.

anthropological peripherality of the *Sifang* and the centrality of the Shang territory. However, in the Pantheon the principles of centrality and peripherality/directionality did not effect a distinction between sacrality and profanity -as that between the *Zhongshang* and the *Sifang*- but of degrees of sacrality and ritual accessibility -as that between ancestors and Nature Powers- insofar as the spatiality of the Pantheon was not profane but essentially liminal and necessarily sacred. As a matter of fact, the territorial hierarchization implicit in the Shang pantheon seem to relate to the fact that Shang civilization was majorly restricted to walled settlements populated by different members of the Shang lineage. These settlements were surrounded by geographical features, such as mountains and rivers, that were not entirely in control of the Shang clans.⁸² Consequently, it is quite probable that these physical landmarks inspired awe and fear to the Shang population, and according to the oracle bone inscriptions is exactly the manner in which the Nature Powers and *Di* were perceived. Considering that the limits of Shang civilization were restricted to walled outposts and routes connecting them, the natural environment surrounding this urban areas was easily considered as both a physical and a spiritual threat to the integrity of the king and the Shang community in general. It is possible to discern this mentality from the oracle bone inscriptions, were there are multiple divinations regarding the movement of the king throughout the realm, his wellbeing when hunting and fears about Nature Powers potentially causing calamities and ravaging the Shang realm, all these revealing major anxiety respecting exposure to non-Shang/unfamiliar environments. As Keightley has argued, this perception of the environment as an unfamiliar, conceivably dangerous spiritual power, was caused by the actual characteristics of the Shang landscape, mostly composed by mountainous areas, forests, lakes and

⁸² Keightley 1999 pp. 275-277, Lewis 2006 pp. 136-137

rivers, and heavily populated by animals, which might have outnumbered humans. It is not casual that in the Shang mind, animals and the wilderness were strictly interrelated. By this time, animal population was quite large, inhabiting extensive areas which remained unsettled, and making uncivilized territories particularly risky habitats.

However, the fact that mountains, rivers, animals and other components of the natural landscape were regarded with awe and even fear should not, in my opinion, lead us to conclude that these entities were absolutely inimical to the Shang. Keightley, Wang and other scholars are certainly correct when they stress the ancestral character of Shang religion, and how strongly the emphasis on ancestral worship permeated their perception of the landscape and other phenomena. However, mountains and rivers, although extraneous, were still the most powerful entities in the Shang pantheon and the king constantly attempted to obtain their favor. In fact, the Nature Powers were located somewhere in between the Former Lords -Shang's most powerful ancestors- and Shang's highest deity, *Di*, forming a numinous stratum defined by the almost complete disappearance of ancestral power and the gradual appearance of non-ancestral numinous power. Considering that the High Power were closer to *Di* than the ancestral powers themselves, the Shang monarch did not limit his sacrifices and petitions to the ancestors, extending them also to the Nature Powers, which were systematically used to obtain numinous power, playing an important role in numinous intercession by effectively mediating between *Di* and the Shang lineage and granting the Shang community access to an otherwise inaccessible section of the spiritual world. In this way, having exclusive access to the ultimate source of all numinous power, the Nature Powers, which

enjoyed exclusively from this privileged position in the pantheon. This numinous preeminence was grounded in the fact that these Powers restrained not only the king but the entire Shang community, influencing land, weather, crops⁸³, and hence forcing the Shang king to continually seek their assistance. However important for the wellbeing of the Shang community, Nature Powers, as I have said before, were particularly hard to contact and tame.

In fact, the Shang powers of the land were as powerful as distant, differing from the Lower Powers not only in their functionality but also, and most importantly, in their ritual availability. If divination functioned as a form of ritual negotiation, then the sources reveal that the High Powers, including the Nature Powers were, in fact, less open than others to this type of bargain, while the Lower Powers, which were closely related to the Shang lineage, were more open to be approached. On the one hand, however accessible ancestors were, inasmuch as they were incapable of accessing the potent reserves of numinous power actually available to the Mountain and other Nature Powers, their spiritual efficacy was minor compared to that of the High Powers. On the other hand, however distant, the High Powers were much more influential than the Lower Powers, being more spiritually efficient than the ancestors. The fact that the more accessible deities were the less influential and the less accessible were the most powerful created a permanent tension in Shang religiosity insofar as the Shang king and his community constantly looked for ways to obtain numinous efficacy. This tension was partially resolved by “ancestralizing” the High Powers, treating them just as they treated their own ancestors in order to make them more approachable and familiar. In this manner, communication with the numinous,

⁸³ Keightley 1999 p. 65, Keightley 2004 p. 8, Eno 2009 p. 63

and the monopoly over it, was accomplished not only through worship of ancestors but also of Nature Powers. The ancestors, in fact, were not the only ones who the king could use to mediate before *Di*, and the High Powers, including the Mountain, also played an important role in numinous intercession.

In this manner, wild animals and the untamed natural landscape, even while representing the realm of the uncivilized, were conceived as subjected to royal authority and as located within the physical and spiritual limits of the Shang world. It is, in this manner, unsurprising that one of the major ways in which the king displayed his power was by hunting, an activity that, when done successfully, amounted to expressing the exclusive royal ability of victoriously enforcing his will and to indicating the king could only enjoy from the favor of the Powers, whom seem to have controlled the natural landscape.⁸⁴ Hunting, thus, was not only a corporeal feat but also, and most notably, a spiritual capacity, a capacity that only the king, with the help of the Powers, could ever dare to accomplish. Consequently, adventuring in mountainous territory, with its deep foliage and plenteous wild fauna, was seemingly understood as an expression of the exclusive royal prerogative of successfully surpassing the confines of the territories under the direct protection of the ancestors

⁸⁴ Keightley (2000) pp. 107-109, Elvin (2004) p. 31, Lewis (2006) p. 137

and into the areas dominated by the Nature Powers.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the assimilation of animals in Shang religiosity is well reflected in the abundance of animalistic motifs in Shang bronzes as well as in the totemistic association between animals and various Shang clans. All of this not only suggests that animals were conceived as somehow amicable to the Shang but also that the sacrality of their territory was not solely restricted to Shang settlements and ancestors, extending also to the surrounding landscape and the Nature Powers. Indeed, the fact that Shang kings worshiped not only ancestral powers but also Nature Powers, making efforts to convert them into amicable numinous forces by “ancestralizing them”, suggests that they attempted to spiritually control the landscape itself. Furthermore, worship of features of the landscape, specially mountains, reveal that the Shang pantheon had an important territorial dimension which complemented the spatiality of the *Zhongshang/Sifang* scheme. Actually, when they spoke of the Mountain Power the Shang referred not to a numinous being as much as to a specific tangible location that has been granted with a numinous quality. Considering that the entire pantheon had a mediumistic quality, the Nature Powers, namely the Mountain and River powers, referred to territories with liminal capacities. In other words, we are dealing here not only with mediumistic entities but also, and most notably, with mediumistic

⁸⁵ Keightley has expressly identified the mountain with the wilderness and suggested that the wilderness was understood as the "unfamiliar" or the "otherness". As I explain below, I do not agree with Keightley on this particular point. Before Keightley, other authors have advanced similar views. Mark Elvin, for example, has suggested that the deforestation of the Chinese continent was closely associated with the elimination of mountain forests, and this with the eventual disappearance of the native fauna, that he metaphorically refers to as the "retreat of the elephants". Cultivating a rather different academic approach to Chinese wilderness, Wolfgang Bauer has suggested that in Ancient China nature stood in opposition to civilization, an idea that was extensively exploited by the Taoists but that can be recognized in earlier texts, such as the *Shanhaijing*. See Elvin (2004) pp. 46, 56-57, 59, 74, 79; Bauer (1976) pp. 89-128.

spaces. Nature Powers, therefore, had the particularity of introducing a territorial framework in Shang religious culture, a framework that appear to have been based on mountains and rivers. The importance of these territories was the greatest considering that, as I have said before, the Nature Powers were the most powerful spiritual entities available to the Shang monarch, whom hence looked for ways to make sure the numinous powers of rivers and mountains were accessible and responsive to him. The spiritual approachability of these Powers extended regal authority beyond the confines of Shang settlements and into the wilderness, transforming royal responsibility for maintaining the Shang community in connection with the spiritual realm in a preoccupation for sustained numinous communication not only with ancestors but also with the natural environment .

Inasmuch as royal ascendancy and political power were grounded in numinous accessibility and ritual efficacy, the attempts to ritually control the Nature Powers through sacrifices to mountains and rivers, reflected a preoccupation to secure the regal dominion over the undomesticated landscape. If such was the case, as I believe it was, the ritual control of mountainous areas and water courses served the Shang king as a mechanism through which the "territorialization" of his claims for politico-religious supremacy was made feasible. In this way, the authority of the Shang king was also rooted in his ability to effectively control non-ancestral, wild spaces. This was achieved through the "ritual opening" of the natural landscape effected by the Shang monarch, permitting the obtention of numinous power from mountains and rivers, as these two specific landmarks were the only ones impregnated with spiritual power. Moreover, as long as the oracle bone inscriptions suggests the Shang king saw himself as inhabiting an environment that was

numinously invested and which was spiritually responsive to him, is possible to conclude that the Shang understood their territory - the *Zhonshang*- as possessing a liminal quality and hence as comprising the third major characteristic of a sacred space as I have defined it before: liminality.

The liminality of the *Zhonshang* was mostly grounded in the capacity of the mountain to territorially convey numinous forces. In fact, the territorial character of the Mountain and River Powers reveal an important and usually neglected spatial dimension of the Shang's pantheon liminal capacity. Apparently, liminality was not a mere religious abstraction but a characteristic of the territory the Shang inhabited, which, accordingly, was considered to be sacred. The mountain, by means of its unique territorial liminality, completed the sacrality of the *Zhongtu*, the "Central Land". This land was sacred insofar as it was ordered, real and, finally, liminal. If it acquired its centrality and directionality from the *Zhonshang/Sifang* complex, it obtained its liminality from the Mountain and River powers. In this way, the sacrality of the mountain ultimately defined the sacrality of the Shang territory itself. Mountain ranges, as a sacred spaces, complemented their territorial liminality with the order and orientation of the *Sifang* to accomplish the overall sacrality of the *Zhonshang*. Consequently, a detailed application of the Eliadean sacral spatiality scheme to Shang religiosity reveals that the sacrality of the mountain did not derive from its centrality but its liminality. Centrality was not a quality of the mountain but of the whole Shang domain.

In early Chinese religion, the sacrality of the mountain was not necessarily determined by its centrality, the Sacred or Cosmic Mountain, as originally postulated

by Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*⁸⁶, is only to be found much later in history and for the most part of the Early Chinese period did not exist as such. The Chinese, indeed, do not appear to have developed the belief in a Cosmic Mountain until the Zhanguo 戰國 and early Han 漢 eras when the worship of Mount Kunlun (*Kunlunshan* 崑崙山), with its rich mythological lore, commenced.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, that before the surge of this cult the mountain was not thought to be central does not mean that it was not conceived as sacred. As I have explained above, the sacrality of a site is not reduced to its centrality, this being only one aspect of “the sacred”. Another aspect of sacrality, as much or more important than centrality, was liminality, and the mountain, insofar as it was an spiritual force of the Shang pantheon, enjoyed from it. Consequently, the most distinctive feature of the mountain was not its centrality but its liminality, insofar as in early Chinese religion centrality manifested not in relation to a mountain or a city but to a territory. Moreover, recognizing the actual nature of the mountain’s sacrality in Shang religion requires accepting that the applicability of the Eliadean “sacred space” is not limited neither to the presence nor the absence of a central mountain/city/temple, conveying several other features, such as reality and liminality. To insist in the opposite is to lose sight of the suggestiveness of both Eliade’s insights and of ancient Chinese religion itself. Instead, acknowledging the complexity

⁸⁶ Eliade (1964) pp. 266-269.

⁸⁷ Munakata (1991) assures that in early China “we find two types of cosmic mountains in the Zhou religious concept: the actual sacred mountain, and the conceptual mountain called Mt. Kunlun...” (p. 9). I concur with this assertion, however I prefer to stress that the early Chinese developed the idea of sacred mountains several centuries before that of a Cosmic Mountain in the Eliadean sense. For a review of the liminal qualities of Kunlun see Munakata (1991) pp. 9-12, Cahill (1993) pp. 18-31, *passim*, Girardot (2008) pp. 8-20, 71-73, 128-29, 138-40, 150-54, 160-165, 183-84, Major (2010) pp. 150-152, 156, 166n. 32, Tseng (2011) pp. 188-192, 200-215.

of Eliade's concept of sacral spatially -in relation to the much broader and more complex notion of "sacred space" as exposed in *The Sacred and the Profane* and not in reference to the much more restricted concept of the "symbolism of the center" as explained in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*- allows us to determine the precise manner in which the sacrality of the mountain manifested in Shang religion. This shift implies highlighting rather different aspects of both Eliade's work and early Chinese religion. More specifically, this approach constitutes an invitation to recognize the importance of territoriality and spatiality in Shang religious culture and to depart from views which focus exclusively on the preeminence of ancestor worship. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the Shang conceived access to the numinous plane as not depending exclusively on ancestors and generally did not dismiss the possibility of effecting it by means of other agents, such as mountains and rivers. This is not to deny the predominance of ancestral powers in Shang religion but, rather, to highlight that admitting the prominence of ancestor worship in Shan religiosity should not lead us to forget the importance of other territorial and spatial aspects of it, insofar as these components –to which I have attempted to call attention to here– were located side by side to ancestors in the Shang pantheon, suggesting that the Shang veritably believed in the liminal capacity of their mountains and rivers, as well as the in the sacrality of their entire territory. Furthermore, the liminality of mountainous areas in Shang religious culture is reinforced by the extensive use of ritual objects of mountainous origin, such as bronzes.

Mountains and bronze production in Early China

In fact, the proto-Shang (Erlitou), the fabrication of Shang's most distinctive ritual objects, bronze vessels, required tin, lead and, most importantly, copper, which were obtained from surrounding mountainous regions. Lead and tin were extracted from mountainous regions in the Shangzhou, Shaanxi area, around the upper Dan and upper Luo river basins -immediately east of the Qinling Mountains and relatively close to the Xiao, Xiong'er and Funiu mountain systems to the west- as well as from others yet inconclusive locations along the middle Yellow River (Huanghe) Basin.⁸⁸ Copper was also extracted from such locations but primarily from the Zhongtiao Mountains, situated just north of those mountain ranges, right across the Xiao Mountains and along the middle Yellow River basin and at short distance from Erlitou on the foothills of the Song Mountains. Additionally, copper was acquired in the mountainous area in the middle Yangzi river basin, spanning across the Dabie Mountains and not too far from Panlongcheng, a settlement strategically located for the extraction and the transportation of minerals.⁸⁹ Access to these different minerals was essential for the Erlitou elite, inasmuch as their ritual effectivity depended on the fabrication of bronzes, which were primarily and systematically used for religious worship. These key resources, however were not available in the immediate surroundings of the Yiluo river basin, where Erlitou was located, and the proto-Shang elite confronted the challenge of having to obtain them farther away, to the west, in the Zhongtiao, Xiao, Xiong'er, Funiu and Qinling mountains, at the outskirts of the Yiluo river basin. The fact the Erlitou elite confronted this challenge successfully indicates they had already established a notably centralized polity with abundant manpower at its disposal. Without the intensive labor that only highly complex

⁸⁸Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 12, 36-42. Liu (2003) pp. 16, 24.

⁸⁹ Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 42-44.

societies can afford, the location, extraction and transportation of lead, tin and copper would have been an impossible task. Consequently, Erlitou, as suggested by the high levels of social complexity, political centralization and technological sophistication its bronze industry required, is considered the first state-level society in China. It is in this manner that, in Ancient China, the manufacturing of bronze items is equated with the emergence of the state.⁹⁰ Moreover, the emergence of state-level societies was characterized by the achievement of unprecedented socio-political, economic and territorial integration around a major site that monopolized access to vital economic resources throughout a vast area, exclusively controlling bronzes manufacturing and imposing an homogenous politico-religious culture.⁹¹ This site was none other than Erlitou, which after receiving the minerals from the mountains of Zhongtiao and Qinling, transformed them into various bronze items, specially bronze vessels. In China, Erlitou was the first city to attain this central status, marking the beginning of the Bronze Age and setting the ground for the further development of Shang civilization.

The early Shang (Erligang) (*circa* 1600–1400 BC)⁹², in fact, preserved and expanded the the vast network of mountain resources and fluvial transportation routes installed by Erlitou. Centering also in the Yiluo river basin, around the city of Zhengzhou (west of Erlitou) in the upper Ji river valley at the confluence between the Yellow and Ji rivers, the Erligang, searching for metal resources, spread throughout a large area from the middle Yellow river basin to the middle and upper Yangzi river basins,. While

⁹⁰ Bagley (1999) pp. 136-146.

⁹¹ Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 29-35, 79-84.

⁹² Liu and Chen (2012), p. 278, Liu (2004), p. 55

the Erlitou material culture was restricted to the middle Yangzi river area (with the exception of Panlongcheng in the middle Yangzi river area), the Erligang encompassed the Wei river basin to the west, the upper Ji and Si river basins to the east, and the upper Huai and middle Yangzi river basins to the south.⁹³ The impressive territorial expansion accomplished by the early Shang state, as suggested by the location of the different sites involved, resulted from an urgent need for sources of copper, lead and tin, which, once more, were mainly located in mountainous areas.⁹⁴ Exploiting these deposits was often the result of political/military control of the areas that hosted such ores. Alike Erlitou, for Erligang, obtaining such minerals was of crucial importance, even more so when the early Shang produced bronzes much more massively and thoroughly than the Erlitou, improving their technical capacities, forging colossal bronze cauldrons (*ding*) and commencing to decorate them with various motifs, including the *taotie*, traditions which the late Shang (Anyang) would continue.⁹⁵ Similarly to the proto-Shang, bronzes were manufactured exclusively in Zhengzhou, the Erligang capital, where casting was performed out of the materials recollected in various mountainous regions throughout China.⁹⁶ In this manner, the Erligang political and economic system functioned along the principles of centrality and peripherality, and while

⁹³ Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 85-126, *passim*.

⁹⁴ The Erligang extracted their bronze-allows minerals, specially copper, mainly from the Zhongtiao and Qinling Mountains as indicated by the Donxiafeng and Donglongshan sites, respectively. They also exploited minerals around the hilly areas of Panlongsheng and Wucheng, the two major Erligang outposts in the middle Yangzi river valley. The early Shang appear to have exerted political and military control over all of these regions. See Liu (2003) pp. 24-27, *passim*. Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 102-111, 116-123.

⁹⁵ Bagley (1999) pp. 142-146. Allan (2007) pp. 486-487.

⁹⁶ Liu (2003) pp. 25-27.

Zhengzhou monopolized the casting of bronzes, the peripheries simply provided minerals and other resources.⁹⁷ This situation would change during the middle Shang period (*circa* 1400-1200 BC), when the centralized political control of Erligang waned, and the various cultures which had adopted its politico-religious institutions, used this cultural leverage to develop their own peculiar traditions, as reflected in their distinctive bronze items.⁹⁸ Among the different societies which inherited the legacy of the politico-religious culture of the Erlitou/Erligang elites were the late Shang of Anyang (1250-1045 BC), which also devoted major efforts to the extraction of minerals and the casting of bronzes.

The late Shang, in fact, inherited the Erlitou/Erligang bronze-centered ritual culture, they did not, however, take over the totality of its transportation routes and mineral ores insofar as the late Shang world shrunk due to important politico-economic competition from other polities, which appropriated specific parts of the early Shang economic network. Regardless, the Shang still preserved an important part of it, and although they competed with various other regional states, their capital, Yin (or Yinxi, in modern Anyang), was by far the largest city of its time⁹⁹, extending its influence into various regions in septentrional China. The Shang heartland stretched at the foothills of the Taihang mountains, across the Huan river, a few miles from the middle Huang (Yellow) river basin.¹⁰⁰ The various small settlements located around Yanxi, defined the Shang core area, which is notable for its huge palatial structures, lavishly

⁹⁷ Liu (2003) pp. 24-28, *passim*. Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 131-141.

⁹⁸ Liu & Chen (2012) 290-294. Bagley (1999) pp. 175-180.

⁹⁹ Campbell (2009) p. 828, Liu & Chen (2012) p. 356.

¹⁰⁰ Liu & Chen (2001) p. 10. Liu & Chen (2012) p. 351.

furnished tombs and inscribed scapulas and oracle bones, considered the first Chinese written records. The actual extension of the Shang polity beyond this territory, however, is a strongly controversial topic. Apparently, while the Shang state managed to exert direct control over different areas spanning along the Yellow river basin in a north-east to south-west axis (from the east Wei river to the Si and Ji rivers valleys), they failed to effectively dominate regions further north and south of this area, in the Loess Plateau, Sichuan and Yangzi river valley.¹⁰¹ Identically to Erlitou and Erligang, the major force behind Shang political expansion throughout North China was its constant demand for tin, lead and copper, which it required to sustain its massive bronze production.¹⁰² The Yin elite obtained these minerals from various locations around the middle Yellow river, including the Qinling mountains and the hilly areas of the Shandong peninsula, establishing outposts in order to secure access to

¹⁰¹ Keightley (1983) pp. 526-548. Thorp (2006) pp. 214-244. Campbell (2009) pp. 826-832. Liu & Chen (2012) pp. 353-391.

¹⁰² Liu & Chen (2012) pp. 351.

these resources.¹⁰³ Meanwhile the political extension of the Shang realm was majorly restricted to the Huang river valley, its material culture expanded far beyond these confines, shaping a large Shang cultural area which encompassed central, eastern and southern China.¹⁰⁴ The extension of Shang culture was signaled by the ample usage of Shang and/or Shang-like bronze vessels, which were adopted indistinctively by both Shang and non-Shang polities.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the majority of late Shang states employed bronze vessels suggests that regardless they rejected or accepted Anyang's political authority, still partook of Shang culture, assumed its cultural

¹⁰³ According to Amano Motonosuke, Shih Chang-Ju, Noel Barnard and Sato Tamotsu, the late Shang obtained copper and tin from various ores located within a radius of 300 to 400 kms from Yinxu, presumably in the Taihang and Zhongtiao Mountains, to the west of Anyang. That the Qinling Mountains also served as a source of copper and tin is suggested by the existence of a Shang outpost at Lianoupo, in the west Wei river valley, just north of the Qinling Mountains. It is feasible that this settlement was established in order to exploit the rich copper deposits of such mountain range. Similarly, several Shang settlements uncovered in the Shandong peninsula are situated on short distance from copper ores in different hilly areas. However, recent metallurgical analyses of Shang bronzes have signaled that some of their constituents might have derived from copper deposits in the middle Yangzi river, where two mining sites have been discovered. It has been precisely the absence of such type of sites that have encourage archeologists to look for a southern origin of Shang bronze vessels. Nevertheless, I judge unwise to completely discard the possibility of a northern origin simply based on the lack of archeological finds, specially considering that throughout most of their history, Chinese acquired metals not only from the Yangzi river valley but also from different sites along the Yellow river basin. See Chang (1980) pp. 151-153, Golas (1999) pp. 72-109, *passim*, Liu & Chen (2003) pp. 110-123, Campbell (2009) p. 835, Liu & Chen (2012) pp. 358-360.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Allan asserts that the late Shang practiced a "cultural hegemony" across China which depended not on political domination but rather in the use of Shang or Shang-like bronze vessels for ancestor worship. In order to illustrate this Allan gives the example of McDonalds in East Asia, assuring that East Asians eat in McDonalds because they want to participate in a globalized American culture and not as a result of culinary predilections. Similarly, non-Shang states adopted Shang ritual culture, and specifically *ding* 鼎 vessels, in an effort to participate in the wealth, power and influence which stemmed from the Shang polity. I endorse Allan's view and, below, use his hypothesis to explore the affiliation between bronze, liminality and territoriality. See Allan (2007) pp. 464-472.

¹⁰⁵ Allan (2007) p. 471. Liu & Chen (2012) pp. 350-391, *passim*.

superiority and thrived for participating of its centrality. Consequently, it is debatable in which specific way we should refer to *Zhongshang*, either as a restricted polity or a broad cultural area. The centrality of the Shang dynasty can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a purely political fact which depended on the categorical domination of the Shang lineage over a certain area, and, on the other hand, as a cultural fact which relied on the assimilation of Shang ritual culture. Although I have outlined this problem in binary terms, it should be emphasized that these political and cultural orders did not necessarily oppose each other but coexisted, and in order to delve into how they did, I believe it is mandatory that we explore the interrelations between ritual culture, liminality/sacrality and territoriality. Doing this will also help us to better understand the politico-religious role that mountains played in the early and late Shang worlds.

As I have described above, Shang ritual culture finds its origins in Erlitou, the first bronze-making, highly complex, state-level society of ancient China. One of the most striking characteristics of the Erlitou religio-political complex is its focus on the manufacturing of bronze vessels, which were used as ritual paraphernalia. The fabrication of these items was a direct consequence of Erlitou's ability to ensure access to key mineral resources, specifically lead, tin and copper, metals needed to produce bronze alloys. Furthermore, these minerals were almost exclusively located in mountains, hence Erlitou founded various settlements and established communication routes in order to transport minerals from the mountain ranges to the foundries of the capital, which held a monopoly on bronze casting. This same pattern was repeated by the early Shang (Erligang) and late Shang (Yinxu/Anyang). In this manner, both Erlitou and Shang cultures manifested a strong preoccupation for

controlling and exploiting mountainous regions and their resources. The reason for this is that securing an steady flow of minerals resources had tremendous implications not only in religious but also, and most decisively, in political terms, insofar as bronze vessels served simultaneously as ritual paraphernalia and prestige goods. Since bronze vessels were the ritual regalia preferred for religious communications, the direct control Shang elites exerted over the entire “bronze-vessel chain of production” granted them a monopoly over numinous intercession and, consequently, justified their political ascendancy. Actually, the very origins of bronze production are to be found in the elites’ interest for enhancing and maintaining their privileged status. The production of bronze vessels, as I have suggested before, was initially possible thanks to enormous economic, technological, military and political efforts. In fact, the obtention and transportation of minerals, conjointly with their transformation into bronze vessels was both technologically laborious and politico-economically demanding for Bronze Age societies, requiring an impressive level of technological proficiency, a highly efficient supply and shipping network, abundant workforce and an extensive military-bureaucratic apparatus that solely a prosperous and powerful elite could have launched. In this way, the plain fact that the Shang nobility was capable of producing bronze vessels reveals an exceptional ability to exert effective leadership as well as a resolute capacity to coordinate and mobilize abundant social and economic resources. The production of bronzes rested on these achievements and the ritual usage of vessels in religious contexts served to

theatrically display regal wealth to the public, providing the politico-economic power of the elites a legitimizing spiritual aura.¹⁰⁶

Thereupon, political centralization, social inequality, and religious monopolization were parallel and interrelated processes involved in the fabrication of Erlitou bronzes. The religious, political and economic spheres interacted circularly around the manufacturing bronze items. Firstly, the political and economic power of the elite provided the materials conditions necessary for the location, extraction and forging of metals. Secondly, considering that bronzes had a ritual functionality and that both their production and usage as religious paraphernalia was controlled exclusively by the elite, their possession granted them a monopoly over communications with the numinous world. Finally, the privileged divine connection which the nobility claimed to enjoy from religiously justified and socially legitimated their politico-economic ascendancy, preserving and enhancing their already advantaged position. In this fashion, the monumental efforts behind the manufacturing of bronze items, and specially bronze vessels, served to demonstrate the socio-political and economic superiority of the elites at the same time that they validated the elite monopoly over numinous interactions.

Liminality of bronzes

¹⁰⁶ K. C. Chang has advanced this hypothesis, asserting that “the great variety and taxonomic complexity makes it obvious that Shang and Chou rituals were extremely complicated affairs in which bronze ritual objects played vital roles. It becomes apparent that the performance of such elaborate and luxurious rituals and the consequent communication with ancestral spirits- essential for the art of governance- *depended* on the bronze vessels...”. See Chang (1983) p. 101.

Bronzes, thus, were the ultimate symbols of power and wealth, and their production and usage provided the elite with a highly effective mechanism, both conceptually and physically, for the legitimization of their socio-political privileges and economic prerogatives. The legitimizing power of bronze vessels, however, ultimately rested in the belief that metals had an exclusive liminal capacity. Put differently, such power was based in the conviction that metals -specifically tin, lead and copper- had the ability to effectively communicate with the divine realm and thus to convey its capabilities. That the Shang believed this is suggested by the very fact they systematically preferred to use bronze vessels in their efforts to ritually achieve communication with the numinous realm. Furthermore, the liminality of bronzes is also suggested by their peculiar decorative designs.

In fact, Shang bronzes are famous for their intriguing decor and specially their most ubiquitous ornamentation, the *taotie*, has attracted major scholarly attention.¹⁰⁷ While the issue of Shang bronze decoration is a subject which would deserve several pages, here I would simply like to stress that various specialists have asserted that

¹⁰⁷ Paper (1978), Kesner (1991), Rawson (1993), Wang (1993) & Wang (2007)

the signification of the decor was essentially liminal.¹⁰⁸ Sarah Allan, for example, has assured that Shang bronze vessels were “...decorated in the language of the spirit world, so that the boundary between the living and the death might be crossed and the sacrifice be received by those for whom it was intended. The motifs which were not of this world signify the crossing of this boundary”¹⁰⁹In this way, “...the bronze motifs create a sense of the other, that which is not limited by the physical realities of this world and which can never be precisely defined”.¹¹⁰ More specifically, the *taotie*,

¹⁰⁸ The decoration of Shang bronze vessels has been interpreted variously. K.C. Chang has assured that the various decors engraved on bronze vessels represent the different animals which assisted shamans in their journeys to the heavenly realm. More recently, and in a similar fashion, Paper has argued that the decoration in the vessels represented a shaman’s mask and/or birds, elephants and crows with mediumistic meanings.

Although all these scholars endorse a liminal understanding of Shang bronze decor, they do so by relying on the veracity of shamanistic imagery, hence resting on the assumption that Ancient Chinese religion was shamanistic and/or mediumistic, a thesis which is controversial, having as much adepts as opponents. K.C. Chang, the eminent Chinese archeologist, was the most enthusiastic defender of the hypothesis of the shamanistic nature of Ancient Chinese religion, an argument that, despite criticism, still find many adherents. David Keightley, another respected scholar, has rejected this hypothesis, arguing that there is not enough evidence in the sources to support such claim and that this results from their manipulation. In this way, the debate on the plausibility of an Ancient Chinese shamanism has been shaped by the opposition between these two major scholars, and until this day, academics assuring its existence follow Chang, while those opposing it side with Keightley. In this particular issue, I find myself closer to those doubting the possibility of shamanism for Early China and believe that anyone interested in asserting it should respond to the inquiries raised in Keightley (1998) and Boileau (2002). Considering the uncertain possibility of a shamanic character of early Chinese religion, I can not but to question the probability of a shamanistic meaning of Shang bronze vessel designs. This, however, does not amount to rejecting the liminal character of bronze designs. See Chang (1983) p. 65, also pp. 56-80, *passim*, Paper (1995) pp. 51-124, Keightley (1998) specially pp. 815-828, Keightley (1999) p. 262, Tong (2002) & Boileau (2002).

¹⁰⁹ Allan (1991) p. 130.

¹¹⁰ Allan (1991) p. 131.

which basically consisted of a pair of eyes¹¹¹, "...may be readily understood as a suggestion of the sacred or the other, that which sees but cannot be known, the world of the spirits to whom the offering must pass, the contemplation of which inspires the living with a sense of awe or dread".¹¹² Similarly, Wu Hung has asserted that bronze decor "...seem to attest to a painstaking effort to create metaphors for an intermediate state between the supernatural and reality- something that one could not depict but portray"¹¹³. Lastly, according to Kesner, Shang bronze decor functioned as "means of visual reference to the supernatural, of approximating otherwise unrepresentable elements of Shang religion".¹¹⁴ Therefore, Shang bronze designs appears to suggests the liminal character of vessels. Nonetheless, it is probable that the liminality of these objects was not simply the result of their ritual function but an actual characteristic of their very physical constitution. If that was the case, then the ritual effectivity of bronzes was finally grounded in the sacrality of the mountain, and the desire to obtain minerals did not result from a self-conscious politico-religious strategy as much as of a desire to physically appropriate the numinous power thought to reside in metals. Furthermore, as Eliade himself has recognized already, this understanding of metals as sacred was not exclusive of the early Chinese, being professed by various ancient civilizations.

¹¹¹ Shang bronze decor presented varied and consistent hybrid patterns and, actually, the most common decorative motif in these vessels, the *taotie*, essentially consisted of a pair of eyes, with each eye dividing the vessel in two identical, or highly similar, sides filled with various animaloid and humanoid shapes. The dual character of this decorative pattern certainly suggests the idea of a boundary and a limit which is trespassed, having hence a clearly liminal connotation. See Allan (1991) pp. 137-160, *passim*. Wu Hung (1995) pp. 48-54. Bagley (1999) pp. 146-156.

¹¹² Allan (1991) p. 134.

¹¹³ Wu (1995) p. 53.

¹¹⁴ Kesner (1991) p. 50.

In *The Forge and the Crucible*, a work dedicated to alchemy and blacksmiths, Eliade has explained how ancient civilizations considered minerals, both in aspect and competency, to be sacred and powerful. According to the eminent historian of religions, many ancient cultures deemed iron as a "heavenly metal", that is, a "...strange object outside their own familiar world, an object coming from elsewhere and hence a sign or token of the beyond, a near-image of the transcendental"¹¹⁵. Conforming to the renown scholar, for the ancient man "the celestial metal is foreign to the earth, hence it is 'transcendent', it comes from 'up above'"¹¹⁶. Although Eliade has originally restricted this definition to iron, he has also suggested that minerals in general were regarded as sacred because of their mountainous origin. In fact, for the archaic man the mountain was impregnated with sacrality and mining was understood as a sacral activity. When adventuring into mountains, the ancient miner takes the greatest precautions, believing "... the area to be entered is sacred and inviolable; subterranean life and the spirits reigning there are about to be disturbed; contact is to be made with *something sacred* which has *no part in the usual religious sphere*- a sacredness more profound and more dangerous"¹¹⁷. Once in there, "... there is the feeling of venturing into a domain which by right does not belong to man- the subterranean world with its mysteries of mineral gestation which has been slowly taking its course in the bowels of the Earth Mother"¹¹⁸. All of these impressions are rooted in "...the multiple manifestations of the *sacred presence* which is affronted by

¹¹⁵ Eliade (1956) p. 27

¹¹⁶ Eliade (1956) p. 28

¹¹⁷ *Cursivas are mine.* Eliade (1956) p. 56

¹¹⁸ Eliade (1956) p. 56.

those who penetrate into the geological strata of life”.¹¹⁹ However, not only the extraction but also the transformation of minerals was imbued with sacrality: “Still charged with this dread holiness the ores are conveyed to the furnace. It is then that the most difficult and hazardous operation begin. The artisan takes the place of the Earth-Mother and it is his task to accelerate and perfect the growth of the ore”.¹²⁰ Therefore, conforming to Eliade, in the ancient mind the detection, extraction and forging of minerals was a sacred activity from beginning to end, and the sacrality of each operation involved in the process derived from interacting with the mountain. Not only the mountain was sacred, but its minerals were too, and those with the ability to obtain and transform these metals claimed possessing a unique capacity to successfully imitate the proceedings of the Earth itself, a talent which was likely seen as spiritual as well.

I believe that the Eliadean views on the relation between minerals and sacrality can be successfully applied to the production of bronzes in Ancient China. As a matter of fact, inasmuch as bronzes were forged from metals of mountainous origin, is highly plausible that the mountain itself was conceived as having the ability to connect the human and divine realms. This liminal quality of the mountain, which is also corroborated by the existence of a Mountain Power in the Shang Pantheon, was quite likely understood to exist equally in the metals which contained. Therefore, when transformed into bronze vessels, metals were seemingly thought to be able to preserve the liminal capacity of the mountains and facilitate the communication with the numinous world. It is in this sense that I have asserted that the desire to acquire

¹¹⁹ Eliade (1956) p. 57.

¹²⁰ Eliade (1956) p. 57.

metals was a desire to physically appropriate numinous power. Furthermore, the hunger for the obtention of minerals was ultimately an ambition for the control of mountainous regions. Put differently, in the Shang mind, accessing mountains equaled to accessing numinous powers and hence they were highly regarded not only as liminal powers but also, and most notably, as sacred spaces which contained liminal materials that, when obtained and transformed, preserved their sacrality and fulfilled liminal functions. Therefore, the ultimate reason why the Shang elite preferred to manufacture their preferred ritual regalia out of metals might not have been arisen from an interest to create prestige goods as much as from a yearning to materially appropriate numinous power from mountains. If this was the case, then the intimate relation which existed between politico-economic and religious power, was ultimately grounded in the ability of the Shang elite to acquire and transform mountainous metals. In this manner, accessing and controlling mountainous regions was quintessential for the creation and preservation of power not so much as a result of its logistical requirements as of its tremendous spiritual implications. To explain, insofar as the mountain was understood to be sacred, controlling its accessibility and exclusively exploiting its resources was identical to monopolizing both the communication with the spiritual realm and the appropriation of its numinous power. If, as I have said before, the mountain was conceived as a territorially-grounded Power, a physical space where numinous forces resided, then mining was not only a technical but also, and most importantly, a religious feat. Thusly, more than for the display of politico-economic power, the manufacturing of bronze items, and specially vessels, was intended to materially demonstrate the religious ascendancy of the Shang elite. Corporeally attesting the elite possession of divine power, bronzes

vessels justified the Shang king's right to rule by means of their very existence. They did so, however, in religious rather than in political or economic terms.

Moreover, that the early Chinese understood the ownership of vessels as signaling exclusive access to numinous power and hence the right to rule is corroborated by the mythical tradition of The Nine Tripods/Cauldrons. According to the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (IV B.C), the tripods (*ding* 鼎) were bronze vessels with very peculiar characteristics:

"In the past when the Xia had virtuous potency (*xi xia zhi fang you de ye* 昔夏之方有德也), the distant regions made *illustrations of their (strange) creatures* (*yuan fang tu wu* 遠方圖物) and (*paid a*) *tribute of metal* to their Nine Shepherds (*gong jin jiu mu* 貢金九牧). [Yu] casted tripods with images (of these) strange beings (*zhu ding xiang wu* 鑄鼎象物)... Jie [the last Xia ruler] had benighted virtue, so the tripods moved to the Shang dynasty (*ding qian yu shang* 鼎遷于商). Zhou of the Shang was cruel and violent, so the tripods moved to Zhou" (*ting qian yu zhou* 鼎遷于周)¹²¹.

¹²¹ Cursives are mine. Translation based on Company, (1996) p. 103 & Lewis (2006)b p. 54. For alternative translations see Legge (1872) p. 293. Chang (1983) pp. 95-96. Birrell (1993) p. 155. Wu (1995) p. 5. & Strassberg (2002) p. 4. Original text is *xi xia zhi fang you de ye yuan fang tu wu gong jin jiu mu zhu ding xiang wu... jie you hun de ding qian yu shang zai si liu bai shang zhou bao nue ting qian yu zhou* 昔夏之方有德也，遠方圖物，貢金九牧，鑄鼎象物... 桀有昏德，鼎遷于商，載祀六百，商紂暴虐，鼎遷于周. Available at <http://ctext.org/chun-qiu-zuo-zhuan/xuan-gong-san-nian>.

While completely addressing the significance of this passage is beyond the scope of this work, I content myself with calling attention to the fact that in this tradition bronze vessels or tripods (*ding* 鼎) are described a) as being inscribed with “pictures” (*tu* 圖) or “images” (*xiang* 象) of “(strange) beings” (*wu* 物)¹²² belonging to “distant regions” (*yuan fang* 遠方), b) as moving (*qian* 遷) from one dynasty to the other as tokens of “virtuous potency” (*de* 德) and, finally, c) as resulting from the casting (*zhu* 鑄) of metals (*jin* 金) performed by a mythical figure: Yu 禹, also known as Da Yu 大禹. I interpret point a) as signaling the aesthetic liminality of the *taotie* -to which I have referred above, and which is probably mentioned here as the “strange beings” or “spirits” engraved in the tripods, an hypothesis coincidental with the actual bizarre appearance of their decorative motifs-, and the religious power which derives from it, insofar as the inscription of these beings on the cauldrons is described as allowing the people to “recognize the spirits” and avoid them from suffering harm, implying hence the ability of those in possession of the tripods (the rulers of Xia, Shang y Zhou) to control numinous powers. Accordingly, I read the passing of the tripods (point b) as referring to the political power which emanated from possessing the bronzes and controlling their liminal capacities, granting each of the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang y Zhou) their right to rule over China. Finally, I fathom Yu, the forger of the tripods (point c), as a metaphoric reference to Bronze Age regal authority, as soon as this, like I have explained before, actually relied on the production of bronzes. Furthermore, Yu is traditionally considered to be the founder of the Xia 夏

¹²² The *Xia* is a mythical dynasty that preceded the Shang and which believed to have ruled between X and X. However, several scholars have identified proto-Shang culture

Dynasty, which has been identified with Erlitou culture, the first bronze-making society of China.¹²³

Liminality and Territoriality: The Sacrality of the Mountain.

The legend of the Nine Cauldrons, hence, appears to provide a mythical portrayal of the relations existing between sacrality/liminality, metallurgy and politico-religious sovereignty. In the light of this account, it is reasonable to conclude that the early Chinese regarded vessels as sacral objects with numinous qualities. Furthermore, this legend might also provide some hints on the issue of sacrality/liminality, metallurgy and territoriality. It is of interest, indeed, that the texts asserts that, in the time of Yu, “the distant regions made illustrations of their strange beings [wu] and paid a tribute of metal”. This assertion actually finds an archeological corroboration. On the one hand, the Shang bronzes, the most obvious equivalents of the Nine Tripods, indeed were indeed decorated with regionally variable bizarre figures, just as the expression “illustrations of their strange beings” suggests. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that the Shang actually obtained their minerals from peripheral regions situated several miles from their capital at Yin, which were politically and/or culturally dependent on Anyang and that can be said “to have paid a tribute of metal”. Therefore, the legend of the Nine Cauldrons conforms to the archeologically-proven fact that the Shang manufactured their bronze vessels with metals obtained in various regions and decorated them variously according to

¹²³ See Liu (2004) pp. 226-229. Lu & Yan (2005) pp. 144-149. Allan (2007) pp. 462-463, 473-475.

regional origins. Furthermore, the narration provides further clarification on the nature of Shang territoriality, revealing that:

- 1) each region had their specific numinous powers (“*their* strange beings”)
- 2) the regional specificity of these powers expressed in particular appearances (“the distant regions made *illustrations* of their strange beings”)
- 3) the elite (Yu) had the ability to appropriate these powers by
 - a) casting the vessels from regional metals (“with the metal, [Yu] *casted* tripods”)
 - b) carving the peculiar images of regional spirits on vessels (“*with images* of the strange beings. These completely depicted all the strange beings”)

This suggests that by casting bronzes from regional metals and decorating them with specific motives the Shang (Erligang/Yin) believed they were actively controlling the numinous qualities of all their territories. While it is debatable that each Shang bronze vessel decor actually corresponded to a single regional metal source, the narrative reveals that the motives behind the casting of bronzes were not only spiritual but also territorial in nature. To explain, the acquisition of metals and the fabrication of bronzes implied not only a political but also, and most notably, a spiritual domination of the territory. Inasmuch as regal authority depended on the possession of tripods, it ultimately stemmed from the spiritual control of the territory. Consequently, the authority of the ruler rested not only in ancestral worship but also on the political and spiritual control of the regions under his authority, and bronzes were understood as theatrically displaying and physically embodying this capacity to spiritually control the space. In this way, Shang territories or, more precisely, Shang mountains, were understood as powerful sources of spiritual power and hence assumed to be liminal

in nature. As I have said before, the centrality of the Shang territory (*Zhongshang*) was grounded in this liminality. This centrality, however, was not reduced neither to a city nor a mountain, encompassing instead a vast area. To put it differently, if it had been reduced solely to the settlement of Yin, which was located in a non-mountainous area, then mountains could have not been considered to be legitimate sources of numinous power. The fact the Shang obtained minerals from regions outside of Yin suggests that the centrality (sacrality) of their territory extended beyond the limits of this settlement. However, this settlement remained as the Shang stronghold and the Shang royal house, based on Yin, founded its politico-religious ascendancy on their ability to politically and spiritually control far away provinces. In this way, it existed a dialectical relationship between Yin and its surroundings regions in which the dominance of the former was grounded in the servility of the latter but where the latter permitted and maintained the precedence of the former. As illustrated above, the veracity of this relation is suggested both by the archaeological record and the Nine Tripods myth

Furthermore, the regal ability to control the territory, and hence the very basis of regal ascendancy, stemmed from the capacity to transform metals into ritual objects, as suggested by the emphasis given in the Nine Cauldrons narrative to the casting of vessels and the engraving of specific images on them. This particular point might also find corroboration in the fact the Shang elite appear to have monopolized the casting (and decoration) of bronzes. As I have suggested above, inasmuch as metals were extracted from sacred regions, that is, mountains, the casting of vessels was not only a technological but also a spiritual endeavor. If extracting minerals was equated to immersing into sacred ground, then handling and transforming them was

understood as effectively appropriating numinous power. Consequently, even more important than the obtention of minerals was the capacity to transform them. In fact, the expression “*with the metal*, [Yu] casted tripods *with images* of the strange beings” indicates that the power of the ruler (Yu) resided not in the obtention of metals and images as much as in the molding of vessels. Therefore, the appropriation of the numinous capacity of metals was not achieved in their mere extraction but ultimately effected in their physical transformation into tripods. Only after these metals were transformed into ritual objects is that their powers were obtained. Thereby, the exclusive access to numinous power the Shang elite claimed for themselves was climactically grounded on their monopoly over bronze casting. By virtue of this monopoly, and the privileged numinous capacities it entailed, is that they forged (both literally and figuratively) their control over communication with the numinous realm. This intimate relationship between religious power and metallurgy -which finds correlation in the archeologically proven fact that Bronze Age elites’ ritual power depended on the possession of bronze vessels- was initially advanced by Marcel Granet and recently recalled by Michael Puett. Granet, relying on the early Chinese mythological corpus, has asserted that “...the Founder Heroes.... they are the Masters of Fire. They are potters or smiths. They know how to make the divine vessels by means of holy and tragic unions. All the dynastic virtue is incorporated in the magic caldrons cast by Yü the Great, exactly as it might be in a Holy Mountain or River”.¹²⁴ More recently, Puett has credited Granet’s claims alleging that “... a close reading of Granet’s work reveals important insights”¹²⁵ and summarizing his

¹²⁴ Granet (1958) p. 194. Eliade himself cites Granet when referring to Yu’s Nine Tripods, which he presents as an example of the liaison between metallurgy and religious power in early and/or “primitive” civilizations. See Eliade (1956) p. 62.

¹²⁵ Puett (2001) p. 135.

proposition as arguing “...that the development of kingship involved a gradual usurpation of the powers associated with sacred areas of nature. The kings’ usurpation of power developed in tandem with growing social complexity..... that probably occurred, he argues, alongside the development of metallurgy”.¹²⁶

I concur with Puett regarding the value of Granet’s insights on the connection between metallurgy, ritual power and social complexity, as they also coincide with archeological analyses of Chinese Bronze Age societies. Consequently, both mythological materials and archeological researches denote the early Chinese conceived metal as sacred and believed that through its manipulation it was possible to obtain ritual power. Monopolizing access to this power, the elite exclusively obtained numinous powers and legitimized its political and economical precedence. This assertion is further reinforced by the fact that, according to the *Yizhoushu* (ca. IV B.C)¹²⁷, one of the first thing the Zhou did after conquering the Shang was to behead the Shang master of cauldrons. Puett has called attention to this passage, concluding that it signifies “the end of the Shang means of determining the will of the divine powers”¹²⁸. I coincide with Puett in that this event symbolized the end of Shang sacrificial system. However, I also read this as indicating the tremendous importance that monopolizing the capacity to forge cauldrons had for the Shang royal lineage. The killing of the Shang caster of bronzes can be read not only as causing an interruption in religious communication but also, and most importantly, as eliminating the very physical means by which this communication was sustained. Apparently, the

¹²⁶ Puett (2001) p. 135.

¹²⁷ Shaughnessy (1993) p. 230.

¹²⁸ Puett (2002) p. 63.

Zhou believed that, in order to obtain the favor of the Powers, they first had to cast bronzes on their own resources with their own master of cauldrons, assuming that that power itself rested on the capacity to control the casting of bronzes. Consequently, the killing of the master of cauldrons could have been rooted in a Zhou desire to eliminate the very source of all Shang politico-religious power. Insofar as this authority rested on casting bronzes, it ultimately derived from acquiring metals, which were extracted from mountainous regions.

That the Zhou understood bronzes as ritual objects with liminal qualities and associated them with the mythical figure of Yu is also signaled by the inscription in the Bingongxu vessel¹²⁹, dated to the mid Eastern Zhou period (956-858 a.C.)¹³⁰ and which describes how Yu 禹 (or Da Yu 大禹) was ordered by Heaven 天 (*tian*) to spread the earth and modify the landscape by means of mountains and rivers, in order to organize the territory in different provinces:

“Heaven commanded Yu to spread out the earth, to follow the mountains, to dredge the rivers and then to divide the regions and set up their tributes”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Shaughnessy (2007)

¹³⁰ Feng (2006) p. xvii.

¹³¹ The original Chinese text is *tian ming Yu fu tu sui shan jun chuan nai cha fang she zheng* 天命禹敷土 隨山濬川迺差方設征. The Bingongxu vessel inscription is in fact much longer, I have referred here solely to its opening lines. These lines resemble the preface of the *Yugong* in the *Shangshu*, which narrates how Yu ended the flood and ordered the space. This resemblance has revealed that the association of Yu with the ending of the flood, as suggested by the use of the expression “to dredge the rivers” (*jun chuan* 濬川), had already developed during the early Zhou. I shall explain this in more detail in the following chapter. See Shaughnessy (2007) p. 16. n. 3.

This passage suggests that the Zhou associated mountains and rivers with Heaven through the act of “spreading earth” (*futu* 敷土), which allowed Yu to model the territory at his will. In this way, mountains appear to have preserved their exceptional cultic status and singular liminal capacities during the early Zhou period, although in the form of the worship of the soil (*she* 社), the divinized earth, which indeed occupied an important place in Zhou religious culture and that apparently originated in the Shang worship of lands (*tu* 土), mountains and rivers. That the Zhou worship of *she* had roots on the Shang worship of *yue* is suggested by the fact the altar in which the Zhou worshiped the earth was built in imitation to a mountain or hill, specifically as an elevated mound of pounded earth.¹³² For the Zhou thus the earth and the mountain were equivalent in religious terms. Moreover, the mountains, together with the rivers, had the ability to effect a Celestial command (*tian ming* 天命) by the act of “spreading out earth”, a capacity which implies they were in direct connection with Shang Di.¹³³ Actually, the scattering of soil and the physical modification of the landscape was effected by means of mountains and rivers, implying that these effectively mediated between Heaven and man. To repeat, according to his narrative, the heavenly remodeling of the world was executed by using mountains and rivers as intermediaries. The effectivity of this mediation, however, ultimately depended not in the landscape itself but in the actions of Yu, which echoes the ability of this mythical hero to forge metals and transform them in ritual objects. The fact this narrative is

¹³² Davis (2012) pp. 154-156.

¹³³ Kominami (1999) pp. 228-231

inscribed in a bronze vessels reinforces this correlation¹³⁴ and confirms the Zhou elite understood mountains and bronzes as having the capacity to convey numinous forces. In sum, this inscription suggests that that the relationship between *Tian* and *she* in Zhou religiosity was modeled after that between *Shang Di* and *yue* in the Shang pantheon, preserving the liminal quality of mountains through the cult of the earth as a ritual imitation of a peak. This liminality was associated to Yu and bronzes, recalling the forging powers of this mythical hero and its roots in the dominance of mountainous regions.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ The Bingongxu vessel, however, does not bear any artistic motifs. Therefore, it does not confirm the association between Yu and bronze decor that I have introduced above. Regardless, the absence or scarcity of decoration is characteristic of Zhou bronze vessels as these instead included written inscriptions, which eventually came to replace graphic design as the preferred medium to communicate religio-political ideas. See Rawson (1999) and Shaughnessy (1999).

¹³⁵ The liminal understanding of the mountain during the Zhou period is repeated in the *Zhou Yi* (Changes/Mutations of Zhou) or *Yi Jing* (Classic/Book of Changes/Mutations), whose oldest strata, including the sixtyfour hexagrams and eight trigrams, can be dated back to between the IX and the VIII century B.C. Out of the eight trigrams in this text, one of them symbolized the mountain: Gen 艮. Considering that the ultimate purpose of this book was to serve as an oracle, having the capacity to predict the will of Heaven, which manifested by means the sixtyfour possible combinations between the eight trigrams ($8 \times 8 = 64$), then the Zhou conceived the mountain not only a space but also as a numinous power with the capacity to express celestial designs through specific spiritual capacities. In this way, mountain ranges are once more depicted as being able to mediate between the divinity and man. In fact, the character for mountain (gen 艮) had a liminal signification, as suggested by the fact that the characters for “boundary” (*yan* 垠), “limit” (*xian* 限) and “eye” (*yan* 眼) feature the *gen* element. While the liminal connotation of the first two characters is obvious, the third one’s association with the concept of boundary or limit is less clear. According to Shirakawa the character *xian* 限 depicts the “awestruck gaze of someone standing before a ladder, conceived of as a stairway for spiritual beings ascending and descending” (Davis p. 173), this would explain why the Chinese character for eye includes *gen*. Shirakawa also relates the eye motif in *gen* with the *taotie*. This association with Shang bronze vessel decoration is further supported by the liminal role *yue* performed in the Shang pantheon, which also functioned as an oracle and that is considered to be the most ancient precedent of this Zhou predictive text. See Keightley (1999) p. 245, Nielsen (2003) pp. 70-71, Smith (2008) pp. 8-10, 18., Davis (2012) pp. 172-173.

Therefore, although the Zhou introduced ritual additions, they preserved the Shang belief that Nature Powers mediated between the heavenly and the earthly realms, comprising spaces charged with numinous powers. In this way, both the Bingongxu vessel inscription and the legend of the Nine Tripods can be interpreted as indicating that for the Shang and Zhou, religious power was ultimately obtained from mountains and that controlling these landmarks, as well as the territories surrounding them, was a prerequisite for the construction of politico-religious power. To repeat: considering that bronzes, which were used for religious mediation and political legitimation, were manufactured out of mountainous metals, mountains, then, were considered to have incomparable liminal properties. Furthermore, the manufacturing of bronzes suggests the Shang elite dedicated tremendous efforts to obtaining the numinous attributes which were believed to reside in mountain ranges, struggling to ensure exclusive exploitation of mountainous resources. Therefore, bronze vessel casting, inasmuch as it responded to ritual necessities, confirms the liminality of the Shang territory and reveals the existence of an important territorial component in late Shang religion. Additionally, acknowledging the territoriality of Shang religious culture implies revising the traditional understanding of it as restricted to ancestor worship. In fact, as suggested by mountain worship and bronze production, Shang religion incorporated a crucial territorial dimension which was mainly defined by the mountain as site of sacrality. This dimension, however, has been either neglected or overlooked by most scholars. For example, although recognizing the importance of *Sigang/Zhongshang* spatiality, David Keightley has asserted that “to the extent... that the Shang found strength and support -political, religious, and psychological- in their settlements, camps, and cult centers, they would have felt exposed, vulnerable, and

uncomfortable in the open countryside where the protection of their ancestors, no longer focused in the cult center would have been dissipated by distance and subject to challenge by whatever Powers took strength from the local landscape and its communities”.¹³⁶ However persuasive Keightley can be, I disagree with him in this particular point. If for the Shang elite the landscape was something completely foreign, threatening and strange. How come they most important ritual items were of mountainous origin? If in their religious culture mountains were indeed tremendously menacing and strange, how is it possible that they still looked up to them to manufacture their most essential religious paraphernalia? I am not attempting to provide a definite answers to these queries, however, I would like to suggest that, considering the widespread evidence of ritual paraphernalia of mountainous origin, the open fear and rejection to the landscape, and specifically to mountains, that Keightley has proposed for the Shang, is not entirely correct. Not only the Shang manufactured their ritual objects from materials acquired in mountainous regions but also gave a special prominence in their pantheon to the Mountain Power, situating it - together with the other Nature Powers- closer to their highest divinity, Di, than their own ancestors. The fact the Shang did these things indicates that they did not repudiate mountains but rather looked for ways to control them and appropriate their resources. Having such an interest in mountains, it is unlikely, therefore, the Shang “felt exposed, vulnerable, and uncomfortable in the open countryside” and that they found strength and support solely on their settlements and camps. The case is rather that they also obtained assistance from the landscape, and specially mountains, either through the use of bronzes or the worship of Nature Powers.

¹³⁶ Keightley (2000) p. 116.

Conclusion

The Shang landscape was not only urban and ancestral but also territorial and mountainous. As explained above, this is suggested by the fact that proto-Shang (Erlitou) and Shang (Erligang/Yin) were state-like society which pioneered in the systematic production of bronze vessels as prestige goods of ritual functionality. This bronze-producing capacity was associated with the ability to obtain a variety of resources from surrounding mountainous regions, specially copper, tin and lead. The production of bronze vessels was achieved by societies of great socio-political complexity and marked economic stratification, with well-defined, well-established and prosperous elites interested not only in dominating their native communities but also in controlling many others located in an extensive area with the sole purpose of maintaining and improving their privileged positions. In this way, the Bronze Age archaeological record indicates that bronze metallurgy depended directly from the control of mountainous resources. While Erlitou (proto-Shang) was the first known society in China to have presented these characteristics, the societies of late Shang, Western Zhou (1045-771 BC) and Eastern Zhou (771-481 BC) preserved and expanded its legacy, defining the course of the Chinese Bronze Age (*circa* 2000-500 BC). The fact that the minerals used for fabricating bronzes were mostly extracted from mountainous regions is no trivial matter considering the great importance of bronze artifacts in Shang religious culture. The systematic use of bronze vessels in ritual offerings, specifically the fact these artifacts were employed to physically contain the aliment of the Shang ancestors suggests the Shang royal house believed these objects had a unique liminal capacity. Inasmuch as the mountain was a territorially-grounded Power though to be notably close to Di, Shang highest deity, it

is feasible that the main reason why the Shang favored the use of copper-alloys in ritual communications with their ancestors was because they regarded the liminal capacity of metals as given by their mountainous origin. To put it differently, to the extent that the minerals from which bronze vessels were built were actual “fragments of mountains” used as ritual objects for communication with numinous entities, liminality -as the capacity to be in direct connection with the spiritual realm- was believed to be a quality of their very physical constitution. Therefore, the exceptional efforts the Shang dedicated to the extraction and forging of mountainous metals might have resulted from a desire to appropriate numinous power and ensure ritual effectivity. The capacity to cast bronze vessels, as the Nine Tripods myth suggests, was understood as reflecting the elite’s ability to successfully and exclusively obtain this power, hence serving to legitimize their political and economic preeminence. As a result, the possession of bronzes not only indicated socio-economic privileges but also, and most importantly, privileged spiritual capacities. Furthermore, given that metals were extracted from mountain ranges, religio-political power was ultimately based in the mountains.

Therefore, not only mountains were sacred but their liminal qualities were coveted by Bronze Age elites, which sought to gain them for themselves by means of mountain worship and bronze vessel casting. In this way, the liminality of the mountain was not simply an abstraction but an actual quality of the landscape. Furthermore, it was this liminality, together with the cardinality of the *Sifang*, which granted sacrality to Shang territory. Insofar as it was believed to be sacred, the Shang realm was understood as

central (*Zhongshang*). In late Shang religion, the sacrality of the mountain was not a consequence of its centrality, as Allan has asserted, but of its liminality. Centrality was the quality of an entire territory, but not of a mountain. As a consequence of the liminality nature of mountains, Shang territory was understood as qualitatively different to any other space. However, the uniqueness of the Shang realm rested not only in the numinous territoriality of mountains but also in the cardinality-oriented spatiality of the *Sifang*: Because of its liminality, Shang was ontologically superior, and because of its cardinality, it was spatially ordered. Therefore, Shang was unique in terms of both the structure and the contents of its spatiality. Its centrality was revealed both in its ontological uniqueness and its spatial directionality. In this way, the order, reality and liminality of the Shang realm defined its sacrality. The sacral nature of Shang resulted of neither a theoretical framework nor a religious speculation but of an actual characteristic of a defined territory.

This novel elucidation of Shang religiosity results from the careful application of the Eliadean concept “sacred space” which, as I have explicated above, has not been sufficiently understood by scholars, which have reduce its plausibility to the likelihood of a central site. In the Eliadean scheme, however, centrality participates in the overall theme of order and orientation, which is actually only one the three major components of sacrality. The other two are reality and liminality. Considering this, in order to successfully address the issue of the the applicability of Eliadean sacrality to Shang religion (or any other religion), these three components are to be considered. In the particular case of Shang religiosity this implies, in the first place, moving from the subject of centrality to that of order and orientation and, in the second place, discussing the suitability of reality and liminality. This is precisely what I have

attempted in this chapter, advancing that each of these categories were indeed extant in Shang religious culture, revealing the nature of its spatial dimension as well as its relations to ritual and political culture. Furthermore, recognizing the territorial and spatial dimensions of Shang religiosity and its intimate association with politico-religious power, reveals rather different aspects of Shang religiosity, which had been largely overshadowed due to the dominance of ancestor worship in oracle bone inscriptions. Regardless of the uncontested importance of ancestors in Shang religious culture, the preeminence of Nature Powers -and specially the Mountain Power- in the Shang pantheon as well as the ritual importance of bronzes suggests the existence of a powerful spiritual dimension situated beyond the limits of ancestor worship and which effectively complemented the liminal capacities of Shang ancestors. Like ancestral spirits, this mountainous and metallurgical sphere also served as an effective source of numinous power for Shang kings, signaling the origins of the religious shift which will take place during the Warring States era, when with the fall of the Zhou nobility, ancestor worship will decline in importance and nature worship, particularly mountain worship, will acquire predominance in religious culture.

Chapter Two:

Ordering space by means of mountains in the *Yugong* 禹貢.

As explained in the previous chapter, a careful application of the Eliadean sacral spatiality complex to Early Chinese religion reveals the sacral quality of the mountain as grounded in its territorial liminality. Furthermore, recognizing the sacred quality of mountain ranges brings to the fore an important, although largely overlooked, territorial component in archaic Chinese religious culture. In this chapter I will explain how, during the Warring States (Zhangguo 戰國) period (481-221 BC), this territorial aspect of ancient Chinese religiosity continued through the persistent understanding of the sacral quality of the mountain, setting the standard for the manner in which mountains would be conceived during the entire imperial period, and even until this day. The notion of the mountain as a sacred space has been, indeed, a pervasive characteristic of the Chinese imagination, and while the origins of this conception can be found in the Shang dynasty, its most specific and characteristic forms only took shape during the late Zhou and early imperial periods. Therefore my interest here lies in three major texts from the *Shangshu* 尚書 (“Documents of the Elders”) or *Shujing* 書經 (“Classic/Book of the Documents”), specifically the chapters entitled *Yaodian* 堯典 (“Canon of Yao”), *Shundian* 舜典 (“Canon of Shun”) and *Yugong* 禹貢 (“Tributes of Yu”, henceforth “Tributes”). In my view, each of these texts reveal that during the Warring States the mountain continued to be conceived as a sacred space due to its capacity to provide order and orientation and hence to define the structure of reality. Particularly in the *Yugong*, a text to which I dedicate special attention in the following

pages, the cosmological function of the mountain acquired precedence over other aspects of sacrality, specially liminality, as the mountain came to be portrayed as an essential element in the ordering of the world, that is, the creation of a *cosmos* as an ordered space where open communication with the spiritual realm was always possible and effective.¹³⁷ Because of its order, this space was characterized by its sacrality. And this sacrality, ultimately derived from the mountain as a “cosmological agent”. In the following lines, I shall explain in which specific manners mountains helped to construct this ordered, sacred space. I shall also explicate how and why is that the creation of an ordered space amounted to the construction of a sacred space, and what role mountains played in this correlation.

There are four major early Chinese texts pertaining to mountains: the *Yaodian*, *Shundian* and *Yugong* chapters of the *Shangshu* and the *Shanhajijing* 山海經, all of which present numerous similarities. The texts I will refer to in the following pages – the *Yaodian*, the *Shundian* and the *Yugong*– date back to the mid-Warring State period, ca. 5th-3rd centuries BC.¹³⁸ These texts, included in the *Shangshu*, although less copious in references than the *Shj*, still provide revealing hints about how the Ancient Chinese viewed mountains.

The *Yaodian* and the *Shundian* texts allude to a few specific mountains but introduce a character known as the “Four Marchmounts” *siyue* 四岳, an examination of which I

¹³⁷ On the use of the term *cosmos*. See p. 27 n. 41, previous chapter.

¹³⁸ Campany (1996) p. 104. n. 7., Nylan (2001) pp. 134-135., Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 602.

believe can be of help in trying to elucidate the early Chinese understanding of mountains.

In the *Yaodian* there are two mentions to the “Four Marchmounts”¹³⁹:

di yue zi si yue shang shang hong shui fanf ge dang dang huai shan

xiang ling hao hao tao tian xia min qi zi you neng bi yi?

帝曰：咨！四岳，湯湯洪水方割，蕩蕩懷山襄陵，浩浩滔天。下民其咨，有能俾乂？

“The Di said, 'Ho! (President of) the Four Mountains, destructive in their overflow are the waters of the inundation. In their vast extent they embrace the hills and overtop the great heights, threatening the heavens with their floods, so that the lower people groan and murmur

¹³⁹ Legge (1899) translates *siyue* 四岳 as “President of the Four Mountains”. There are two major problems with this rendition. First, the expression originally does not include the character for “President”, which Legge apparently utilizes in an effort to communicate the fact that it refers to a person and a title rather than four actual “mountains”. Second, it is better to translate the character *yue* 岳 (or alternate 嶽) as “marchmount” or “sacred peak” in order to differentiate it from the character *shan* 山, which is customarily translated as “mountain”. The character *yue* 岳 refers not simply to a mountain but rather to an officially sanctioned mountain which was the recipient of special sacrifices, it is composed from the signifiers for mountain and *qiu* 丘 “elder” or “big”, although *qiu* also meant “hill”, “small mountain” or “hillock”, and was the first name of Confucius. As I shall explain, the *Shundian* refers to four marchmounts when describing Shun’s “tour of inspection. Although referring to a title, the expression *siyue* 四岳 might allude to these four mountains mentioned in the “Canon of Shun”.

'Is there a capable man to whom I can assign the correction (of this calamity)?"¹⁴⁰

di yue zi siyue zhen zai wei qi shi zai ru neng yong ming xun zhen wei?

帝曰：咨！四岳。朕在位七十載，汝能庸命，巽朕位？

"The Di said, Ho! (President of the) Four Mountains, I have been on the throne seventy years. You can carry out my commands;– I will resign my place to you. The Chief said, I have not the virtue;– I should disgrace your place"¹⁴¹

In both cases the Ti (or Di) 帝 is Yao 堯, a mythical ruler that was believed to have established astronomical computations and to have laid the foundations of the agricultural way of life by putting an end to the flood that, supposedly, was ravaging

¹⁴⁰ Legge (1899) pp. 34-35, Karlgren (1950) translates the passage as follows: "The emperor said: Oh, you Si Yue ("Four Mountains", a title), voluminously the great waters everywhere are injurious, extensively they embrace the mountains and rise above the hills, vastly they swell up to Heaven" (p. 3).

¹⁴¹ Legge (1899) p. 35. Karlgren (1950) translates the passage as follows: "Oh Si Yue, I have been in the high position (on the throne) 70 years. (If) you can (use) execute (Heaven's) mandate, I shall (withdraw from yield=) cede my high position. (Si) Yue said: (I have) not the virtue, I should disgrace the emperor's high position" (pp. 3-4).

China.¹⁴² Because of his civilizing deeds Yao was a figure of extreme importance in the Confucian mythological accounts of the past and, therefore, in the intellectual and political justification of the imperial form of government from the Han dynasty on. In the consideration of this, the fact that in the *Yaodian* the "(President of) the Four

¹⁴² In early Chinese religious culture the flood is a recurrent theme. Anne Birrell has identified at least four flood myths traditions, associated with the characters of Nü Wa 女媧, Gun 鯀, Gong Gong 共工 and Yu. More recently, Mark Edward Lewis has analyzed these figures as mythological representations of the forces of order (Nu Wa, Fu Xi and, particularly, Yu) and chaos (Gong Gong, Gun). While Birrell fourfold classification scheme of the flood myths is certainly useful for signaling the peculiarities of specific narratives, Lewis study reveals the many and complex associations between these different figures. In this way, although certain accounts of the flood are exclusively associated with either Yu or Fu Xi, various other texts link these two figures with each other. For example, the *Yugong* and the *Mengzi* relate to the the mythological tradition which depicts the flood as caused by Gong Gong and tamed by Yu, while in other texts Yu confronts not Gong Gong but Gun, which is also portrayed as the initiator of the deluge. Other tradition, renders not Yu but Nu Wa as its tamer. Regardless of their differences, these narratives illustrate the flood as a chaotic situation caused by rebellious and violent figures, such as Gong Gong and Gun, and as characterized by the collapse of the heavens, the overflowing of waters and, in general, the blurring of boundaries. See Birrell (1997) & Lewis (2006)b, specially ch. 2.

Mountains"¹⁴³ is depicted as one of the closer advisors of Yao can not but to speak of the paramount intellectual, political and religious importance of the mountain in the construction of regal political power and divine ascendancy. The clearest example of this in the Canon of Yao is the first of the passages I have just quoted, in which the Four Peaks are inquired who they believe is the appropriate person to end the deluge. Considering the mythological centrality of the deluge I read this as an indication of the great politico-religious significance of the mountain.

On the other hand, the concept of the mountain as a counselor might be traced back to the divinatory uses of the mountain during the Shang dynasty. Indeed, asking the mountain via divination about urgent issues, as observable in the oracle bone inscriptions, is not too different from inquiring a minister, or other official, about a

¹⁴³ The original text simply speaks of *siyue* 四岳, which Legge translates as “Four Mountains”. Legge has added the expression “The President of” possibly in an effort to make sure the reader understands that the term “Four Mountains” refers not to four physical peaks but to an actual individual. Legge’s decision to translate *yue* 岳 as “mountain” is arguable insofar as such term is usually translated as “peak” or “marchmount”, while *shan* 山 is customarily translated as “mountain”. Contrarily to *shan*, *yue* refers to an imperially sanctioned sacred mountain, and this is certainly the case with *siyue* 四岳. Therefore, it is much more precise to translate this expression as “Four Peaks”, which is the translation I shall adopt here. The term *siyue* is also used in other classical texts such as the the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Master Zuo’s commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 “Spring and Autumn Annals”) and the *Guoyu* 國語 (“Discourses of the States”). During the Han dynasty *siyue* was replaced by the *wuyue* (“Five Marchmounts” or “Five Peaks”). This different uses of *yue* 岳 correspond to changes in cosmological and cosmographical thought, grounded in the transition from a cosmological system based on four cardinal directions, which apparently existed from the late Shang to the late Zhou (1046 - 256 BC) periods, to another one based on five, established during imperial times in the context of the increasing popularity of the *Wuxing* (“Five Elements/Phases/Agents”). The specific characteristics of the transition from one cosmological system to the other has been extensively discussed by Aihe Wang. See Robson (2009) pp. 25-44 and Wang (2000) pp. 92-128. For *yue* in the *Shundian* original text see <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/canon-of-shun>.

state affair, as is the case of the dialogue between Yao and the the Four Peaks. The impressive political prominence of this official, who is even offered the throne by the king, therefore, might be the result of some sort of secular transformation of the former protagonist of the *yue* in the Shang pantheon, this is coherent with the fact that the concept of the mountain appears together with the numeral four, which was the basis of Shang cosmology (*Sifang*).

The religio-political prominence of the Four Marchmounts is also discernible in the *Shundian* or Canon of Shun -second chapter of the *Shangshu*- where it is said that after Shun 舜 was appointed king, succeeding Yao in this charge,

"...he sacrificed specially, but with the ordinary forms, to God (*lei yu shang di* 類于上帝), sacrifices with reverent purity to the Six Honored Ones (*yin yu liu zong* 禋于六宗); offered their appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers (*wang yu shan chuan* 望于山川); and extended his worship to the host of spirits (*bian yu qun zhong* 遍于群神)"¹⁴⁴

Soon after this, the ruler initiated his "tour of inspection" (*xunshou* 巡狩):

¹⁴⁴ Legge (1899) p. 39. The usage of the term God is debatable, the result of an unfortunate translation of the term *Shang Di* 上帝, the "Lord Above", by Legge. Original text is 肆類于上帝，禋于六宗，望于山川，徧于群神. Available at <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/canon-of-shun>

"In the second month of the year he made a tour of inspection eastwards, as far as Daizong (岱宗)¹⁴⁵ , where he presented a burnt-offering to Heaven, and sacrificed in order to the hills and rivers (*wang zhi yu shan chuan* 望秩于山川). Thereafter he gave audiences to the princes of the east. He set in accord their seasons and months, and regulated the days... In the fifth month he made a similar tour southwards, as far as the mountain of the south, where he observed the same ceremonies as at Thâi. In the eighth month he made a tour westwards, as far as the mountain of the west, where he did as before. In the eleventh month he made a tour northwards, as far as the mountain of the north, where he observed the same ceremonies as in the west. He then returned (to the capital), went to (the temple of) Cultivated Ancestor, and sacrificed a single bull"¹⁴⁶

These passages reveal four major things regarding mountains. In the first place, they show how rivers and mountains, already present in the Shang oracle bone inscriptions, remained as the most notable features of the landscape. In the second place, they reveal that well after the Shang dynasty sacrifices to these landmarks continued to be an integral part of the ruler's religious prerogatives both at the central and the regional level, as revealed in the "tour of inspection", where every five years

¹⁴⁵ *dai* 岱 means Taishan 太山 or Taiyue 太岳, one of the five sacred peaks, while *zong* 宗 signifies "ancestor". Therefore *Daizong* is a reference to Tai Mountain and it literally reads as "ancestor Tai Mountain".

¹⁴⁶ Legge (1899) pp. 39-40.

sacrifices were offered to major mountains in each cardinal direction.¹⁴⁷In the third place, insofar as each cardinal direction was associated with a mountain, they suggest that mountains not only preserved their liminal character but also acquired an orientational ability, permitting the identification of the four directions and serving as means for ordering space. In the fourth place, the fact that the directional function of mountains was related to the four directions indicates that well after the fall of the Shang, the Chinese continued to understand their space as having a quadrate shape.¹⁴⁸ In sum, in the *Shundian* mountains preserved their cultic status and acquired the functions the Shang reserved for the *Sifang* scheme. Therefore, during the late Zhou the sacred character of mountains was further expanded, encompassing both the liminality and the directionality/centrality of space, which came to be associated with them. In this way, these passages allude, on the one hand, to the prevalence of the understanding of the mountain as the most notorious territorial component of early Chinese religious culture and, on the other hand, to the significant continuity between Shang and Zhou religiosity.

In the first place, the persistence of the mountain's ritual centrality in early Chinese religion is clearly discernible from certain passages of the *Shundian* which signal that

¹⁴⁷ Legge (1899) pp. 39-40.

¹⁴⁸ The notion of *siyue* is certainly related to the *Sifang* scheme insofar as it reproduces the same quaternary spatiality, denoting a continuity between Shang and Zhou cosmologies. The Zhou certainly inherited the Shang cosmographical framework. Noticing this, Sarah Allan has argued that the Shang probably believed in the existence of four major mountains located in the edges of the world. Although there are no mentions to *siyue* in the oracle bone inscriptions it is plausible the concept of "Four Peaks" (or Four Marchmounts") was already developed during the Shang dynasty and that the royal house at Yin believed these mountains supported the sky just as the legs of a turtle support its carapace. However feasible is this hypothesis, nothing of it is totally deducible neither from the *Shangshu* nor the oracle bone inscriptions, remaining in the ambit of mere speculation. See Allan (1991) p.86.

mountain sacrifices were an important part of regal religious obligations, to the extent that a specific type of sacrifice was devised exclusively for peaks, as suggested by the fact that ritual activities directed to mountains (and rivers) were refereed by using a distinct character (*wang* 望)¹⁴⁹, as in the following cases:¹⁵⁰

wang yu shan chuan 望于山川¹⁵¹

“offered their appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers”¹⁵²

“he made wang-sacrifice to mountains and rivers”¹⁵³

wang zhi yu shan chuan 望秩于山川

“sacrificed in order to the hills and rivers”¹⁵⁴

“he made wang-sacrifice successively to mountains and rivers”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ As various authors have signaled, the mountain (*wang*) sacrifices bore a panoptical quality inasmuch as the character 望, besides from conveying “mountain sacrifice” it also meant “to observe”, “to watch” and/or “to gaze into the distance”. This is the reason why, in reference to mountains and rivers, the character has been translated as “vista sacrifices” [Sterckx (2009) p. 877] or as “sacrifices performed from afar” [Bujard (2009) p. 789]. On sacrifices and the “tour of inspection” see Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) pp. 638- 640.

¹⁵⁰ Given the significance and complexity of these passages, rather than adventuring to translate them myself I have decided to provide the original text in early Chinese, accompanied by the authoritative translations of Legge (1899) and Karlgren (1950), hoping this will help the reader to make sense of the text.

¹⁵¹ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) translates this as “...the rite wang (observation from distance, commensuration) with respect to mountains and streams” (p. 87 n. 118)

¹⁵² Legge (1899) p. 39.

¹⁵³ Karlgren (1950) p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Legge (1899) p. 39.

¹⁵⁵ Karlgren (1950) p. 4.

The wang sacrifices –as Karlgren renders– were actually part of a threefold series of sacrifices performed by Shun and directed to major deities which included not only mountains and rivers but also Shang Di 上帝 and asterisms, which too received special offerings in the *lei* and *yin* sacrifices, respectively:

lei yu shang di 類于上帝

“he sacrificed specially, but with the ordinary forms, to God”¹⁵⁶

“he made lei-sacrifice (the “good” sacrifice) to God on High”¹⁵⁷

yin yu liu zong 禋于六宗

“sacrificed with reverent purity to the Six Honoured Ones”¹⁵⁸

“he made yin sacrifice to the six venerable ones (cs. celestial divinities)”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Legge (1899) p. 39.

¹⁵⁷ Karlgren (1950) p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ Legge (1899) p. 39.

¹⁵⁹ Karlgren (1950) p. 4.

In this way, the sacrifices of Shun offer a glance to the Zhou pantheon, which was apparently not too different from that of the Shang, with Shang Di –as the first beneficiary of sacrifices– at the the top, asterisms in the middle and mountains and rivers at the bottom. This hierarchy, in fact, suggests that during the Zhou, mountains preserved their privileged connection with powerful numinous forces, which appear to have been understood as descending from the heavens to the Chinese territory. The liminal character of the space occupied by the mountains and rivers to which Shun offered sacrifices is further indicated by the fact that sacrificing these landmarks was equaled to worshipping spirits. This is precisely the manner in which Shun’s rituals conclude:

bian yu qun zhong 遍于群神¹⁶⁰

“extended his worship to the host of spirits”¹⁶¹

“he made (all round=) comprehensive sacrifices to all spirits”¹⁶²

The character *bian* 遍 is of certainly difficult rendition in this particular context, however I suspect it refers to the act of “thoroughly/comprehensively sacrificing to”

¹⁶⁰ Dorofeeva-Litchmann translates this as “... the rite *bian* (riding around) with respect to the multiplicity of deities/spirits” in Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) p. 87 n. 118 and as “*bian* (lit. “riding around”) with respect to the multiplicity of [their] deities/spirits in Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 639.

¹⁶¹ Legge (1899) p. 39.

¹⁶² Karlgren (1950) p. 4.

bian yu 遍于 the “multiple spirits” *qun zhong* 群神 hosted by mountains and rivers *shan chuan* 山川. This view is reinforced by the fact that the *Shanjing* –which comprises the first five books of the *Shanhaijing* and that I will review in the following chapter– is a contemporary text which deals almost exclusively with mountains and provides generous descriptions of the incredible variety of spirits –an other numinous entities such as minerals, plants and animals– that populate mountain ranges, as well as of the sacrifices required to tame and control them. In this way, the term 群神 is probably a reference to the different deities which the *Shanjing* describes in detail. Furthermore, the belief in varied mountain spirits and the development of specific sacrifices for peaks suggest that, during the Zhou period, the numinous powers of mountains acquired much more defined characteristics than in the Shang dynasty, when mountains received the very important but highly generic *di* sacrifice.¹⁶³As I shall explain further in this chapter, this might be related with the decline of ancestor worship and the ascent of territorial cults associated with mountains and rivers.

Back to the issue of Shang-Zhou religious continuity. It is clear from the abovequoted passages that the understanding of mountains as powerful numinous agents persisted not only in their ritual prominence but also in their orientational/directional functions. The ability of the mountain to provide orientation in space is suggested by the fact that in his royal “tour of inspection” throughout the country, Shun is described as passing through four mountains located in each cardinal direction. In the tour, the king stops at each mountain according to a calendrical scheme and perform sacrifices to them. This ritual procession is particularly important because it

¹⁶³ See previous chapter p. 30. n. 50.

introduces a specific set of mountains with defined geographical positions (*siyue*) that appear to have held a distinctive place in religious culture. The uniqueness of this framework was grounded in the numerology of four which, as explained in the previous chapter, was characteristic of the *Sifang* scheme of the Shang. The *Shundian* preserved this quaternary spatiality but introduced an innovation by associating each cardinal point with a specific peak. This association not only reveals a continuity between Shang and Zhou cosmography but also, and most importantly, that the very organization of space was effected by means of mountains. This ordering capacity of mountains in the *Shundian* is further reinforced by the fact that, as a result of his tour across the Four Peaks, Shun organized the Chinese territory in distinctive territorial units:

zhao shi you er zhou feng shi you er shan jun chuan 肇十有二州，封
十有二山，濬川。

“He instituted the division (of the land) into twelve provinces, raising altars upon twelve hills in them. He (also) deepened the rivers.”¹⁶⁴

“He delimited the 12 provinces and, and raised altars on 12 mountains, and he deepened rivers”¹⁶⁵

Besides from the “tour of inspection”, as Chinese traditions assure, the creation of the Twelve Provinces (*shi you er zhou* 十有二州) is one of Shun’s most notorious

¹⁶⁴ Legge (1899) p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Karlgren (1950) p. 5.

mythical achievements. Furthermore, is of utmost interest for our purposes that each of these territorial units was correlated with a mountain (*shan* 山), again relating spatial divisions with mountain ranges. In this way, both the “tour of inspection” and its resulting Twelve Provinces were associate with specific mountains, the former with the Four Peaks and the latter with twelve mountains (*shi you er shan* 十有二山). Therefore, mountains were essential for the successful execution of Shun’s endeavors. On the one hand, mountains dictated Shun’s movements across the land and revealed him the fundamental structure of space. On the other hand, the spatial arrangement that resulted from Shun’s ritual movement was signaled by peaks, inasmuch as the location of each province was defined by a specific mountain. On the whole, spatial movement and territorial organization was effected by virtue of mountains: Serving as univocal directional markers, peaks made movement possible and as spatial landmarks, mountains marked the contours of space. As I shall explain, this orientational capacity of mountains is repeated in the *Yugong*.

The Canon of Shun reified the liminal and orientational functions of the mountain in the person of the "Four Mountains", which was simultaneously a reference to specific peaks in the Chinese landscape and a close advisor to the king in religious and political matters, as suggested in other passages of the text:

"He called (in) all the five jade symbols of rank; and when the month was over he gave daily audiences to (the President of) the

Four Mountains, and all the Pastors, (finally) returning their symbols to the various princes" ¹⁶⁶

"He deliberated with (the President of the) Four Mountains how to throw open the doors (of communication between himself and the) four (quarters of the land), and how he could see with the eyes, and hear with the ears of all" ¹⁶⁷

"Shun said, Ho (President of the) Four Mountains, is there any one who can with vigorous service attend to all the affairs of the Di, whom I may appoint to be General Regulator, to assist me in (all) affairs, managing each department according to its nature?"

¹⁶⁸

"The Di said, Ho! (President of the) Four Mountains, is there any one able to perform my three (religious) ceremonies?" ¹⁶⁹

In the last two passages the "the President of the Four Mountains" is, like in the *Yaodian*, depicted as a government counselor, who is asked about decisive state affairs. The first passage, in turn, parallel the Four Mountains with ritual paraphernalia in numerological fashion ("five jade symbols of rank") and with other

¹⁶⁶ Legge (1899) p. 39

¹⁶⁷ Legge (1899) p. 42

¹⁶⁸ Idem

¹⁶⁹ Legge (1899) p. 44.

government officials ("the Pastors" and "the princes"), anew denoting its dual, political and religious, character. Even more revealing is the second passage in which the Four Mountains are openly depicted as intermediaries between the ruler and the entire world (the "four quarters of the land") thanks to their ability to teach the king how "to throw open the doors of communication" and how "to see with the eyes, and hear with the ears of all". This passage seem to suggest that were the Four Mountains themselves the ones capable of this type of communication, contemplation and comprehension. If this is correct, then this passage can be understood as textual evidence for how the Zhou, just as the Shang, thought of mountains as sacred spaces, that is, as spaces that could serve as "doors of communication" between the human and the heavenly realms. As I shall explain further in this chapter, I believe this reading to be correct.

The various passages from the *Yaodian* and the *Shundian* we have reviewed so far attest for the complex symbolics of the mountain in early China, which is defined by a mixture of political, religious and geographical aspects. The fact that all these different characteristics are introduced as indistinguishable from one another suggest the extraordinary allegorical import of the mountain in these canonical texts. The mountain as a political counselor, a spiritual intermediary, a directional marker and a geographical landmark, they all seem to have coexisted in the classical corpus, diverging in their textual representations but converging in their ritual, religious and political functionalities; all of the different "impersonations" of the mountain indeed are always central for the establishment of politico-religious authority, whether as an advisor, a numen or a physical reality, the mountain invariably assist the ruler in the

constitution of his authority. Both conceptually and physically, therefore, the mountain is characterized as being of great importance in Zhou religiosity and politics.

Besides from the *Yaodian* and the *Shundian* the other text from the *Shangshu* that reflects the religious and political centrality of the mountain is the *Yugong* or the "Tributes of Yu", which is certainly helpful for the purpose of understanding the early Chinese view of the mountain and that I shall refer simply as the *Tributes*. The *Yugong* somehow resembles the tour of inspection mentioned in the *Yaodian*; and although it lacks of a calendrical scheme it also depicts a ritual procession across mountains; however, in the *Tributes* this depiction, that in the *Yaodian* consist of just a couple of paragraphs, is considerably more elaborated. The *Tributes* develop some themes initially introduced in the *Canons*, not only explaining in detail the characteristic of what appears to be a tour of inspection but also, and most importantly, offering an explanation for the ending of the flood as a result of the works of Yu 禹, another mythical hero in the style of Yao and Shun.¹⁷⁰ The manner in which the flood is depicted in the *Yugong* differs from other Ancient texts and might be the result of an effort to transform a purely mythological event into a historical one. In other words, initially the flood, as is suggested in other classical texts, might have been thought to reflect some sort of communicative disruption between the human and heavenly realms but in the *Shangshu* the flood is an actual inundation whose solution implies a decisive and (apparently) inevitable civilizing and disciplinary

¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that the theme of the flood is of major importance in Chinese mythology and, specially, in the Confucian historical narratives, which draw on various mythological elements. See Boltz (1981), Birrell (1997) & Lewis (2006)b.

intervention from the ruler (or "the government")¹⁷¹. This intervention is so crucial for the establishment of civilization, that is, the agricultural way of life (which is obviously impossible to develop in the context of a deluge), that it amounts to a cosmogonic event.

In the *Yugong*, indeed, the process in which the deluge is ended is also the process in which the *cosmos* is forged and the world, as an ordered, un-chaotic space, is created. The particularity of this process in the Confucian tradition is that is accomplished by the performance of thoroughly defined -and therefore entirely repeatable- ritual actions, the frame in which these actions develop is both temporal and spatial. In both cases the mountain is of paramount importance because, together with the rivers (which anyways always emerge from mountains), is the privileged focus of all ritual actions and provides the spatial frame for the movement of the ruler and the organization of the space. It is in this sense that I here refer to Yu's movement across the landscape as a ritual procession. I believe that in order to understand the nature of this procession and the role of the mountain in it, as explained in the *Yugong*, we are first to understand the nature of this cosmogonic process itself. As I have said, this process has both spatial and temporal dimensions, the analysis that follows will focus first in the former, the latter will be addressed subsequently.

The "Tributes of Yu" consist of two sections, one dedicated to the description of the Nine Provinces and the other one dedicated to the listing of several mountains and

¹⁷¹ See Birrell (1999) pp. 344-349. See also Birrell (1997) pp. 241-257 and Lewis (2006) pp. 21-33.

rivers; in these narratives the river-mountain dyad, which I have shown to exist in other sources, is repeated. The first section of the *Yugong* consist of a description of the different provinces Yu founded in his movement across various rivers while attempting to terminate the deluge. The narrative stresses how Yu followed the rivers to traverse the territory, using them, together with mountains and seas, to define the borders between the provinces. In this way, the description of Yu's journey serves as a brief description of the Chinese empire. This section starts as it follows:

"Yu differentiated the Nine Provinces.¹⁷² Following (the course of)¹⁷³ the mountains, dredging the rivers and trusting the earth to make the tributes (of the provinces). Yu spread the earth, and

¹⁷² Legge translates this sentence as "Yu divided the land". However, the term *bie* 別 is more accurately translated as "to distinguish" or "to differentiate" than as "to divide". What Legge has translated as "the land" is actually *jiu zhou* 九州, the Nine Provinces or Nine Regions, whose creation is ascribed to *Da Yu* 大禹 ("Yu the Great"). The original Chinese text is 禹別九州. See Legge (1899) p. 64 & <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu>.

¹⁷³ James Legge translates *sui shan* 隨山 as "following the course of the hills" instead of as "following the hills", which would be the most logical choice for this expression. Legge's translation probably resulted out of an interest to emphasize the mobile nature of Yu's endeavors. In my translation I have preferred the term "mountain" over "hill" to translate *shan* 山 and discarded the use of the phrase "the course of" inasmuch as it does not appear in the original text.

following the mountains he cut down the trees, determining the highest hills and largest rivers (in the several regions)" ¹⁷⁴

These lines enunciate the main feats of Yu as exemplary ruler and tamer of the flood: the clearing of mountainous flora and the measurement and division of the land. Most notably, all of these achievements result from Yu "following the mountains" (*sui shan* 隨山). I judge this very expression to be crucial, since it seems to indicate the essentially cosmological guise in which the mountain is presented in the *Yugong*, as a geographical feature that provides the ruler with spatial reference for the organization of the territory both in spatial and temporal terms. As explained above, the mountain performs the same exact function in the *Shundian*, and, as I shall demonstrate, it appears to have preserved it in the *Yugong* as well. In fact, in the *Tributes*, mountains are depicted as cosmological agents, that is, as essential elements for the creation of the *cosmos* as an ordered world; this is particularly true in reference to the first section of the text, which provides a description of the different provinces Yu is said to have created in his efforts to finish the deluge and

¹⁷⁴ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Legge (1899) and Shaughnessy (2007) as references. The etymological dictionary at <http://www.chineseetymology.org> has been of special aid. The original Chinese version is the following: 禹別九州，隨山濬川，任土作貢。禹敷土，隨山刊木，奠高山大川。 Accessible on line at <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu> (It includes the traditional translation by Legge). Interestingly, Legge has preferred to omit the sentences *futu* 敷土 ("to spread the earth") and *ren tu zuo gong* 任土作貢 ("trusting the earth to make the tributes") in his translation. The expression *futu* 敷土 and his relation to the worship of the earth during the Zhou period has been studied by Ichiro (2009). The contents of this passage strongly resemble the opening lines of the Bingongxu vessel inscription, which is dated to the VIII and IX centuries B.C. This resemblance has revealed that the myth of Yu controlling the flood by means of mountains and rivers, which was traditionally thought to be a Warring State tradition, actually finds its origins in the early Zhou period. See Legge (1899) p. 64 & Shaughnessy (2007) pp. 16, 17 n. 4.

the specific rivers he travelled across in the process in which he ordered the world. The route Yu follows resembles the one Shun is said to have traveled in his “tour of inspection”¹⁷⁵. Moreover, just like that of Shun, the route of Yu is said to have generated administrative structures. While Shun is ascribed with the establishment of twelve provinces¹⁷⁶, Yu is said to have created nine provinces in his ritual procession through the realm.¹⁷⁷ Each of these regions are briefly described as the narrative recounts the movement of Yu across rivers, which are hence depicted as his

¹⁷⁵ Legge (1899) pp. 39-40.

¹⁷⁶ Legge (1899) p. 40.

¹⁷⁷ Legge (1899) p. 74.

preferred transportation mediums.¹⁷⁸ In this way, Yu's fluvial journey functions as a

¹⁷⁸ The textual coexistence of a duodecimal and a nonary geographical scheme in the *Shangshu* is intriguing. However, I suspect it can be explained by astronomical/astrological reasons. These two schemes, in fact, appear to be rooted in two complementary astronomical systems used during the Warring States and early Han periods. Namely, the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches, and the Nine Palaces of Heaven, which served to divide and organize Heaven in twelve solar stations and nine lunar lodges, respectively. These celestial divisions reflected the early Chinese believe that the Heavens are a circle, and the Earth is a square, as explained in the *Zhoubi suan jing* 周髀算經 (“The Mathematical Classic of the Gnomon of the Zhou dynasty”) and which defined the *gai tian* 蓋天 (Umbrella Heaven) cosmography, that established an umbrella-like heaven rotating around the North Pole over a squared, flat earth. That these two systems coexisted is suggested by different astronomical boards (known as *shi* boards or cosmographs) excavated from the tomb of Xiahou Zao 夏侯竈, Marquis of Ruyin 汝陰 (165 B.C), where cosmographs depicting the terrestrial and heavenly planes as divided according to either the twelve solar stations or the nine lunar palaces were found side by side. Furthermore, these astronomical systems also coexist in the contemporary *Huainanzi* 淮南子 text (139 B.C), which provides a fairly detailed description of them in its third chapter, entitled *Tianwen* 天文 (“Heavenly/Celestial Patterns). Therefore, archeological and textual evidence suggest that both systems did not exclude each other but were rather compatible in both geometrical and numerological terms. While the specifics of this interaction surpass the purposes of this explanation, it will suffice here to signal that the hypothesis the Heavenly Stems/Earthly Branches found a counterpart in Shun's twelve provinces and the Nine Palaces of Heaven in Yu's Nine Regions is also supported by the astrological practice of field allocation, which identified each of this celestial divisions with a specific region of the Chinese realm in an attempt to determine with precision the way heavenly movements (allegedly) affected human affairs. This astrological procedure is explicitly explained in the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Classic/Book of Rites), which assures that the imperial astrologer “...concerns himself with the stars in the heavens, keeping a record of the changes and pl movements of the stars and planets, sun and moon, in order to examine the movements of the terrestrial world, with the object of distinguishing (prognosticating) good and bad fortune. He divides the territories of the nine regions of the empire in accordance with their dependences on particular celestial bodies. All the fiefs and principalities connected with distinct stars, and from thus their prosperity or misfortune can be ascertained” [Needham (1959) p. 190]. Specifically in the case of the Nine Regions, field allocation astrology posed the geometrical and mathematical challenge of applying a circular heavenly scheme to a squared earthly plane. In fact, this was one of the major issued addressed by the *Zhoubi suan jing*, the oldest extant Chinese astrological/astronomical treatise and that features an entire chapter dedicated to this single operation. This chapter specifically deals with the various mathematical and geometrical procedures that permit the composition of squares and circles based on

narrative thread linking the description of the nine provinces, hence the text invariably provides a short mention of the rivers which allow access to the region about to be introduced. As the summary of the provinces also serves as a recount of their tributes, it is therefore assumed that the very movement of tributes was achieved by means rivers. Provinces, on the other hand, are often delineated by tracing river courses, although mountains and seas also serve as boundaries. Mentions to mountains in this section are not limited to bordering hills, extending also to the different mountains which Yu sacrificed in his journey. Specifically, sacrifices to mountains are mention with respect to the eight and ninth provinces:

cai meng lu ping 蔡蒙旅平

“Cai and Meng (mountains) were sacrificed to and regulated”¹⁷⁹

jing qi ji lu 荆岐既旅

“Jing and Qi (mountains) were sacrificed to”

Although the term *shan* 山 is never mentioned in any of these passages, we know the caharcters *cai* 蔡 *meng* 蒙 *jing* 荆 and *qi* 岐 refer to mountains inasmuch the character *lu* 旅 –which means “mountain sacrifice” or “to sacrifice to a mountain”– is used with respect to them. Furthermore, that the *lu* sacrifice was directed exclusively to mountains is reinforced by the following passage:

jiu shan kan lu 九山刊旅

¹⁷⁹ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Legge (1899) p. 70 and Karlgren (1950) p. 15 as references. Original early Chinese text retrieved from <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu>.

“the nine mountains were cleared of their trees and sacrificed to”¹⁸⁰

In this passage –situated at the very end of Yu’s description of the Nine Regions– the character *lu* 旅 is employed in reference to the nine mountains (*jiushan* 九山), which suggests that Yu offered this type of sacrifice to each and every mountain he encountered in his course.¹⁸¹ The mountainous character of this sacrifice is hence very clear, echoing the *wang* rites performed by Shun. Actually, the *lu* sacrifices had the same function in the *Yugong* that the *wang* sacrifices in the *Shundian*: to tame mountains. Furthermore, the overlap in the ritual functionality of these rites reinforces the view that during the late Zhou period the contours of the mountains’ spiritual contents were defined with unprecedented precision, to the point that a specific set of ritual activities devised to acquired its potencies –as those which were likely involved in the performing of the *wang* and *lu* sacrifices, emerged.

Besides from describing sacrifices to mountains, the first section of the *Yugong* focuses on describing the peculiarities of the nine provinces Yu is said to have defined in his ritual movement across the land, these regions are classified according to the quality of their soil and the type of tribute they pay. As an example, the first of these provinces, Ji, is described as it follows:

¹⁸⁰ Translation based on Legge (1899) p. 74. I have replaced “hill” for “mountain” and added the number “nine”, which is omitted by Legge in this particular rendition. Original early Chinese text retrieved from <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu>.

¹⁸¹ Considering that the number nine was also employed to convey “completeness”, the expression *jiu shan* 九山 might be render as the “totality of mountains”, suggesting that Yu offered sacrifices to all of the mountains in his realm. See Lewis (2006)b. p. 42.

"The soil of this province was whitish and mellow. Its contribution of revenue was the highest of the highest class, with some proportion of the second. Its fields were the average of the middle class" ¹⁸²

Apparently, the Ancient Chinese had a fairly sophisticated system of classification for fields and tributes. The fifth province, Yang, is also described in these terms:

"The fields of this province were the lowest of the lowest class; its contribution of revenue was the highest of the lowest class, with a proportion of the class above" ¹⁸³

This classification system reflects the strong economic character of the text, mostly preoccupied with the productivity of every province, which appears to be defined in relation to the needs of a central government whose geographical centrality is the implied point of reference for the cardinal location of each of the nine regions, as well as the assumed recipient of the tributes mentioned in the text. These tributes, on the other hand, are exotic and/or regionally distinctive, including silk, varnish, salt, hemp, lead, pine, jade, gold, silver, copper, bamboo, feathers, cedar, cypress, grindstones, whetstones, cinnabar, etc.¹⁸⁴ Many other products, not obtained in mountains, also appear to have had ritual functions. I shall further explain this in more detail when referring to the *Shj*.

¹⁸² Legge (1899) p. 64.

¹⁸³ Legge (1899) p. 68.

¹⁸⁴ As explained in the previous chapter, there is great degree of certainty that gold, silver, copper, jade and cinnabar minerals were mostly obtained from mountains and were used for ritual purposes, including the casting of sacrificial vessels. See Liu 2003 pp. 36-56.

In summary, the first section of the *Yugong* provides some revealing hints regarding the Ancient Chinese view of mountains. This data is complemented by the second section, which provides more abundant information, enumerating and naming several mountains in a very schematic manner. This section, indeed, describes Yu's journey across mountains. This mountain procession, as suggested by the very structure of text, seems to have developed parallel and simultaneously to Yu's movement across rivers. The connection between rivers and mountains is explicitly stated in this section in the form of various descriptions of how mountains are the sources of different rivers. The mountain-river parallelism is also repeated in the very narrative structure of this section, which after rendering a detailed description of the different mountains Yu traversed, it provides an account of the rivers he moved across in his expedition, tracing their sources back to specific mountains. It is possible to identify these different sub-sections according to the manner in which Legge translates their initial character: *dao3* 導. The ones naming the mountains Yu encountered in his excursion are translated as places Yu "surveyed and described"¹⁸⁵, while the ones recounting the courses and sources of rivers are rendered as paths Yu "traced". Differently from Legge, Karlgren prefers to render this character as "to travel along", which I believe is more appropriate.¹⁸⁶ In this way, the second section starts as it follows:

"(Yu)¹⁸⁷traversed (*dao3* 導) Qian and Qi, proceeding to Jing mountain (*jing shan* 荆山); then crossing the He, Hukou, and Leishou, going on to Tai peak (*tai yue* 太岳). After these came

¹⁸⁵ Legge (1899) p. 72.

¹⁸⁶ Further in this chapter I shall explain in more detail the complexities involved in the translation of the character *dao3* 導.

¹⁸⁷ The character for Yu 禹 is absent in the original text.

Zhizhu (底柱)¹⁸⁸and Xicheng, from which he went on to Wangwu; then there were Taihang (mountain) and mount Heng (*heng shan* 恆山), from which he proceeded to the Jieshi (碣石)¹⁸⁹, where he reached the sea."¹⁹⁰

This passage is followed by various others describing mountains. This paragraph in particular describes four different mountain chains of three mountains each. There is clear parallelism between narrative and geographical structure since each of these chains is described in an independent sections, each corresponding to a specific mountain range. The other two paragraphs repeat this formula. The second one introduces two ranges of four mountains each while the third one mentions three chains, two ranges of two mountains each and one chain of three hills. In total the

¹⁸⁸ Literally “Whetstone Pillar”.

¹⁸⁹ Literally “stone tablet rock”, with *jie* 碣 meaning “stone tablet” and *shi* 石 conveying “rock”, “stone”, “mineral” and also “stone tablet”. An etymological analysis reveals the expression *jieshi* 碣石 as a little redundant since *shi* 石 is already included in the character *jie* 碣, which is composed of both 石 and *jie* 曷, with the *shi* providing the meaning and *jie* the sound, therefore *jieshi* 碣石 might also be translated as “stone stone”. In view of the fact that mountains and rocks were intimately related to each other in early Chinese religious culture, and that the character *jie* 碣 referred to a “stone tablet”, conjointly these characters appear to refer to a mountain stele inscription, which were common during the early imperial era. Actually, the character most widely used to refer to a “stone tablet” (*bei* 碑), when combined with *jie* 碣 –as in *beijie* 碑碣– meant “mountain stelae” or “inscribed stone tablet”. It is hence logical that a mountain was be named *jieshi* 碣石.

¹⁹⁰ Translated taking Legge (1899) p. 72. and Karlgren (1950) p. 17 as references. Original Chinese text is 導岍及岐，至于荆山，逾于河；壺口、雷首至于太岳；底柱、析城至于王屋；太行、恆山至于碣石，入于海。 Pinyin terminology taken and original Chinese text retrieved from <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu>

Tributes of Yu refer to twentyseven mountains and nine mountain chains in three different paragraphs.¹⁹¹

This enumeration of mountains is followed by a description of the courses of nine different rivers from their sources, six of which are mountains. It is also specified where these rivers flow into, which in six cases is the sea, two cases the Huanghe (Yellow River) and in one case is not stipulated ¹⁹². This section ends with a summary of the works of Yu:

"The nine provinces were traversed equally; the four river banks were all made habitable; the nine mountains were chopped down (from trees) and sacrificed to; the sources of the nine rivers were cleared; the nine marshes were well banked; the four seas converged equally"¹⁹³

These lines signal that the ultimate purpose of Yu's ritual procession across mountains and rivers was that of *ordering* the land in order to make it fit for human usage. Although the tone of the narrative is markedly engineering its ultimate signification is *cosmical*, serving as an explanation of how the generation of a *cosmos* was only possible through the performance of concrete and specific actions which succeeded in lowering the waters (*si yu ji zhai* 四隩既宅) and merging the seas

¹⁹¹ As Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) has noticed, the number 27 is a multiple of 9. Considering Lewis (2006)b interpretation of nine as "totality", the number twenty seven would also be a reference to such concept. See Legge (1899) pp. 72-73, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) pp. 77. n. 98, 100 & Lewis (2006)b p. 42.

¹⁹² Legge (1899) pp. 73-74.

¹⁹³ Translated directly from the Chinese, taking Legge (1899) as a reference. Original text is *jiu zhou you tong si yu ji zhai jiu shan kan lu jiu chuan di yuan jiu ze ji bei si hai hui tong* 九州攸同，四隩既宅，九山刊旅，九川滌源，九澤既陂，四海會同。

Accessible at <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/tribute-of-yu>. See Legge (1899) p. 74.

(*si hai hui tong* 四海會同) by clearing mountain trees (*jiu shan kan* 九山刊), offering mountain sacrifices (*lu* 旅), cleansing river sources (*jiu chuan di yuan* 九川滌源) and banking of marshes (*jiu ze ji bei* 九澤既陂). These actions eliminated excesses and ensured communication flows, ending hence the chaos of the flood, which was implicitly characterized as an unnatural situation of blockade and exuberance. While the excesses eliminated in these procedures were those of wood, water and mud, the flow ensured was the of rivers, which were then able to communicate the four seas, as suggested by the expression “the merging of the seas” (*si hai hui tong* 四海會同) that ended the summary of Yu’s actions. On the one hand, the activities accomplished by Yu ensured the habitability of the low grounds along the rivers as signaled by Yu making the river banks habitable (*yu ji zhai* 隩既宅)¹⁹⁴ and allowing people to “descend from the hills and dwell in the lands” (*jiang qiu zhai tu* 降丘宅土)¹⁹⁵. Inasmuch as making the low grounds habitable also made them available for the practice of agriculture, the text appears to suggest that Yu’s actions were essential for the establishment of civilization and that the flood was not only a natural catastrophe but also, and most importantly, a socio-economic one since it forced humans to live up in the mountains, in high ground, where agriculture was impossible to practice. In this way, the hydraulic capacities of Yu were central to the generation of an ordered, cardinally oriented and geometrically balanced world, that is, a *cosmos*. On the other hand, Yu’s hydraulic works achieved the perfect integration of

¹⁹⁴ This is said at the beginning of the Yugong, in its third column (section) and not in the twenty-fourth that I have just quoted. However, both passages clearly resonate with each other. Legge (1899) p. 65.

¹⁹⁵ *Idem*

the country by establishing well-functioning routes of communication through the now fluent rivers. Considering that the accessibility of the capital and the necessity of good routes of communication it is a dominant theme in the first section of the *Tributes*, it is reasonable to presume the accessibility between the regions and the capital depended precisely on securing the normal flow of river waters. The capital, as the assumed recipient of all tributes, was the implicit geographical, political and religious center of the country, while the provinces, as the ones expected to provide tributes, were the periphery situated around this center and defined in reference to it.

The paragraph I have quoted above is followed by another one that continues to summarize Yu's deeds in a similar tone:

"The six magazines (of material wealth) were fully attended to; the different parts of the country were subjected to an exact comparison, so that contribution of revenue could be carefully adjusted according to their resources. The fields were all classified with reference to the three characters of the soil; and the revenues for the Middle Region were established" ¹⁹⁶

This paragraph recalls the more administrative aspect of Yu's ritual procession, which is also presented as an integral part of his overall efforts to generate an order out of the chaos of the deluge. This managerial element is revealed by Yu's application of metrical categories for classification and measurement, according to which different

¹⁹⁶ Legge (1899) pp. 74-75.

types of soils and various taxations are defined, permitting to define the specific tax loads for each region in the *Zhongguo* 中国 (“Middle Region” or “Central Country”), that is, China. It should also be mentioned that it is very clear from this paragraph that the early Chinese understood economics mostly as an agricultural affair since all regional revenues are defined according to the quality of their soils and therefore in reference to their agricultural potential. More importantly, the fact that the establishment of taxation is ascribed to Yu suggest that he, as a mythological figure, was identified with the state and/or the government itself, a theme obviously reinforced by the fact that Yu is also held responsible for the creation of the administrative division, in nine provinces, of the Chinese territory. I shall come back to this subject later in this chapter.

Summarily, these concluding paragraphs reveal that the main concern of the *Tributes* is to explain how the ordering of the world was achieved by Yu; it also refers to the three major characteristics of this cosmological achievement, that is, the foundation of civilized existence through the physical control of nature, the generation of accessibility to the center from the periphery (and vice versa); and, lastly, an agronomical examination of the territory along with the establishment of fiscal parameters in accordance to it. There are, therefore, three main semantic layers in this ordering process: 1) the engineering feat of ending the deluge, interconnecting the country and defining tributary criterions; 2) the cultural achievement of creating the necessary material conditions for the development of civilization, that is, for an agriculture-based way of life; 3) and, lastly, the mathematical-geometrical and administrative accomplishment of subdividing and spatially organizing the Chinese territory. I believe that, in the Chinese mind, all these aspects were inseparable and

they all constituted essential, interdependent parts of the process in which Yu created the world as a *cosmos*.

The *Tributes*, however, does not end in this conclusion, the last section of the text introduces another numerical scheme, different from the Nine Provinces, known as the Five Zones of Submission. Each of these zones is described in an independent paragraph -recalling the model of geographical-grammatical concordance, which I have already denoted in relation to the the description mountain and rivers of the Nine Provinces. The zones are characterized in terms of their distance from the center, and specific distances, measured in *li*, are provided; the zones cover five hundred *li* each, organized in a concentric manner. Therefore, the theme of centrality, already observable in the Nine Provinces, is particularly strong in this scheme. The text appears to suggest that the center is the capital and its surroundings. The importance of the different zones is directly proportional to their closeness to this center, the farther from the center they are, the less importance they have. The first, most central zone is known as the "Domain of the Sovereign", this is where the king and his court live. The second zone is labeled the "Domain of the Nobles", inhabited by the king's high ministers and great officers. The third zone is named the "Peace-securing Domain", and hosts those dedicated to learning moral duties and the practice of war and defense. The fourth and fifth zones, in turn, are occupied by criminals and barbaric tribes, respectively. The level of civilization, therefore, is clearly inferior in those areas farther from the center than in those closer to it, and *viceversa*. In this scheme, thus, centrality is equaled to high culture, civilization and moral perfection, while peripherality is related to barbarism, criminality and moral decadence. In this way, the Five Zones of Submission introduce a moral element to

spatial order which reinforces the ontological superiority of the land under the direct or indirect authority of the king, transforming the sacred reality of the Chinese realm in a morally-grounded fact.

The Yugong, including both nine provinces and five zones, poses the problem of spatial congruence. In fact, the manner in which the Five Zones scheme was supposed to interact with the the Nine Provinces, the main cosmographic system of the text, remains uncertain. John Major, however, has suggested that these systems do not necessarily contradict but rather complement each other, inasmuch as the Nine Provinces scheme, which was feasibly understood as a 3x3 magic square or rectangle, was able to contain a concentric quinary scheme.¹⁹⁷ Consequently, these two organizing schemas, although being cosmographically different, fulfilled the same exact function: to organize space by imposing divisions, distinguishing centrality from peripherality. On the one hand, in the Nine Provinces, the world is divided in nine regions whose center is the implicit receiver of the tributes and the assumed point of reference for the location of each province. On the other hand, in the Five Zones the world is organized in decreasing degrees of civilization and increasing degrees of criminality and barbarism, according to their distance from the center. In both cases, the center is never explicitly defined but we are invited to conclude that it refers to the Chinese capital and neighboring areas, where the king, his court and the core of his bureaucratic apparatus resides; a suggestion which is particularly clear in the Five Zones.

¹⁹⁷ This is suggested by the fact that when each of the squares in a nonary square are divided into nine squares, producing a total of 81 squares ($9 \times 9 = 81$), five concentric squares are defined. In this manner, the Nine Provinces perfectly contained the Five Zones of Submission, forming a single interrelated spatio-geometrical structure. See Major (1984) p. 144.

Whereas the center is always a specific geographical point from where the world is organized, it acquires different characteristics in each scheme; and while in the Nine Provinces the world acquires an order in relation to the economic needs of a center, in the Five Zones the organization of the world is achieved in reference not to an economic but to a cultural nucleus. In other words, the two of these systems incorporate the existence of a geographical/administrative center, although in the former this is characterized in economic terms in the latter this is done in cultural terms; however the understanding that for the existence of a *cosmos* the creation of a center is necessary is common to both schemas, this notion being probably the most prevalent and important one in the *Tributes*. It is hence very clear from this text that the Chinese understood the creation of an ordered world as inevitably requiring the presence of a center, and that the *cosmos* could not be created but in relation to this central place. Although mountains only appear in the first of these schemes, I believe they were understood as integral parts of these different efforts to organize the world.

As I have mentioned when referring to the description of the Nine Provinces in the first section of the *Yugong*, mountains (and rivers) play an important role in the organization of the world, serving as borders between provinces. In fact, the world of the *Tributes*, is composed of three major elements: mountains, rivers and seas. The seas, which are four, form the outer limits of the world and surround all nine provinces, this is where many of the rivers flow into. The inner limits of the world, in turn, are delimited by rivers and mountains, which serve to subdivide the Chinese territory. Almost all rivers are born in mountains, if they do not flow into seas, then

they do in the Yellow River.¹⁹⁸ Rivers, therefore, serve as connectors between mountains and seas, as well as connectors between mountains and cities, and most notably, between center and periphery. While the main role of rivers in this scheme is to allow communication between different sectors of the world that of mountains and seas is to serve as fixed points of reference. In this manner, these three elements, and specially mountains and rivers, serve as *cosmic* agents, that is, as elements capable of generating an ordered space and therefore creating a *cosmos*. The cosmic agency these elements exert is essentially spatial, delimiting boundaries and defining administrative subdivisions, in such manner participating in the organization of the world.

However, these ordering efforts are not only spatial but also numerical. As it is clear from the different passages I have reviewed so far, the early Chinese gave great importance to numbers and, more specifically, to numerological schemes. In fact, they seem to have believed that in order to the world to be ordered it had to be numerically partitioned in several independent units that at the same had to conform a great unity of interactive parts. This understanding certainly reveals a strong mathematical preoccupation with regard to the ordering of space, it also speaks of the existence of a equivalence between numerology and cosmology or, more precisely, between numerological schemes and cosmographic/geographic representations in the Ancient Chinese mind. In other words, the Early Chinese seem to have thought that numbers, and systems or groups of numbers, represented not only abstract entities but also, and most importantly, organizing schemes and spatial

¹⁹⁸ This picture of the world as surrounded by seas is repeated in the *Shanhaijing*, although this text -in its chapters sixth to ninth- also describes the regions located beyond the seas (*haiwai* 海外). See Birrell (1999).

structures¹⁹⁹; for numbers, as Granet has brilliantly explained, were emblems, symbols which represented graphical, cardinal and distributive structures²⁰⁰; not existing, therefore, clear distinctions but rather correlations between the theoretical and the practical uses of numbers.²⁰¹ For this reason in Early China, mathematics and numerology were disciplines strongly tied to cosmology and cosmography and

¹⁹⁹ It is very clear that in Ancient China numbers had not only a computational but also a spatial function, the Nine and Twelve Provinces being specific variations of a pervading characteristic of early Chinese religio-cosmological thought. According to Graham (1989) and Hall & Ames (1995) numbers were understood as “images” or “models” of particular phenomena. The *Wuxing* (“Five Elements/Agents”) system is probably one of the most notorious examples of how numbers were used by the early Chinese to organize the entire world in systems of “correlative cosmology”. This practice, however, is already observable in the *Sifang* scheme, where the number four served to organize space (*sifang*, *situ*) and spiritual forces (*siwu*). See Henderson (1984) ch. 1 & 2, *passim*. Graham (1989) pp. 313-370. Hall & Ames (1995) pp. 211-281. Wang (2000) ch. 2 & 3, *passim*. Bray, Dorofeeva-Lichtmann & Métalié (2007), specially Introduction, pp. 1-78.

²⁰⁰ This ordering function of numbers and their relation to cosmographs is intimately associated with the production and usage of *tu* 圖 during the Warring States. The *tu* were understood simultaneously as maps, diagrams or cosmographs and as images or pictures. According to Bray (2007), the *tu* were “templates for action” (p. 2), insofar as the knowledge they contained “was unfolded into realisation and into action” (p.3), functioning as “plans for interpreting and mobilizing cosmic forces” (p. 4). The affiliation of Yu with this cosmological specialty is clearly signaled by the legend of the Nine Tripods, which claims Yu carved “images” (圖) on bronzes in order to identify and tame regional spirits. Furthermore, to the extent that the Nine Provinces scheme was conceived to constitute an exact description of the *cosmos*, also pertains to the *tu* category. In fact, the early Chinese do not appear to have distinguished between a cosmograph and a map, insofar as they used the same word (*tu*) to refer to both of them. The *tu* as a cosmograph-map was at the basis of the *dili* 地理 (“geography”) and *dixi* 地形 (“topography”) genres, which flourished during the late Warring States and early imperial periods and that were heavily influenced by the nonary cosmography of the Yugong, continuing to render Yu as the creator and constructor of the Chinese realm. Finally, the creation of the *tu* was closely associated with the development of the *shushu* 術數 (“occult arts” or “art of numbers”), that is, numerology. This reinforces Granet suggestions regarding the spatial and ordering functions of numbers during early China. See Smith (1996) pp. 1-41., Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003) pp. 38-43 & Bray (2007) pp. 1-22, *passim*.

²⁰¹ Granet (2013) pp. 122-227, specially pp. 122-135.

not merely preoccupied with purely logical theorizations.²⁰²It was rather the case that, for the Ancient Chinese, to number was, certainly, to count but also, and most notably, to distribute and to subdivide, to spatially intervene and geometrically modify a certain space in order to grant it structure. Consequently, it was believed that numerals did not simply represent an order but that they themselves constituted it; the very structure of the *cosmos* was understood to be numerical and mathematical in nature and numbers had the ability to evoke the arrangement of the universe, the different elements which composed it and the interactions between them. Order, therefore, was achieved as consequence of the application of these regularities to the territory, which, if we recall what I have said about the *Yugong*, is precisely what Yu did with the Chinese realm.

The entire *Yugong*, indeed, could be understood as a mathematical treatise written in a geographical and mythical format. If we see it carefully, we will see that the twelve provinces of Shun, the nine regions of Yu, the Five Zones of Submission, the listing of mountains and rivers, as well as the understanding of mountains, rivers and seas as boundaries in the *Tributes*, they all result from the application of numerical and geometrical schemas to the physical landscape, and the very manner in which these different achievements are described, as resulting from the constant , reflect this. This is particularly clear in the fact that the total number of mountains in the text (27) is three times the number of provinces (9) in which China is divided ($9 \times 3 = 27$). In this way, the number of mountains and provinces defined by Yu, reveal a preoccupation which is not so much geographical as it is numerical in nature. This might lead us to read the *Yugong* as topographically inaccurate or deficient. However, it should be

²⁰² Cullen (1996) pp. 35-39. Cullen (2010) 328-338.

stressed that the early Chinese did not distinguish geography from cosmography, using the same character (*tu* 圖) to refer to both cosmographs and maps.²⁰³ Furthermore, the production and usage of *tu* was closely associated with development of the *shushu* 術數, a term which can be rendered as “occult arts” or “art of numbers”, that is, numerology.²⁰⁴ This serves to reinforce the view that in ancient China to describe was to order, and to order was to number. In this way, the mathematical aspects of the Yugong were intrinsically associated with its geographical purposes, and the actions of Yu were conceived as being simultaneously numerological and cosmographical in nature.

Although in the *Shangshu* both Shun and Yu are ascribed with the creation of territorial divisions, it is Yu who seems to be particularly involved in this ordering endeavor, being repeatedly described as dredging, cutting, channelizing, etc, in sum, as physically altering, materially modifying the landscape according to certain patterns, a feat which only he, as a mythical hero, semi-god and governor is able to accomplish. The physical remodeling of the world however is nothing but the most tangible expression of Yu's ability to establish limits, as this is the ultimate characteristic of this mythical hero's endeavor, that is, the establishment of boundaries, which were not only geographical but also moral and biological, inasmuch as the early Chinese experienced major anxiety regarding the potential disappearance of these limits²⁰⁵, the reality of which was theatrically depicted in the watery chaos of the flood, that Yu finally ended by imposing divisions and

²⁰³ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003) p. 42, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 605. n. 33.

²⁰⁴ Bray (2007) p. 4.

²⁰⁵ Yates (1994) p. 62. Lewis (2006)b ch. 1, *passim*.

establishing boundaries, shaping the very structure of the world by delineating the borders of provinces, the altitude of mountains, the length of rivers, the number of seas, and the routes of communication between the center and its peripheries.

So far I have mentioned how the construction of this *cosmos* resulted from the application of mathematical regularities, now I shall refer to the subject of the interaction of its different parts. As I have stated when referring to the first section of the *Tributes*, the ritual march of Yu across the landscape not only created the Nine Provinces (and with that the limits and the structure of the world) but also defined the existence of two quite different zones: the center and the peripheries. In the text, the relation between these parts is essentially hierarchical as is suggested by how tributes flowed from the provinces to the capital through rivers. Observing this I have concluded that the role of rivers was that of permitting communication between the different constitutive parts of the *cosmos* (center and peripheries, mountains, rivers and seas). I would like to add that this type of interaction was also strictly hierarchical and that the early Chinese appear to have believed that an ordered world was one defined by unequal relations between the constitutive elements of the *cosmos*, and more specifically, between a cultural/geographical nucleus and its perimeter. This sense of hierarchy is very clear in the description of the Nine Provinces, where the different regions of China are described and classified strictly in terms of their economic utility for the center. Similarly, in the Five Zones of Submission model, each zone is described in relation to its geographical proximity to the center, which is equated to its level of cultural and ethical sophistication. Therefore, in these schemas it is always the center which grants structure to the world by serving as a fixed point of reference, while the remaining elements are organized around it. In this manner,

the Early Chinese appear to have thought that an ordered space had to be, necessarily, a hierarchical space, with a well defined central zone and its subsidiary peripheral areas. Furthermore, these hierarchies applied both for the relationships between China and its neighbors as well as for those between the capital and the provinces. In this way, at the same time that the Chinese empire itself was understood to be central in contraposition to the peripherality of surrounding polities and cultures, the Chinese imperial capital was conceived as occupying the very center of the Chinese empire itself, this central position being defined in relation to its subordinate surrounding regions.²⁰⁶

The importance of the center for the organization of the world is particularly clear in the *Yugong*, where the entire description of the provinces in fact focuses in their "articles of tribute" and the quality of their soil, for which a sophisticated system of classification is applied. Furthermore, it is constantly implied that tributes and agricultural products from these regions flow through rivers in direction to the center; and one of the major achievements of Yu, as said before, is to assure that this flowing is constant and safe. In this manner, his responsibility in making these regions apt for agricultural production could be interpreted not only as a way to found the basis of civilization but also to assure the economic and political preeminence of the center over these peripheries, even more considering that the center itself could not exist if it was not for the existence of relations of dependency of these regions from the center. It is the establishment of this primacy what brings order to the world.

²⁰⁶ Actually, the Chinese imperial capital itself consisted of a series of grids in the style of the *Yugong* nonary scheme, functioning as a miniature replica of the cosmos. See Steinhardt (1990) 29-71, *passim*. Lewis (2006)a pp. 169-186 and Pankenier (2011).

In other words, Yu orders the world by successfully instituting a system of hierarchical relations into the world, the *cosmos* hence is forged as soon as hierarchy is introduced and the concept of order itself is equated with that of hierarchy.

In this way, the work of Yu developed in two parallel and simultaneous levels. One level was that of the fixing of boundaries and shapes, where the mountains, rivers and oceans that Yu encountered in his march served as lines that divided the space in equal parts and defined the structure of the world; for the accomplishment of this these geographical formations were of crucial importance because they made possible the spatial application of mathematical-geometrical regularities to the landscape. Another level was that of the determination of the relations between the different constitutive elements of the *cosmos*, where regions were defined in terms of either their economic or their cultural subordination (depending on the model used) to an implicit center, forming a hierarchical structure of political dependency of the peripheries from an economic-cultural nucleus; and where . The primacy of this nucleus was the essential ordering standard of the cosmos and defined the character of the relationship between its different constitutive elements. It could be argued, however, that this hierarchical arrangement is actually of second order and that it exists another one located in an even more profound and subtle level in the very elements constitutive of these regions, that is, mountains, rivers and seas. Out of these elements, it is the mountain that occupies a position of preeminence, performing a role similar to the dominant function that the center has among the regions. Whereas seas simply served to defined the outer contours of the world, mountains and rivers shaped the inner core of the geographical landscape, but since

mountains were the sources of rivers this granted them special importance, even more considering that the role of rivers was less structural than communicative.

The preponderance of mountains over rivers is quite clear in the textual structure of the second section of the *Tributes*, where the listing of mountains precedes that of rivers; in that same section is constantly emphasized how mountains are the sources of all known rivers, something that I interpret as mountains being the starting points for the spatial ordering of the world, the ultimate physical markers for the generation of the *cosmos* out of the application of pre-established mathematical structures. Mountains being the starting points, rivers then stretch spatial lines from them to the seas, that is, from the core to the periphery. In linear logic, if mountains are the start, rivers are the trajectory and seas the end of the different topographical lines which Yu traces in his journey, defining the structure and the shape of the world. It is quite probable that this structural quality of mountains might have been a consequence of their exceptional geographical stability, their absolute "physical fixation" to the space. Possessing these characteristics at simple sight, it is easily understandable why the Early Chinese used them as starting points for the organization of the space. In this manner, spatial immobility could explain why, for the purposes of Yu's cosmological endeavor, mountains were of utmost importance, providing the foundations for the construction of an ordered, hierarchically "well balanced" space.

I would therefore recognize the existence of two categories of elements in the *Yugong*. The first category would be that composed by mountains, rivers and seas, which are the most basic forms of organizing space, equivalent to numerals in mathematical terms and to points in geometrical terms. The second category would

be that composed by regions, which are formed out of the conjunction or the sum of the previous elements just as geometrical forms are shaped as aggregates of several points in the space. These different composites perpetually interact in a hierarchical fashion, while the center organizes the regions around it, the mountain serves as the ultimate geographical positioner and constitutes the most important structural element of the cosmos, in relation to which the others are defined. In this way, the two levels in which the work of Yu developed, the fixing of limits and the establishment of relationships, was applied differently to the two categories of elements. In the first category, that of the structural elements, at the first level, these were delineated; and at the second, relations between them were defined, with the predominance of the mountain characterizing the nature of these interactions. In the second category, that of the provinces, at the first level these were created as composites of structural elements while at the second interactions between them were established and with that the supremacy of the central region over the peripheries. For each category Yu's endeavor was characterized by an effort to delimitate and hierarchize elements, and the ordering of the world resulted from the systematic spatial of these two operations.

In the process of spatial delimitation and hierarchization, at both levels and for the two categories, the mountain was of paramount importance, serving as the most basic element in the structure of the cosmos, the supreme point of reference for the formation of an ordered space. According to the *Shangshu* sections I have reviewed so far is very clear that without the mountain, as a physical/geographical marker and spatial delineator, the application of mathematical regularities to the landscape and hence the geometrical creation of the *cosmos* would not have been possible; it is true

that rivers and seas also played an important part in that same process, however the very ordering of those elements themselves was only possible because mountains served as starting points in the spatial structuring of the world. Furthermore, the creation of the regions, as structural elements of second order, and hence the very formation of the territorial-cultural center from which these were defined, depended on the mountain. In this manner, without mountains limits and structures could have not developed and a geometrically ordered space could not have been formed; insofar as mountains provided fixed point of reference, it was actually possible to establish delimitations and to create the structural elements of the universe as well as the hierarchical relations between them necessary for the formation of an ordered space, that is, a *cosmos*. The mountain, in such a way, was the paramount cosmic agent, the point from which the entire world acquired order and meaning. Nevertheless, as I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, the cosmic function of the mountain was not only spatial but also temporal, as soon as the ordering of the space was effected in the process of a ritual movement across the landscape, a chronological ordering was forged along with the spatial one.

Mountains, indeed, were used to organize not only space but also time; as matter of fact, the spatial functionality of the mountain was intrinsically related to a temporal functionality. If the mountain was able to serve as a point of reference, and hence as a cosmic agent, it did only in the context of a temporal frame. In other words, besides from the existence of mountains, the ordering of the world -and with that the generation of a *cosmos*- required the existence of a temporal frame, without such frame it would have been impossible for Yu to move from one point of the space to the other and in such manner to define the limits and the structure of the world.

Considering that in the *Tributes* the spatial organization of the world is achieved in the process in which Yu moves across the landscape, it is hardly possible to differentiate between spatial and temporal arrangements because of the simple reason that it is time that allows subjects to move from one point to the other. Without temporality, a *cosmos* could have never been formed.

In this manner, in the *Yugong* scheme, not only the spatial but also the temporal organization of the world ultimately depended on mountains, which Yu used to orient himself in the landscape. Inasmuch as mountains were quintessential for tailoring ordered spaces, they also functioned as the most basic instruments for the measurement of time. To explain, I suspect that it was the duration of the displacements between mountains which operated as an important chronological device for the early Chinese. It is in this sense in which I suggest Yu's ritual march across the territory served as a mechanism for the organization of both space and time. The chronological function of mountains is particularly clear in Shun's tour of inspection, which was apparently based on Yu's ritual procession and where different cardinal directions correlated to specific seasons, that is, temporal phases. This correlation between cardinal directions and seasons suggests that for the Ancient Chinese time and space were identical, or at least intimately connected, categories. The idea of movement as possessing an organizational capacity could be interpreted as an expression of this correlation, as soon as movement itself implies spatiality and temporality. Consequently, since in Yu's work order was achieved by means movement, it is logical that spatial and temporal organizations were generated simultaneously.

In view of this, it is perfectly understandable why the *Yugong* so heavily emphasizes that the construction of the *cosmos* was effected as a result of a process, a movement, and a course. Actually, all of Yu's achievements are rooted in this mobile quality. Inasmuch as the delimitation of the Nine Regions is effected by traversing rivers, mountains and seas, and the integration between the central and peripheral zones of the Chinese realm resulted from channeling rivers, the overall organization of the world derived from Yu's continuous spatial displacements, which were oriented to ensuring fluxes of waters and tributes. The emphasis given to the elimination of excesses, which was equaled to the removal of all sort of obstacles that hampered the natural movement of waters, clearly echoes the importance ascribe to mobility. Furthermore, the centrality of movement is reflected not only in the fact that Yu accomplished the ordering of the world by moving across mountains and rivers, but also, and most suggestively, in the words used to describe this movement. To explain, all the terms used in the *Yugong* to describe the actions Yu effected on rivers and mountains signal movement, suggesting that the organization of the world was accomplished by moving across the landscape. The words in the text which convey this are the following (with the times they occur in parenthesis):

sui 隨: to follow, to trace, to comply with (2)

*dao*⁴ 道: to direct, to conduct, to guide, to lead, to channel (4)

*dao*³ 導: to travel along, to trace (to conduct, to guide, to lead, to direct) (12)²⁰⁷

song 從: to follow, to yield to, to comply with (2)

²⁰⁷ Legge (1989) also translates *dao* 導 as “to survey and describe”. This translation, however, is debatable and does not necessarily conveys the original meaning of the term. See below.

ru 入(于): to enter (at/to) (15)

da 達(于): to arrive (at/to) (5)

fu 浮(于): to float (at/to) (8)

yu 逾(于) to pass over, to cross (at/to) (3)

zhi 至(于): to reach, to go, to proceed on, to come (at/to) (28)

Most of these characters –such as *song* 從, *ru* 入, *fu* 浮, *dao4* 道, *da* 達, *yu* 逾, *zhi* 至– are used to illustrate the route Yu followed while defining the Nine Regions and they mostly occur in relation to the crossing, entering and reaching of a river. It is remarkable that many of these characters –as in *sui* 隨, *dao4* 道, *dao3* 導, *da* 達 & *yu* 逾– render the radical for walking (*chuo* 辵), hence suggesting that most of the actions effected by Yu took place as part of a process of spatial displacement.

The first of the terms introduced, *sui* 隨, occurs solely in relation to mountains in the expression *sui shan* 隨山. As I have explained above, this expression is of great importance since it serves to introduce the activities of Yu. Moreover, the character *sui* 隨 means not only “to follow” or “to trace” but also “to comply with”. Therefore, *sui shan* 隨山 can also be translated as “complying with the mountains”. This can be read as indicating that Yu produced order in the measure in which he accepted the route mountains offered as his ultimate guide for orientation in the landscape. The value of acquiescing to the landscape was also conveyed by using *song* 從, which originally means something quite similar to *sui* (to follow, to comply with) but which

was used to communicate the act of conducting or leading a river in a certain direction, as in

heng, wei ji cong 恆, 衛既從

“the Heng and Wei were made to follow their courses” (Karlgren)²⁰⁸
“The (waters of the) Heng and Wei were brought to their proper channels” (Legge)²⁰⁹

wei qi ji cong 漆沮既從

“The Qi and the Zhu were next led” (Legge)²¹⁰
“The Ts’i and Tsü (rivers) were made to follow their courses” (Karlgren)²¹¹

That a character meaning “to follow” was used to signify the channeling of rivers is seemingly contradictory. However, this concurs with the traditional characterization of Yu’s success in the performing of his activities as resulting from his exceptional ability to adapt to the intrinsic tendencies of rivers and mountains, a point that I shall return to. Furthermore, the textual emphasis assigned to motion was also involved in the usage of *dao3* 導, which was employed to signify Yu’s displacement across the landscape. In the middle section of the text, after the description of the Nine Provinces and before that of the Nine Zones of Submission, the character is used profusely to characterize Yu’s actions, being placed at the beginning of each description of his trajectory about a river or mountain:

dao bo zhong 導嶓冢

²⁰⁸ Karlgren (1950). p. 17.

²⁰⁹ Legge (1899) p. 65.

²¹⁰ Legge (1899) p. 71.

²¹¹ Karlgren (1950). p. 15.

“He surveyed and described Bo-zhong” (Legge)²¹²

“He travelled along the Po-chung (mountain)” (Karlgren)²¹³

dao hei shui 導黑水

“He traced the Black-water” (Legge)²¹⁴

“He travelled along the Hei-shiei (river)” (Karlgren)²¹⁵

Although *dao* 導 undoubtedly refers to some sort of spatial displacement, the exact manner in which is used in the *Yugong* is open to interpretation. Legge has translated it as “to trace” or as “to survey and describe”, while Karlgren has rendered it as “to travel along” and, more recently, Dorofeeva-Litchman has explain it as “to delineate”.²¹⁶ The original meaning of *dao*³, however, is “to lead”, “to guide” and “to conduct” and I believe is pertinent to preserve this signification. Most scholars have been reluctant to interpreted it in this way certainly not because they have ignored its most primitive connotation but since it seems to be too literal of a translation to say Yu “conducted (*dao*³) *Bo Zhong* (mountain)” or Yu “guided (*dao*³) Hei sui (river)”, as this would imply to assure that Yu himself gave direction to these landmarks. Karlgren and Legge have deliberately avoided such interpretations. On the one hand, Legge has opted for two different translations, when the text deals with mountains he

²¹² Legge (1899) p. 73.

²¹³ Karlgren (1950). p. 17.

²¹⁴ Legge (1899) p. 73.

²¹⁵ Karlgren (1950). p. 17.

²¹⁶ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2005/2006) p. 75. n. 30, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) p. 256, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 203. Dorofeeva also translates *dao* 導 as “to pave” in Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003) pp. 53, 79 & Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2010) p. 17., where she cognates “paving” to “delineating” [compare Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003) p. 79 with Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) p. 229. n. 31]. I judge both translations to concur with the actual meaning of the character in the *Yugong*. “To pave” is indeed a particularly pertinent rendition and my own understanding is quite akin to it.

speaks of “surveying and describing” and when it refers to rivers he tells of “tracing”. On the other hand, Karlgren has preferred a rather neutral rendition, opting for the voice “to travel”, which is faithful to the actual peripatetic character of the passages but which abstain from connoting the imposition of a direction. The same applies for Legge’s “tracing”. His rendering of *dao3* as “surveying and describing” is, however, rather unfortunate and slightly confusing, awkwardly conveying a sense of motion. More precise is Dorofeeva-Litchmann’s “to delineate”, a translation that although less emphatic than “to conduct”, comes closer than any of the abovemention to the original meaning of *dao3*. Regardless of its disparate renditions, that this term was employed to refer to the act of guiding and directing, is specially clear in the following passage:

dao he/ge ze 導荷澤

“The (waters of that of) Ge were led to (the marsh of)” (Legge)²¹⁷

“He conducted (the waters of) the Ko marsh” (Karlgren)²¹⁸

Roger Ames, Henry Rosemont, Sarah Allan and Mark Edward Lewis concur in translating *dao3* 導 precisely as it is used in this description, arguing that in texts such as the *Yugong*, the *Lunyu* 論語 (“The Analects”) and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (“Mencius”) it was used interchangeably with *dao4* 道, a character which is usually translated as “the way” but which has multiple meanings revolving around a rich path

²¹⁷ Legge (1899) p. 70.

²¹⁸ Karlgren (1950). p. 15.

imagery that includes the capacity “to lead” and “to direct” in the sense of walking with a defined direction.²¹⁹In the *Yugong*, *dao* 道 is used in this manner several times:

jiu he ji dao 九河既道

The nine branches of the He were made to keep their proper channels (Legge)²²⁰

The Nine Ho (branches) were conducted (Karlgren)²²¹

wei zi qi dao 濰淄其道

“The Wei and Zi were made to keep their (old) channels” (Legge)²²²

“The Wei and Tsi (rivers) were conducted” (Karlgren)²²³

chi qian ji dao 沱潛既道

“The Tuo and Qian streams “were conducted by their proper channels” (Legge)²²⁴

“The T’o and Ts’ien (streams) were conducted” (Karlgren)²²⁵

As it can be inferred from these passages, both *dao*³ 導 and *dao*⁴ 道 were employed to signify the act of leading or conducting the waters, that is, channeling the rivers. Actually, the character 導 results from simply adding the signifier for hand (*cun* 寸) to 道, which serves to accentuate the mobile connotation of the character. Similarly, the character *sui* 隨 results from combining 冫 with 道, although an alternate form of the character simply omits 冫 while preserving 道, which is also read as *sui* and that

²¹⁹ For the interrelations between *dao*³ 導 and *dao*⁴ 道 see Allan (1997) pp. 68-73, Ames & Rosemont (1998) pp. 45-46 and Lewis (2006)b pp. 33-43.

²²⁰ Legge (1899) p. 65.

²²¹ Karlgren (1950). p. 14.

²²² Legge (1899) p. 66.

²²³ Karlgren (1950). p. 14.

²²⁴ Legge (1899) pp. 68-69.

²²⁵ Karlgren (1950). p. 15.

greatly resembles 道. Therefore, although these characters are written and pronounced differently, they are all rooted in *dao4* 道, connoting some kind of motion, whether this is caused by an external agent (as in *sui* 隨)²²⁶ or an internal impetus (as in *dao3* 導 and *dao4* 道). Furthermore, the peripatetic connotation of 道 and its variants is revealed by its own graphic components, which consist of the radical for walking, 辵 or 辵 (*chuo*), and the character for “head”, “chief”, “leader” or “king” 首 (*shou*), suggesting “walking with a purpose or a direction”. The character *chuo* 辵 connotes moving across a road or tracing a path while moving, inasmuch as it comprises the characters for road 行 (*xing*) and foot 止 (*zhi*). Noticing this, Ames & Rosemont have concluded that in the Confucian texts “... *dao* seems to denote the active project of “road building”, and by extension, to connote a road that has been made, and hence can be traveled”²²⁷. The usage of both *dao3* 導 and *dao4* 道 in the *Yugong* concur with this definition, serving to characterize Yu as “building rivers”. in the sense of re-establishing their proper courses in his efforts to end with the flood. Furthermore, several characters in the text used to characterize Yu’s deeds suggest that achieving this implied the active modification of the landscape. The character *jun* 濬 (to dredge a waterway, to dig or wash a well, etc.), for example, occurs in opening lines of the *Yugong* to introduce the efforts of Yu. The characters *yi* 乂 (“to regulate”) and *yi* 藝 (“to plant, to cultivate”) also occur in relation to rivers and lands, respectively. These characters signal that Yu not only moved across but also

²²⁶ In this case the external agent is the mountain since in the *Yugong* the character *sui* 隨 always appears conjointly with *shan* 山.

²²⁷ Ames & Rosemont (1998) p. 45.

modified the landscape, defining its fluxes and imposing certain structure to it. However, this structure derived from the natural tendencies of the landscape itself and not from simply applying an abstract framework to the landscape, this is signaled by the fact Yu floated (*fu* 浮) and followed (*sui* 隨, *song* 從).

In this way, the text constantly suggest that Yu had the capacity to efficiently adapt to the features of the environment and that his movement was achieved by acquiescing to nature. Consequently, the mythical hero's ability to reshape the environment was rooted in his willingness to comply with it. As suggested above, this paradox is particularly well reflected in the usage of the character *song* 從 which although meaning "to follow" it was employed to signify "to conduct" or "to lead". In fact, *song* 從 appears to refer to the act of "causing something to follow" and therefore of imposing a direction on something. But here again, following and leading are not conceived as opposite but as complementary terms: Following leads to directing, directing implies following. This rationale is repeated in the character *sui* 隨 which conveys "following" but which comprises the (dao)道-looking alternate of *sui* 遒, suggesting "to direct". This coincides with the fact that despite Yu is initially introduced as following mountains (*sui shan* 隨山), in the rest of the text he is portrayed as directing or leading them (*dao shan* 導山). While this might seem to be a contradiction, it is not. Concurring with the philosophy behind the text, what this insinuates is that Yu was able to impose a direction, and an order, to the landscape in the measure in which he followed mountains and rivers. It was because he followed the path mountains revealed that he was able to impose a direction on them. However, this direction was not Yu's creation, not an artifice from his will but a

product of its capacity to comply with the immanent structure of things. According to the Chinese mythological corpus, and as suggested by the *Yugong* itself, this structure was corrupted by the flood, which was in turn a consequence of the cosmical criminality of Gong Gong, who toppled Buzhou Mountain (*buzhoushan* 不周山) and caused the waters to become uncontrollable and damaging.²²⁸ Dealing with a corrupted world, the work of Yu consisted not of creating but of re-creating a *cosmos*. This is not to say he did not create anything, he certainly did, his entire work consisted in constructing and fashioning an order. Nevertheless, ultimately this order derived not from his imagination but from the environment itself, specifically from mountains and rivers. Actually, the original reason why it became necessary for Yu to carry out his work is because such order, which is immanent to nature, was disrupted. It had not been altered by Gong Gong, the intervention of Yu would have been unnecessary. Therefore, the merit of Yu resided not in his ability to create but in his ability to reestablish the *cosmos*. This might explain why the text had no concerns in assuring that Yu both followed and guided mountains chains. Yu's faculty to order space by acquiescing to the innate dispositions of the environment is explained in watery terms in the *Mengzi*:

Baigui said: In regulating the waters (*zhi shui* 治水), I surpass Yu (*yu yu yu* 愈於禹)

Mengzi said: You are straying from the path [wrong] (*guo* 過) sir! . (When) Yu regulated [controlled] the waters (*zhi shui* 治水), it regulated them conforming to their (natural) course [path] (*dao* 道).

²²⁸ Major (2010) p. 115. n. 4.

Hence he used the four seas (to serve) as drainage ditches (*wei he* 為壑)²²⁹

Mengzi then continues with a definition of the flood:

(When) waters are traveled against (its natural flow) (*shui ni* 水逆), then they are called “inundating waters” (*jiang shui* 洚水). “inundating waters” are “flooding waters” (*hong shui* 洪水), this is what a benevolent person (*ren ren* 仁人) detests (*wu* 惡). No, sir, you are straying from the path [wrong] (*guo* 過)!²³⁰

Mengzi’s description of the flood and its suppression by Yu echoes in several points the the description provided in the *Yugong*. In the first place, Mencius explains the controlling of the flood as deriving from Yu’s readiness to adjust to the *dao* 道 of water, that is, to its course, path or way. In this way, Yu is once more portrayed as channeling (controlling waters, 治水) by following the rivers or, which is the same, by adapting to their course (*dao*). In the second place, and concordantly with this rationale, the flood is characterized as resulting from moving against the waters (*shui* 水), as signaled by the character *ni* 逆, which means “to oppose”. Inasmuch as the waters have already been described as possessing a course in themselves, we might translate the expression *shui ni* 水逆 as “traveling/moving against the flow of the

²²⁹ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Slingerland (2003) and Lewis (2006)b as references. Original text is: 白圭曰：丹之治水也愈於禹。孟子曰：子過矣。禹之治水，水之道也。是故禹以四海為壑。 Available at <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gaozi-ii>. See Slingerland (2003) p. 152 & Lewis (2006)b p. 38.

²³⁰ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Slingerland (2003) and Lewis (2006)b as references. Original text is: 水逆行，謂之洚水。洚水者，洪水也，仁人之所惡也。吾子過矣。 Available at <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gaozi-ii>. See Slingerland (2003) p. 152 & Lewis (2006)b p. 38.

waters”. This is reinforced by the fact that *ni* 逆, which encompasses the characters for walking (*chuo* 𠂔) and going backwards (*ni* 𠂔), literally means “to walk or go against”, although is usually translated as “to oppose” or “to reverse”. In the third place, Mengzi dismisses Baigui by accusing him of “erring”, this is conveyed by the character *guo* 過. However, as Ames & Rosemont have suggested, *guo* ultimately refers to “going too far”, “going astray” or “straying from a path”. By accusing Baigui of “straying”, Mencius is characterizing him as “going against the flow” and hence of committing the same faults of those which caused the flood. In fact, immediately after this accusation he compares Baigui’s managing of the flood with that of Yu. By accusing him twice of this, both at the beginning and the end of the passage, Mengzi further emphasizes the overall importance which these verses give to “staying in the path”, “going with the flow” and working with, not against, nature, as this is introduced as the root of Yu’s success in taming the overflowing waters. Finally, the characters *dao* 道, *guo* 過 and *ni* 逆—which are central to Mencius’ recount of the achievements of Yu—, all feature the radical for walking (*chuo* 𠂔), hence concurring with the *Yugong* in describing the ordering of the world as depending on spatial displacement. Furthermore, just like in the *Yugong*, in the *Mengzi* movement is portrayed in terms of a path or a way that is outlined across the landscape. The importance of the path in early Chinese thought was such that it came to be incorporated in the very structure of language, hence the character for “erring” was conveyed by recalling the image of a person deviating from a path, that for “opposing” by evoking a man walking backwards and those for “channelling” and/or “leading” (*dao*₃ 導, *dao*₄ 道) by calling to mind the act of walking with conviction. That this rich path imagery applied

indistinctively to both rivers and mountains is suggested by the fact that the characters *dao3* 導 and *dao4* 道 are employed in reference to both of them.

Additionally, and as I have suggested above, the fact that Yu imposed an order by following rivers and mountains, and hence by complying with the landscape, indicates that it was believed the environment possessed certain organizing principles which were inherent to it. The path imagery which pervaded early Chinese imagination also inundated the conceptions on the functioning of the earth itself and Yu was conceived as having succeeded in his endeavors in the measure in which he recognized and reinstalled its immanent procedures. In view of this, it might be argued that Yu's work was geomantic in nature²³¹, as soon as it was preoccupied with the normal functioning of the vital fluxes of the earth. In fact, the *Yugong* was traditionally considered to pertain to the imperial genre of "terrestrial organization" or "structure/pattern of the earth" (*dili* 地理) as defined by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) in the *Dilizhi* 地理志 ("Treatise on Terrestrial Organization") chapter of the *Hanshu* 漢書 ("The Book of the [Former] Han Dynasty"). The *dili* corpus, which encompassed several cosmographical writings inspired in the nonary scheme of the Tributes, were seemingly related to the *fengshui* practices, as suggested by the fact the terms *dili* and *fengshui* were used interchangeably in early Chinese texts, with the latter being

²³¹ The ideas of the *fengsgui* 風水 (geomancy or siting) can be tracked back to the fourth century BC in the *Guoyu* (as I shall demonstrate), but are fully testable in early Han treatises such as *Taichan shu* 胎產書 and *Maishu* 脈書 ("Channel/Vein Book"). According to Liu (2009) in the *Han Shiming* 釋名 (Explanation of names) dictionary, the word "house" 宅 was defined as "to choose 擇: one selects an auspicious site and builds on it" (p. 929). See Lo (2007) pp. 389, 400.

a colloquialism for the former.²³² Although at first glance it might seem odd that a technique designed to determine appropriate locations for human dwelling was placed in the same category than a discipline concerned with territorial divisions, both traditions rested on the same assumptions: That in order for a territory to be inhabited it first had to be ordered following certain patterns. Furthermore, both in the *fengshui* 风水 and *dili* corpuses this order was deduced from the disposition of rivers and mountains. Particularly in the former, determining auspicious sites for human construction depended on establishing the actual flow of *qi* 氣 (pneuma, breath) of a given location. This flow was often determined by observing the arrangement of mountains and rivers. Mountains were understood anchoring (*zhen* 鎮) and fixing (*ding* 定) *qi* to the earth²³³, while rivers were conceived as permitting its circulation across the landscape. Moreover, Mencius equaled *qi* itself to water. Taking the works of Yu as a model, the *Mengzi* compares the relentless movement of water to the natural tendency of humanity towards good:

“The goodness of human nature is like the down hill movement of water (*ren xing zhi shan ye you shui zhi jiu bu ye* 人性之善也猶水之就下也)— there is no person who is not good, just as there is no water that does not flow downward.

Now, as for water, if you strike it with your hand and cause it to splash up, you can make it go above your forehead ; if you apply force and pump it , you can make it go uphill. Is this really the nature of water , though? No, it is merely the result of environmental

²³² Lee (1986) pp. 22-23.

²³³ Campany (1988) pp. 155-156 & Lagerwey (2010) p. 13.

influences [*shi zeran* 勢則然]. That a person can be made bad shows that his nature can also be altered like this.”²³⁴

Recognizing the watery character of human nature, Mencius invites his disciples to cultivate a “flood-like” or “flooding” *qi* (*hao ran zhi qi* 浩然之氣):

“Mengzi said: I understand doctrines, and I am good at nourishing my flood-like *qi*

May I ask what you mean by flood-like *qi*?

It is difficult to explain in words. As a form of *qi*, it is the most expansive and unyielding. If it is cultivated with uprightness and not harmed, it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is the form of *qi* that complements rightness and accompanies the Way (*yu dao* 與道)”²³⁵

Therefore, in the Mengzi, the flood-like *qi* is portrayed as the highest form of *qi*, insofar as it imitates the fluidity and adaptability of water, accompanying the way (*yu dao* 與道). This analogy between *qi* and water, however, is not exclusive to the Mengzi, being a widespread idea of late Zhou philosophico-religious thought, whose *locus classicus* is to be found in the *Guanzi*:

²³⁴ Slingerland (2003) p. 150. Original text is 人性之善也，猶水之就下也。人無有不善，水無有不下。今夫水，搏而躍之，可使過顛；激而行之，可使在山。是豈水之性哉？其勢則然也。人之可使為不善，其性亦猶是也。 Available at <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gaozi-i>.

²³⁵ Slingerland (2003) p. 154. Original text is 曰：我知言，我善養吾浩然之氣。敢問何謂浩然之氣？曰：難言也。其為氣也，至大至剛，以直養而無害，則塞于天地之間。其為氣也，配義與道。 Available at <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i>.

“Water is the blood and *qi* of the earth (*di zi xue qi* 地之血氣), like the stuff that penetrates and flows [*tong liu* 通流] through the muscles and vessels (*jin mai* 筋脈) of the body”²³⁶

Furthermore, the believe that *qi* flowed across the earth like veins (*mai* 脈)²³⁷ throughout the body applied not only to water but also to mountains. In geomantic treatises mountain ranges were referred to as “veins”, “veins of the earth” (*dimai* 地脈) or “dragon veins” (*long mai* 龍脈).²³⁸ The circulation of the *qi* in the landscape, therefore, was effected by both rivers and mountains. However, inasmuch as the latter were the sources of the former –as explained in the *Yugong* and repeated in the *Shanhajing*– this were particularly important in the energetic configuration of the

²³⁶ Slingerland (2003) p. 124. Also translated in Ricket (1998) pp. 100-101 as “water is the blood and breath of Earth, functioning in similar fashion to the circulation of blood and breath in the sinews and veins”. Original text is 水者，地之血氣，如筋脈之通流者也。故曰水具材也。 Available at <http://ctext.org/guanzi/shui-di>.

²³⁷ The character *mai* 脈 was amply used in early Chinese medical manuscripts and treatises and has also been rendered as “channel”, “blood vessel” or “pulse”. Lo (2007) advocates for “channel” arguing that it “...embraces muscular and topographical elements of the concept that are evident in the early texts and images”(p. 386) and which are ignored in other renditions. Although I concur with her argument, I rather preserved the term vein since it powerfully evokes the vital and vibrant manner in which the early Chinese conceived their environment. However, Lo’s translation of *mai* as channel is also highly suggestive of the fact n the *feng shui* mountains were understood as having the capacity to channel energies through the earth in the same manner that rivers carried water and veins transported blood. In this way, the expression (*di mai* 地脈) can be happily translated as “channels of the earth” and (*long mai* 龍脈) as “dragon channels”. Finally, that these channels were equaled to mountains is also suggested in the usage of *mai* 脈 to convey “mountain range”. See <http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E8%84%88>. For *mai* in medical literature see Lo (2007) pp. 386-395.

²³⁸ Bennett (1978) p. 13, Company (1988) p. 156, Lagerwey (1987) p. 11 & Lagerwey (2010) p. 15.

terrestrial plane. In fact, mountains were conceived as having the capacity “to fix” (*ding* 定) and “to anchor” (*zhen* 镇)²³⁹ land tracts and hence as providing stability to space. This spatial anchoring actually consisted of “subduing” or “pressing down” over an specific energetic point on the territory called *xue* 穴, “...a point where concentrated tellurgic energies come to the surface and where, therefore, human beings can tap into the flow of energies hidden deep within the earth”.²⁴⁰ Mountains, it was believed, were precisely located over these tellurgic points, permitting access to numinous powers in different specific sites and allowing the circulation of *qi* across the landscape in their routes over the territory. It is because of this energetic function of mountains that their paths, and those of the rivers which sprouted from them, were referred to the “veins of the earth”. Inasmuch as the works of Yu were also recounted in terms of the tracing of spatial paths, it is highly suggestive that geomantic writings refer to the structure of the earth as defined by energetic routes marked by mountains and rivers. Therefore, considering that the *Yugong* apparently incorporated several of the concepts also contained and further clarified in various other Warring States/early Han texts, it is plausible to conclude that –insofar as Yu was preoccupied with the re-establishment of water fluxes by the channeling of rivers and the definition of spatial contours through the traversing of mountain chains– he was ultimately concerned with the effective circulation of *qi* and his flood-quelling

²³⁹ Mountains were understood as fixing specific regions, sometimes being called “weighty fixers”. Similarly, tripods were conceived as possessing identical abilities; according to Campany (1988) certain bronzes bore names such as “tripod that fixes the land”. This reinforces the relationship between bronzes, territorially and sacrality which I have suggested in the previous chapter. In this case, however, the sacral character of tripods expressed not through their ritual power but by means of their cosmographical capacities. See Campany (1988) pp. 155-156 & Lagerwey (2010) p. 13.

²⁴⁰ Lagerwey (2010) p. 15.

efforts were oriented to assuring this was properly restored. Actually, this concurs with the fact that, as explained above, the flood was characterized as a chaotic and abnormal situation of blocked and/or overflowing –and hence defectively flowing– watery –vein-like– courses –and water, as I have shown, was conceived to be conceptually equivalent to *qi*. Furthermore, that the stagnation of waters was equaled to a disruption in the normal flow of *qi* is explicitly stated in *Guoyu* 國語 (“Discourses of the States”) (IV c. B.C.)²⁴¹ in reference to the misdeeds of Gong Gong 共工, a mythological figure traditionally blamed with provoking the flood:

“This is not permissible. I have heard that those in antiquity who nourished their people did not topple mountains, raise up lowland wastes, block rivers, nor drain swamps. Mountains are the gathering of earth (*fu shan tu zhi ju ye* 夫山土之聚也). Lowland wastes are where creatures take shelter. Rivers are where energy [*qi*] is guided (*jiu qi zhi dao ye* 川氣之導也). Swamps are the amassing of water. When Heaven and Earth took shape they gathered [earth] on high to form mountains and gave shelter to creatures in the lowlands. They dredged out river valleys (*shu wei chuan gu* 疏為川穀) to guide the flow of energy (*yi dao qi qi* 以導其氣), and ringed the stagnant pools in low places in order to amass moisture. Therefore the gathered earth did not collapse and the creatures had a place to take shelter. The energies did not stagnate (*qi bu chen zhi* 氣不沈滯), but also did not overflow (*er yi bu san yue* 而亦不散越)”²⁴²

²⁴¹ Lewis (2006)b p. 45., Bray (2007) p. 20, Lewis (2009) p. 588. On the date of the *Guoyu* see Chang (1993).

²⁴² Translated in Lewis (2006)b p. 40. Original text is 不可。晉聞古之長民者，不墮山，不崇藪，不防川，不竇澤。夫山，土之聚也，藪，物之歸也，川，氣之導也，澤，水之鍾也。夫天地成而聚于高，歸物于下。疏為川穀，以導其氣；陂塘污庫，以鍾其美。是故聚不隤崩，而物有所歸；氣不沈滯，而亦不散越。 Available at the <http://ctext.org/guo-yu/zhou-yu-xia>

This passage concludes assuring that “the ancient sages were attentive only to this” (*gu zhi sheng wang wei wei zhi shen* 古之聖王唯此之慎).²⁴³ Immediately after this, master Guan contrasts the ways of the “ancient sages” (*gu zhi sheng wang* 古之聖王) to those of Gong Gong:

“In the past Gong Gong renounced this Way (*xi gong gong qi ci dao ye* 昔共工棄此道也). He took his ease in lascivious music and in dissipation destroyed his body. He desired to block up the hundred rivers (*yu yong fang bai chuan* 欲壅防百川), and to topple the mountains to fill up the lowlands. Thereby he harmed the world (*yi hai tain xia* 以害天下). August Heaven did not bless him, and the common people did not assist him. Calamities and chaos²⁴⁴ arose together (*huo luan bing xing* 禍亂并興), and Gong Gong was thereby destroyed.”²⁴⁵

These passages are particularly revealing regarding the interrelations between the flow of water and the circulation of *qi*, and hence with respect to the very nature of the flood itself as a chaotic phenomena. The account begins by describing the ways of “ancient people” (*gu zhi zhang min* 古之長民) as “channelling/removing obstructions (*shu* 疏) to make (*wei* 為) river valleys (*chuan gu* 川穀), (thus) guiding the flow/dredging out/channelling/directing/conducting (*dao* 導) (of) energy/pneuma/breath” (*qi* 氣). In this way, the *Zhouyuxia* (周語下) chapter of the *Guoyu* clearly

²⁴³ Lewis (2006)b p. 56.

²⁴⁴ Intriguingly, Lewis (2006)b has translated *luan* 亂 as “desires” in this passage. I prefer to render this character as “chaos”. In a different translation of the same passage, also in Lewis (2006)b, he simply omits it. See and compare Lewis (2006)b pp. 41, 56.

²⁴⁵ Translated in Lewis (2006)b pp. 40-41 昔共工棄此道也，虞于湛樂，淫失其身，欲壅防百川，墮高堙庫，以害天下。皇天弗福，庶民弗助，禍亂并興，共工用滅。

Available at the <http://ctext.org/guo-yu/zhou-yu-xia>

correlates the dredging of river valleys (疏為川穀) with the channeling of *qi* (以導其氣). As a result of this, the text assures, “energies/pneumas did not stagnate” (*qi bu chen zhi* 氣不沈滯), but also did not overflow” (*er yi bu san yue* 而亦不散越). The natural flow of rivers and *qi* is hence depicted in direct opposition to the two major characteristics of the flood as I have described it, that is, stagnation and overflowing. After describing the normal functioning of the environment, the narrative proceeds signaling that Gong Gong -the flood instigator and criminal- “renounced to/discarded/abandoned (*qi* 棄) this way/path/method” (*ci dao* 此道), “obstructing and embanking (*yong fang* 壅防) the hundred rivers” (*bai chuan* 百川) and “toppling (*duo* 墮) mountains” (*gao* 高)²⁴⁶, hence “harming/damaging/injuring (*hai* 害) the world/(all) under heaven (*tian xia* 天下) and causing “calamities/disasters/misfortunes (*huo* 禍) and chaos/anarchy/confusion (*luan* 亂) to arise conjointly (*bing xing* 并興)”. Therefore, the account concludes describing the “abandonment of the way” (*qi ci dao* 棄此道) as the ultimate origin of the flood. This abandonment is characterized in purely negative terms and as standing in direct contraposition to the workings of the cosmos as previously described. In this way, Gong Gong instead of “dredging” (*shu* 疏) and “channelling” (*dao* 導), “obstructs” (*yong* 壅) and “embanks” (*fang* 防). Because of this behavior, he caused calamities (*huo* 禍) and chaos (*luan* 亂) in the world (*tian xia* 天).

²⁴⁶ *gao* 高 actually means “tall” or “lofty”, however Lewis (2006)b translates it as “mountain” likely in reference to the *Tianwen* chapter of the *Huainanzi*, which states Gong Gong toppled *Buzhou* Mountain causing the plane of the sky to diverge from that of the earth. This tradition also assures that it was the toppling of this mountain the cause of the flood, which reinforces my suspicion. See Major (2010) p. 115. n. 4.

Concludingly, in view of the account of the flood provided in the Guoyu, it is highly plausible that the Yugong allegorically and/or implicitly referred to the flood as a disturbance in the natural flow of *qi* through rivers and mountains and that the works of Yu were concordantly praised for its ability to reinstate this flux. Moreover, this hypothesis is additionally reinforced by the fact that, as explained above, in the Tributes, Yu is repeatedly portrayed as having been successful in his efforts in the measure in which he acquiesced to the innate disposition of rivers and mountains, as revealed by the reciprocal usage of characters meaning “to follow” (*sui* 隨, *song* 從) and “to conduct” (*dao*⁴ 道), or of which simultaneously conveyed both concepts (*dao*³ 導). In view of this, it is logical to conclude that the routes suggested to Yu by mountains and rivers were those of the *qi* circulating throughout the land. The “innate dispositions” of the environment which I have referred to would have corresponded, thus, to those defined by energetic flows. Just as the *qi* was illustrated as moving like blood across arteries in a body, Yu was depicted as tracing paths (*dao*³ 導) on the earth. His concern for ensuring fluent territorial circulation and his ability to direct by following is particularly clear with respect to his dealing with river courses. In fact, Yu is portrayed as floating (*fu* 浮), and therefore as letting himself be led by rivers in his movement. However, he is also portrayed as dredging (*jun* 濬), as if he, when encountering physical opposition to the continuity of a water course, would apply force to ensure its natural flow in the direction already signaled by the river itself. The manner and context in which these characters are employed once more suggests that the corruption caused by the flood on the landscape resulted from disturbing the natural tendencies and dispositions of rivers. If rivers were the veins of the earth,

then these veins had been obstructed by the flood and Yu was responsible for reopening them. However, Yu reopened not only rivers but also mountains –as these were also veins of the earth or dragon veins. Actually, that the character *dao3* 導 –as “to channelize” or “to conduct/direct”– was used in reference to mountains might have originally alluded to how Yu opened energetic –or “tellurgic”– paths through mountains. It is particularly in this sense that I find Dorofeeva-Litchmann’s translation of *dao3* 導 as “to delineate” or “to pave” as extremely appropriate.²⁴⁷ Yu certainly delineated the contours of space, and hence ordered it, by paving ways through rivers and mountains. Furthermore, the routes Yu paved over the land were those of the *qi*, tracing “the veins of the dragon” (*long mai*) and defining the ultimate structure of the world. I suspect this is the reason why Yu was simultaneously depicted as following and directing mountains/rivers. To explain, Yu was able to order inasmuch as he recognized and followed the “veins of the earth” (*di mai*) on mountains and rivers. It was only because he followed them that he was able to conduct them and pave their ways throughout the space. The ordering of the world effected by Yu, thus, was ultimately based on the vital propensities of the environment itself and his capacity to effect order derived from resuming the immanent dynamics of the world. Therefore, if the works of Yu essentially consisted in the delimitation of the contours of the world, the definition of its structural elements and the establishment of their dynamics as a result of applying regularities to the landscape, then these patterns and the order they produced were ultimately extracted from the landscape itself and did not result from imposing but from recognizing and reinstalling a structure, which was inherent to the environment. These regularities and dynamics, when applied to

²⁴⁷ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2005/2006) p. 75. n. 30, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) p. 256, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 203

spaces, had the ability to generate order not only in terms of structure and shape but also in terms of communication and interaction. However, given that they had been altered as a result of the cosmic crime committed by Gong Gong, it was Yu's responsibility to restore them. Noticing that Gong Gong's attempts to impose frameworks had only caused blockades and excesses in the normal circulation of rivers and mountains (*qi*), he avoided repeating this model and instead preferred to carefully observe the environment, identify its natural tendencies, adapt to them and use them to his benefit as to re-order the world and reinstate the *cosmos*, that is, the reality of the world as an ordered and well functioning space. In this way, mountains permitted Yu to defined not only the structure and patterns of the earth (*dili* 地理) but also its internal dynamics (*dimai* 地脈).

That the *Yugong* portrays Yu as responsible for the restoration of the cosmos points not only to the immense mythological importance of *Da Yu* but also, and most notably, to the believe that the orderly and properly functioning of the world relied on the ritual activities of an external –numinously powerful– agent. This believe is intimately connected to what Mark Edward Lewis has defined as the “...constance menace of universal dissolution and chaos... that has haunted the Chinese imagination through centuries”²⁴⁸. However, it should be clarified that this cosmological narrative is not universally Chinese but peculiarly Confucian, as the Taoist deliberately proposed a world which prescinded from any external agency

²⁴⁸ Lewis (2006)a p. 2 & (2006)b pp. 24-25.

whatsoever and functioned from and by itself (*ziran* 自然).²⁴⁹ The cosmological presumptions behind the *Yugong* and the *Mengzi* certainly corresponded to the Confucian narrative of the *cosmos*, where the actions of either a mythological figure or a virtuous ruler were required for the world to avoid chaos (*luan* 亂) and preserve its natural order. While in the *Yugong* the responsible for cosmic stability was Yu, in the actual historical record this responsibility rested on the monarchs and emperors who, by taking the actions of Shun and Yu as mythical models, recreated their labors in two major ritual systems: The *xunshou* 巡狩 (“tour of inspection”) and the *mingtang* 明堂 (“Bright/Luminous Hall”). These two models consisted in ritual excursions of space which generated and renewed order, maintaining the cohesion and integrity of the *cosmos*. Although the former was believed to have been initially introduced by a

²⁴⁹ *ziran* 自然 can be translated as “so-of-itself” like in Slingerland (2003) and Hall & Ames (1995), but is customarily rendered as “natural” or “spontaneous”. Ames (1995) has identified the Taoist cosmology of spontaneity with Chinese cosmology itself, assuring that “the Chinese “world as such” is constituted by a “worlding” (*ziran* 自然), a process of spontaneous arising or “self-so-ing” which requires no external principle or agency to account for it” [Hall & Ames (1995) p. 185]. Although I concur with Hall & Ames in that *ziran* cosmology prescind from an external principle (or agent) I doubt that this view can be ascribed to the whole of Chinese cosmological thinking. In fact, the cosmology behind texts such as the *Yugong*, the *Mengzi* and the *Shanhaijing* indicates exactly the opposite, that external agency was central to the existence, continuity and preservation of the *cosmos*. Furthermore, as I shall explain, Yu was one of the mythological figures most notoriously associated with this cosmology. If Hall & Ames have portrayed the Chinese cosmos as strictly spontaneous, Lewis (2006)a has called attention to the fact that the early Chinese mind sees “... the human world and its relations as things produced and modified through effort” [Lewis (2006)a p. 1]. In this way, whereas Hall & Ames have restricted the Chinese world to one of pure Taoist spontaneity, Lewis has limited it to one of absolute Confucian effort. I think, however, that the picture is more complex than that. In fact, these two narratives of the *cosmos* coexisted and competed with each other. Chinese cosmologies are better understood as responding to different intellectual interests, as proposed by Puett (2001). It might be much more suggestive of a proposition to conceive Taoism as a reactions against the world of effort initially proposed by Confucians. These issues, however, are far beyond the scope of this work.

mythical character (Shun), it was actually performed by various late Eastern Zhou and early imperial rulers.²⁵⁰

The First Chinese emperor, Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝, performed at least four tours of inspection in 219 BC, 218 BC, 216 BC and 210 BC, visiting Mt. Yi (to the east), Mt. Tai (to the east), Mt. Langye (to the east), Mt. Zhifu (to the north), Mt. Jiuyi (to the south), Mt. Kuaji (to the south) and Mt. Jitou (to the west). He did so by purposely imitating the actions of Shun and Yu, to whom he offered sacrifices at Mt. Jiuyi and Mt. Kuaji, respectively. The tour of the emperor was clearly modeled after that of Shun²⁵¹, as the mountains he traversed were all located at the outskirts of his domains.²⁵² At six of these mountains, plus the gate of Jieshi (Jiemen), commemorative stelae (*bei* 碑) were erected, most of these have been preserved on later sources and they testify for the alleged virtuosity, martial power and benevolence of China's first emperor. In conformity with this, the *Yugong* refers indirectly to a mountain inscription when mentioning Mt. Jieshi (碣石) –which might have been the same place that Jiemen– which literally means “stone tablet rock”. This association is further supported by the fact that *jie* 碣 and *bei* 碑 are strikingly similar characters, both referring to stelae.²⁵³ The narrative style of the Shihuangdi's mountain inscriptions echoed Yu's efforts to subdue the flood, as the emperor was praised for having “broke through and opened river embankments, leveled and

²⁵⁰ Campany (1996) p. 106.

²⁵¹ To the point that is likely that the tour of Shun itself resulted from turning Shihuangdi's actions into a mythological account. See Kern (2007) pp. 112-113

²⁵² Kern (2007) p. 106. fig. 110.

²⁵³ See p. 79. n. 159.

removed the dangerous obstacles and fixed topography”²⁵⁴ However, the act of writing on a mountain by erecting an stelae was associated not only with an interest for leaving a record of the ruler’s deeds but also, and most importantly, with a desire for “... defining and appropriating cosmic position, and of imprinting the mark of conquest”²⁵⁵. In fact, these inscriptions were carried out only after performing sacrifices to these mountains. For example, the sacrifices offered to Shun at Mt. Jiuyi were of the *wang* 聖 type, the same sacrifice Shun himself is said to have performed to mountain spirits (see above). The sacrifices at Taishan 太山 were particularly elaborated, here the Emperor carried out the sacrifices known as *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪, which were offered exclusively to this peak. The actual characteristics of these sacrifices are unknown²⁵⁶, however the *feng* sacrifice might be a derivation from the rituals Shun performed to the mountains in the twelve provinces after concluding his tour of inspection, since these were also referred to by the signifier *feng* 封.²⁵⁷

The mountain rituals of Qin Shihuangdi exerted lasting influence in early imperial China. The first to follow his example was Wudi 武帝 (141-87 BC), sixth emperor of the Han dynasty, which also toured various mountains and performed the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. By the time of Wudi, a set of five sacred peaks/marchmounts (*wuyue*

²⁵⁴ Kern (2000) pp. 42-43.

²⁵⁵ Kern (2000) p. 57.

²⁵⁶ Lewis (1999)b

²⁵⁷ The tour of inspection concludes assuring that “the *feng* (sacrifices were performed) at the twelve mountains”. However, Legge and Karlgren translate *feng* 封 as “to raise an altar”. Original text is *feng yi shi you er shan* 封十有二山. Available at <http://ctext.org/shang-shu/yu-shu?searchu=%E5%B0%81>. See Legge (1899) p. 40, Karlgren (1950) p. 5, Robson (2009) p. 35 & this chapter, p. 69.

五岳) had been established, with Taishan as the eastern peak (*dongyue* 东岳).²⁵⁸ Wu is said to have visited this peak eight times and performed the *feng* sacrifice in five different occasions.²⁵⁹ He also toured other four major mountains, strategically located in every cardinal direction²⁶⁰, including the center.²⁶¹ In this way, Wudi's tour of inspection was performed as a tour across the Five Marchmounts.²⁶² The emperor gave tremendous importance to the performing of this tour –which culminated in the performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices at Mt. Tai–, converting it in one of the most important ritual obligations of the monarch.²⁶³ That this tour was modeled after the *Shundian* mountain scheme is revealed by the fact that when Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-86 BC), a contemporary of Wudi, wrote the Fengshanshu 封禪書 chapter of the *Shiji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”), he introduced his account by recounting Shun's journey. He, however, depicted the mythical emperor as traversing not four

²⁵⁸ The dynamics of the transition from a fourfold to a fivefold mountain system are complex and respond to changes in cosmological thought. The emergence of the Five Marchmounts schemes was intimately associated with the development of the *wuxing* 五行 cosmological framework. Every sacred peak was identified with an asterism, a god and a color. See Vervoorn (1990-1991) pp. 9-12, Wang (2000) pp. 173-209 & Robson (2009) pp. 35 - 44.

²⁵⁹ Harrist (2008) p. 226.

²⁶⁰ Kleeman (1994) pp. 228-230.

²⁶¹ The fivefold mountain system resulted from adding a central peak: Songshan 嵩山 or Songyue 嵩岳. Although other systems placed Huashan 华山 in this role. See Kleeman (1994) p. 229 & Robson (2009) p. 40.

²⁶² Lewis (1999)b p. 51.

²⁶³ Puett (2009) p. 714.

but five mountains²⁶⁴, contradicting the *Shundian*.²⁶⁵ Sima Qian's account of Shun's tour of inspection was hence strongly influenced by Wudi's own tour through the Five Marchmounts, to the point that he equalized them even at the face of contesting textual evidence, probably in an attempt to provide a solid mythical foundation for the new ritual system. Furthermore, Sima Qian not only added a new mountain to the Sundian scheme but also took the liberty to assume that the three extant peaks, which were not identified with any particular mountain in the original account²⁶⁶, were those traversed by Wu in his version of the tour of inspection.²⁶⁷ In this way, Sima Qian attempted to legitimize the Five Marchmounts' tour of inspection by presenting it as an exact replica of Shun's journey across mountains.

Besides from touring the realm by way of mountains, Wudi also symbolically traversed it in an architectural replica of the world²⁶⁸, the *mingtang* 明堂 ("Luminous Hall"), which he built in 109 BC at Fenggao, at the eastern foot of Mount Tai, and

²⁶⁴ Watson (1993) pp. 4-5.

²⁶⁵ James Robson has called attention to this in order to highlight the fact that accounts of the Five Marchmounts are varied and that the actual locations of the different *yue* 岳 were not stable but variable, responding to divergent religious and cosmographical interests. See Robson (2009) pp. 25-31.

²⁶⁶ The *Shundian* mentions only the Taishan, and then refers to the remaining mountains simply as *yue*. See Legge (1899) p. 39-40 and Karlgren (1950) p. 5.

²⁶⁷ Robson (2009) p. 30.

²⁶⁸ Tsai (2003) explains the *mingtang* as a "ritual miniaturization" of the *xunshou* which served "... as a means of representing the world in an easily accessible miniature in the imperial capital, thus providing an alternative to the actual performance of the imperial inspection to the circuit of the Five Marchmounts" [Tsai (2003) p. 72]. Similarly, Lewis assures that "...the Bright Hall was a ritual building or palace that imitated the structure of the cosmos and through which the ruler enacted the cycle of the seasons" [Lewis (2006)a p. 261]

visited after performing the *feng-shan* sacrifices.²⁶⁹ According to the *Guan zi* 管子 (“Master Guan”), *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (“Spring and Autumn of Lü Buwei”), *Liji* 禮記 (“Book/Classic of Rites”) and *Huainanzi*, the ruler moved across the *mingtang* – and hence the *cosmos* itself– by following the “Monthly Observances” (*yueling* 月令), which divided the Bright Hall into twelve rooms according to the twelve months and required the ruler to occupy a specific room on each month of the year.²⁷⁰ Each set of three rooms (4x3=12) was associated with the directions, seasons and colors of the Five Phases scheme. Consequently, the ruler not only had to inhabit certain rooms depending on the season but also had to station himself in a certain cardinal direction and wear appropriate apparel.²⁷¹ Although these “observances” were based on a duodecimal scheme more closely associated with Shun’s tour of inspection, this system was cosmographically and architectonically complemented with that of Yu’s Nine Provinces²⁷² by dividing the rooms to the the southeast, southwest, northeast and northwest of this ninefold structure into two, assigning thus two months –instead of one– to such cardinal points (4x2=8).²⁷³ Despite the fact there is neither

²⁶⁹ Tseng (2011) pp. 21-22.

²⁷⁰ Wu (1995) pp. 181-183, Hwang (1996) pp. 44-47.

²⁷¹ Tseng (2011) pp. 78-79

²⁷² It is highly plausible that while the twelve room system corresponded to the twelve solar stations, the nine rooms correlated to the nine lunar lodges. In this way, the *mingtang* was designed to resolve the geometrical and astronomical challenge – which I have referred to on a previous footnote– of combing a circular solar scheme with a squared (or rectangular) terrestrial grid. This challenge was not only mathematical but also cosmological insofar as the circle was identified with the heavens and the square/rectangle with the earth. Nevertheless, other versions of the Luminous Hall divided it exclusively into nine chambers. For descriptions of the *yueling* and the *mingtang* see Henderson (1984) pp. 75-82, Henderson (1994) pp. 212-216, Wu (1995) pp. 176-187, Lewis (2006)a pp. 260-273, Wu (2007) pp. 191-199, Tseng (2011) pp. 37-88, *passim*.

²⁷³ Wu (1995) p. 181.

archeological nor textual evidence assuring that the monthly observances were actually performed in the *mingtang*²⁷⁴, considering that this building was a “... *tu* in architectural form”²⁷⁵, and that the *tu* were dynamic charts devised to be performed in movement²⁷⁶, it is highly plausible that the Luminous Hall actually involved peripatetic ritual procedures. Furthermore, one of the few remnant images of a *mingtang*, included in the lacquerware lid found in the Linzi Lanjiazhuang tomb (VI-V c. BC) – and which clearly resembles the one built by Wang Mang in Chang’an– displays a series of animalistic figures suggesting a clockwise displacement similar to that of the monthly ordinances.²⁷⁷ This reinforces the hypothesis that this architectonic structure, as a miniature of the cosmos, encompassed not only a quadrate arrangement but also a dynamic process, a worldview which indeed concurs with the one explained in the *Shundian* and the *Yugong* themselves, and that it is reinforced by the association of the *mingtang* with Mt. Tai and Wudi’s “tour of inspection”

The construction of the Luminous Hall at the foot of Taishan, in fact, suggests this structure was closely related to the ritual touring of sacred peaks. Furthermore, this relationship was so close that it converted the building into a mere subordinate of the *feng-shan* sacrifices, eventually diminishing its ritual significance. The ritual insignificance of the *mingtang*, added to the fact that it was located 800 kms. away

²⁷⁴ Tseng (2011) p. 81.

²⁷⁵ Wu (2007) p. 199.

²⁷⁶ Speaking of the *mingtang* as a *tu*, Bray (2007) assures that the functioning principles of this structure confirms the “*tu* were microcosms: depicted the cosmic and divine pulses and patterns, and they provided a framework for human comprehension, interpretation and manipulation of these patterns (p. 16). For a definition of *tu* and explanation of its various uses see Bray (2007), specially pp. 1-34.

²⁷⁷ Hwang (1996) pp. 61-66, 705.

from the Han capital in Chang'an, caused it to fall into disuse.²⁷⁸ In fact, the second *mingtang* was built in 4 AD at the capital by Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BC - 23 AD)²⁷⁹ and used in its own right to serve as a "...physical reminder of Wang's compatibility with Duke of Zhou, who had erected a Bright Hall in the second Zhou capital, Luo, over a thousand years earlier".²⁸⁰ Although initially built for this purpose Wang Mang eventually changed the symbolism of the hall to signify the will of Heaven. However ambitious were his intentions, his incompetence as a ruler, after two decades, led to the burning of the capital, and with that the of Luminous Hall, in 23 AD.²⁸¹ It would not disappear for too long. The complex was built for the third time in 59 AD, this time south of Luoyang, where it served the Han rulers for more than a hundred years, until the rebellion of 190 AD, which finally overthrew the dynasty.²⁸² Across the different periods in which the Bright Hall existed, it was probably used to symbolically tour space but surely employed to perform sacrifices to Heaven, offering to royal ancestors and ceremonies of enfeoffment.²⁸³ The latter of this ritual procedures was closely associated with the *feng* ceremony performed at Mt. Tai. Actually, the Chinese character to convey the act of installing someone as a lord or nobleman was *feng* 封.

²⁷⁸ Tseng (2011) p. 26.

²⁷⁹ Tseng (2011) p. 28.

²⁸⁰ Tseng (2011) p. 32.

²⁸¹ Tseng (2011) p. 35.

²⁸² Tseng (2011) p. 36.

²⁸³ Tseng (2011) pp. 70-88.

Furthermore, to *feng* was “to raise up a mound”²⁸⁴, that is, to raise an altar²⁸⁵ in imitation of a mountain, granting the beneficiary the right to offer sacrifices to the god of the land or the divinized earth (*she* 社), which was worshipped in mountain-like altar.²⁸⁶ Not only persons but also mountains were enfeoffed: In the *Shundian* it is said that Shun “enfeoffed (the) twelve mountains” (*feng yi shi you er shan* 封十有二山).²⁸⁷ Therefore, enfeoffment rituals were essentially mountainous, which further relates the Luminous Hall with mountains and the rituals carried out in them.

Therefore, the touring of the space in both the *xunshou* and the *mingtang* was closely associated with the myths of both Shun and Yu and it appears to have been modeled on the actions of these legendary rulers. On the one hand, in the case of Shihuangdi, the act of displacing from one mountain to the other by offering them wang sacrifices was clearly based on Shun’s tour of inspection. However, his displacement was described as physically modifying the landscape in the style of Yu’s taming of the flood. On the other hand, as suggested in the *Shiji*, Wudi’s tour across the Five Marchmounts was thought to be an accurate reproduction of Shun’s own tour. Finally, the rituals performed in the Luminous Hall possibly resembled the peripatetic procedures of Shun’s tour of inspection and were apparently related to the sacrificial

²⁸⁴ Cook (2009) p. 243.

²⁸⁵ It is apparently in this sense that both Legge (1899) and Karlgren (1950) have translated *feng*. In their versions of the *Shundian*, the expression *feng yi shi you er shan* 封十有二山 has been rendered both as “raising altars upon twelve hills in them” and as “raised altars on 12 mountains”, respectively. *Feng* has also been translated as “to enfeoff” by Tseng (2003). See Legge (1899) p. 40, Karlgren (1950) p. 5 & Tseng (2003) p. 100.

²⁸⁶ Davis (2012) pp. 154-156.

²⁸⁷ Tseng (2003) p. 100.

offerings directed to Mt. Tai. In this way, the actions performed in these journeys took the deeds of Shun and Yu as models. That the activities of these mythical heroes served as exemplary actions for early Chinese emperors not only reveals the ultimate nature of imperial ritual activities but also inform us of the politico-religious functions of the myths associated with Shun and Yu themselves. With respect to this, the views of Mircea Eliade are, once more, particularly suggestive. In fact, according to him, one of the most notorious characteristics of myths is that they are regarded as models. The paradigmatic character of myths is rooted in their ability to reveal the ultimate sacred nature of the world:

“The myth reveals absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work. In other words, the myths describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred.... it is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in the myths, that establishes the world as a reality”²⁸⁸

Mythical accounts are hence intimately related with sacrality, inasmuch as they recount how the creative activities of gods established the sacredness, and thus the reality, of the world. Furthermore, as I have explained on the previous chapter, the creation of a sacred space depended on ordering space:

“the sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world”²⁸⁹

Consequently, organizing space was an essentially sacral activity modeled on the actions of mythical characters. Eliade explain this in different ways:

²⁸⁸ Eliade (1957) pp. 96-97.

²⁸⁹ Eliade (1957) p. 30.

“...the cosmization of unknown territories is always a consecration; to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods”²⁹⁰

“What is to become ‘our world’ must first be ‘created’, and every creation has a paradigmatic model –the creation of the universe by the gods”²⁹¹

“to settle in a territory is, in the last analysis, equivalent to consecrating it... this universe is always the replica of the paradigmatic universe created and inhabited by the god’s; hence it shares in the sanctity of the god’s work”²⁹²

In this way, to order was to sacralize or consecrate, and to sacralize was to repeat mythical actions. Furthermore, by repeating the ordering actions of mythical heroes, the ancient man managed to preserve and maintain the sacral quality of his world:

“Since the sacred and strong time is the time of origins, the stupendous instant in which a reality was created, was for the first time fully manifested, man will seek periodically to return to that original time. This ritual reactualizing of the *illud tempus* in which the first epiphany of reality occurred is the basis for all sacred calendars”²⁹³

The reactualization of the *cosmos* and the ability to preserve sacrality, however, was not limited to organizing rites but extended to all ritual activities:

²⁹⁰ Eliade (1957) p. 32.

²⁹¹ Eliade (1957) p. 31.

²⁹² Eliade (1957) p. 34.

²⁹³ Eliade (1957) p. 81.

“... sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites”²⁹⁴

In reference to this but particularly in relation to the celebration of the New Year, Eliade assures that

“...through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated, that is, it began again as sacred time, for it coincided with the *illud tempus* in which the world had first come into existence... by participating ritually in the end of the world and in its re-creation, any man became contemporary with the *illud tempus*”²⁹⁵

By extension, participating of any ritual activity amounted to re-creating the *illud tempus*. Actually, myths were at the basis of all ritual actions.

“... the supreme function of myth is to ‘fix’ the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities... Acting as a fully responsible human being, man imitates the paradigmatic gestures of the gods, repeats their actions....”²⁹⁶

The religious function of rituals is hence double:

“.... faithful repetition of divine models has a twofold result: (1) by imitating the gods, man remains the sacred, hence in reality; (2) by the continuous reactualization of paradigmatic divine gestures, the world is sanctified. Men’s religious behavior contributes to maintaining the sanctity of the world”²⁹⁷

In sum, the relation between myth and rituals can be described as it follows:

²⁹⁴ Eliade (1957) p. 70.

²⁹⁵ Eliade (1957) p. 80.

²⁹⁶ Eliade (1957) p. 98.

²⁹⁷ Eliade (1957) p. 99.

“... the imitation of an archetypal model is a reactualization of the mythical moment when the archetype was revealed for the first time... all rituals imitate a divine archetype and that their continual reactualization takes place in one and the same atemporal mythical instant”²⁹⁸

Therefore, if myths recounted the creation of the world as resulting from the ordering of space and the establishment of its liminality and reality, rituals were devised to preserve this order, sustain that liminality and maintain such reality by re-creating the ordering of the world. This re-creation was effected by re-enacting mythical actions. This act of re-enactment was the rite itself. All rituals were thus based on mythical archetypes and their ultimate function was to maintain cosmic stability and perpetuate sacrality.

Each of the elements in the definition of mythical and ritual actions provided above is to be found in the *Yugong*, the *Shundian* and the *Shiji*. Shun traveled the world through mountains, defining its contours according to the cardinal directions and offering sacrifices to mountains located in each cardinal point. Once the flood arose, Yu ordered the world by following mountains and rivers, shaping the Chinese realm as a geographical and political unit. Both Shun and Yu ordered the world by means of mountains, creating different –but probably complementary– administrative divisions. Furthermore, their actions served as mythical models for early Chinese emperors, which re-enacted their actions in the peripatetic ritual systems of the “tour of inspection” and the Luminous Hall. In fact, while the tour of inspection implied the actual traversing of the Chinese territory across four or five mountains, the *mingtang*

²⁹⁸ Eliade (1959) p. 76.

was an architectural reproduction of the *cosmos* feasibly designed to symbolically and cosmographically replace the territorial touring of the land. Despite the fact the *mingtang* lacked from mountains it replaced them with walls and doors as cardinal markers. Similarly, while the tour of inspection included sacrifices to mountains, they Luminous Hall certainly lacked from them but also featured several ritual offerings performed in a cardinally-oriented structure. Therefore, although being cosmographically and ritually divergent, the ultimate function of these systems was identical: to ritually reenact the mythical ordering of the world by moving across space defining directions and offering sacrifices. Using these ritual systems, both Qin Shihuangdi and Han Wudi re-ordered the world, preserving the sacrality and maintaining the cosmic stability of the Chinese territory. In this particular case, the conservative function of peripatetic journeys is related to the anxiety the early Chinese experienced toward what they perceived as the imminent threat of chaos (*luan* 亂), which was metaphorically portrayed in the Shangshu –and other early Chinese texts such as the *Mengzi*– as the physical catastrophe of the flood.

In these Confucian texts, the chaos of the flood was implicitly or explicitly explained as resulting from a disruption in the natural flow of energies and/or waters, a cosmic crime usually ascribed to Gong Gong. The restoration of the natural order and the suppression of the flood was achieved only as a result of the heroic actions of Yu, which was able to use the immanent tendencies of the environment to subdue the rising waters. The cosmic stability of the world was hence reestablished as a result of the deliberate effort of a mythical character. As Mark Edward Lewis has noticed, the picture of the world transmitted in these texts is one of “... things produced and

modified through effort”²⁹⁹. Furthermore, is precisely this emphasis on effort which relates these texts to ritual actions. As way of explanation, to the extent that the world was re-ordered as a result of a peripatetic politico-religious journey through mountains and rivers –which encompassed offering sacrifices, channeling rivers, defining tributes and assuring the effective fluvial connectivity between the regional peripheries and the central capital–, the order of the world, and hence the very existence of the *cosmos*, depended on the permanency of the constructs it generated, which in turn rested on the periodical repetition of ritual displacement through space. In this way, in the Chinese case, the circularity and repeatability of cosmic time –as explained by Eliade– did not work spontaneously but rather as the result of the deliberate efforts of an external agent. The threat of chaos was hence rooted in the belief that if the periodical offering of sacrifices to mountains or rivers and the sending of tributes, as well as the natural flow of waters and stable disposition of mountain ranges were altered, then the world as an ordered and significant reality would crumble to ashes and disappear into confusion. Lewis read this preoccupation for order as a concern for the establishment of divisions, assuring that “at every level, the early Chinese perceived the threat of a looming chaos, and argued for the necessity of maintaining clear lines of division to prevent a collapse back into this void. The tales of the flood can only be understood against the background of these broader concerns, for the flood was the image par excellence of the collapse of divisions into chaos, and tales of taming the flood provided models for the maintenance of order through the reimposition of vanished distinctions or the repeated drawing of lines”³⁰⁰. Lewis has also recognized that the agency needed to

²⁹⁹ Lewis (2006)a p. 1

³⁰⁰ Lewis (2006)b p. 21.

maintain this order was necessarily ritual in nature, insofar as texts dealing with “...the construction of organized space... insisted on the importance of continued action in their own day to protect this space from the threat of chaos... early discussions of ritual repeatedly asserted that it maintained order through imposing divisions. It was through separating men from women, senior from junior, ruler from subject, or civilized from barbarian that ritual constituted social roles and groups. Without ritual’s constant guidance to create and maintain these divisions, society would collapse back into undifferentiated chaos or animal savagery”.³⁰¹ In this way, according to Lewis, the early Chinese themselves understood rites as having a basically *cosmic* (ordering) function. This reinforces my hypothesis that the Eliadean propositions regarding the relationship between myths and ritual can be successfully applied to early China. In fact, inasmuch as the ultimate function of rites was that of preserving order, their performative effectivity was rooted in their ability to reactualize the “...*illud tempus* in which the first epiphany of reality occurred”³⁰². In the Chinese case that reality was that of the establishment of divisions and “the construction of organized space”, as recounted in texts such as the Yugong and the Shanhaijing – which Lewis also has also considered in his research. Accordingly, the role of rites has been that of maintaining such divisions in order to avoid chaos.

I certainly concur with Lewis’ views on the nature of early Chinese ritual culture. However, there are certain differences in Lewis’ and Eliade’s arguments regarding the nature of order –and hence of rites– that I would like to call attention to and which

³⁰¹ Lewis (2006)a p. 2.

³⁰² Eliade (1957) p. 81.

are important for my own argumentation. Lewis –following Yates³⁰³– has defined the construction of order as the installation of divisions.³⁰⁴ Eliade, in turn, has defined order as characterized by spatial hierarchization, the definition of a center and a periphery and the achievement of effective orientation in the space. Lewis’ definition stresses the socio-political and cultural connotations of Chinese order –as in monarch/subject, man/women and civilized/barbarian, and although it still considers spatial divisions –as in center/periphery or capital/region, it reads them mostly as political and cultural constructs. Eliade’s *cosmos*, in turn, stresses the religious nature and ontological character of ordered space, hence revealing and intimate association between spatial ordering and rituality. Therefore, despite recognizing the early Chinese concern for the construction of “organized space”, Lewis does not interpret it as a preoccupation for the definition of a sacred space, tending to dissociate the efforts for maintaining order from any kind of religious preoccupations. Similarly, despite recognizing the *cosmic* function of rituals, he reads it as entailing the preservation of socio-cultural and political divisions and not of spatial order itself. In this way, the Eliadean conception of order that I have adopted here is slightly different from the one championed by Lewis, stressing rather different aspects of the Chinese fancy for structuring spaces. The main difference lies in the fact that Eliade’s order is quintessentially spatial and religious, and only tangentially socio-cultural and political. For Eliade, in fact, order is less about society or culture than about the world as a comprehensive spiritual and physical “reality”. In this way, Eliade does not distinguish between the construction of an ordered space and the manufacturing of the world itself. In order to be real, the world has to be ordered. This understanding

³⁰³ Yates (1994)

³⁰⁴ Lewis (2006)a cites Yates in his introduction. See Lewis (2006)a p. 2. n. 9.

differs from Lewis' rationale, which conceives the construction of organized space as the fabrication of a political and socio-cultural unit: the Chinese empire. Lewis, however, does not completely ignore the sacral and onto-cosmological aspect of order but see it as a subsidiary of the socio-cultural and political element, arguing that the empire itself came to be identified with the entirety of the world in an effort to obtain politico-religious legitimization, an argument which is to a certain extent implicit in the Eliadean insistence on the ancient inclination for identifying political entities with sacred spaces. Consequently, the role these authors ascribe to the cosmic nature of order is radically different: While Lewis sees it as a mere discourse for politico-religious justification Eliade understand it as a reality in its own right. In fact, from an Eliadean perspective, the identification between socio-political order with cosmical order was not a mere theoretical assertion but an actual cosmological and religious belief. In other words, Eliade invite us to understand the cosmological – and cosmographical– character of order not simply as a function of socio-cultural and political organization but as a definite statement on the ultimate ontological status of the world. In this way, although it is undeniable that the allegation that socio-political and cultural realities were identical to cosmic structures had a politico-religious function, the early Chinese participated of this belief as the actual experience of a pervasive continuity between the different planes of existence. This absolute identification of the human and cosmic spheres implied that the fear toward the imminent decomposition of society, culture and government was also a fear toward the possible destruction of the world itself as a physical and spatial reality. This belief was, in fact, at the root of the characterization of chaos as a flood, that is, as a factual phenomena of rising waters with catastrophic ecological consequences. Thus, the application of the Eliadean concept of order to early Chinese thought explains the

flood not simply as a politically-inspired metaphor but as the ultimate, palpable manifestation of the disintegration of order. This reading of the flood is only possible insofar as Eliade's definition of order encompasses not only social, cultural and political divisions –like the one provided by Lewis– but also, and most importantly, spatial and territorial arrangements. Considering that this work is dedicated to the study of a territorial unit which was pivotal in the early Chinese efforts to define orderly spaces, the Eliadean framework is particularly useful. Furthermore, and with a view to clarifying the relations between spatial order and rituality via mountains, reassessing the nature of order in early China from an Eliadean perspective also entails readdressing the issue of the cosmic function of rites.

In fact, to the extent that rites were understood as preserving society, culture and political organization, they were also, and most notably, conceived as maintaining the physical and spatial integrity of the world itself. This *cosmic* function of ritual activities is observable in both cosmographic texts and regal journeys through space, where the movement of either a mythical hero or an emperor, as well as the sacrifices he offered throughout his displacement, had the ability to maintain the stability of the *cosmos*. As I have explained, rites are re-creations of archetypical ordering actions initially performed by mythical characters, hence ritual actions are always based on mythical models. This is precisely the case with the rites performed by Shihuangdi and Wudi, which were modeled on the actions of Yu and Shun as described in the *Yugong* and the *Shundian*, respectively. The actions of these mythical rulers were characterized by the definition of spatial contours and energetic fluxes through mountains and rivers. These contours and fluxes were not the result of their actions as they already existed in the innate dispositions of the natural environment, their

achievements consisted not in creating but in re-establishing these geographical and energetic systems. The original cause which made these actions necessary was the cosmic crime committed by Gong Gong, who disrupted the natural dispositions of mountains and rivers, causing energetic stagnation and flooding waters to erupt. In this way, the necessity of mythical action arose as a result of the pristine corruption of the cosmic order. Furthermore, this order is reinstated only as a result of the deliberate efforts of Yu. It is implied hence that from the very moment the natural order of the world was disrupted, its very existence as a *cosmos* –that is, as an ordered, well-functioning and balanced reality– came to depend on the actions of an external agent. This agent was Yu. Consequently, to the extent that Yu did not create but re-created the *cosmos*, his merits ultimately resided in that he showed the way to maintain the *cosmic* stability of the world. This was literally a way (*dao4* 道) to the extent that Yu re-ordered the world by traversing (*dao3* 導) mountains and rivers. Yu's journey provided a mythical model for the preservation of the world as an ordered space. This model was essentially repeatable and hence ritual. This was the exact, pivotal point in which myth and ritual converged: Insofar as actions were continuously necessary to sustain the *cosmos* and Yu had shown the way to do this successfully, those interested in avoiding the world from returning to chaos simply had to repeat this way. This is precisely what early Chinese emperors did, they traversed the space either territorially through mountains or symbolically in the Bright Hall, repeating the model once delivered by Yu. Inasmuch as these journeys repeated a mythical model, they were necessarily ritual in character. In this way, ritual action in early China was devised to sustain the stability of the *cosmos*. In the preservation of this stability mountains were fundamental, permitting the

establishment of spatial divisions and energetic flows, defining the structure of a sacral spatiality.

The cosmic function of rituals also had a political connotation, as Lewis has signaled. To the extent that the very existence of the *cosmos* depended on continuous ritual action, and considering that the performance of cosmic rituals was a regal prerogative, the mythical narrative of Yu's taming of the flood served as a justification for the imperial monopoly over politico-religious power. Presenting himself as the continuator of the works of Yu, and Shun as well, the early Chinese emperor asserted that the continuity and integrity of the world rested in his exclusive capacity to re-order space by periodically touring the land. In this way, the legitimizing role of rituals rested not only on the alleged governmental responsibility for the maintenance of social, cultural and political divisions –as Lewis has explained– but also in the assertion that the preservation of the structural and energetic stability of the world was a regal obligation. Hence the narrative of the flood as the cosmic crime –caused by Gong Gong– which was redeemed through the ritual righteousness of Yu, placed the Chinese monarch as the sole guarantor of the world as an ordered space. The cosmological function of the king was achieved specifically through ritual action. This ritual action was essentially mobile in character. The reason for this is that originally Yu had re-ore-ordered the world by traveling across the space, hence the rituals which permitted the preservation of the *cosmos* necessarily consisted of spatial journeys. To the degree that the world depended on mobile ritual action, the preservation of the *cosmos* rested on the continuous ritual movement of the king across space. Conversely, the ceasing of regal motion was equaled to the eventual loss of cosmic balance, the collapse of energetic flows and the disruption of the

structuring elements of the world. In imitation of Yu's efforts, regal motion was achieved by following mountains and rivers, which served not only as spatial boundaries but also as energetic corridors whose normal functioning was essential for the maintenance of the *cosmos*. However, inasmuch as cosmic stability depended on the ritual agency of a third party, the normal circulation of flows and the physical integrity of the world's structural elements –mountains and rivers– rested not in themselves but in the relentless movement of the monarch. In this way, the continuous circumrotation of the king throughout the realm assured the continual circulation of energies (*qi* 氣) across mountains and rivers, hence securing the tectonic structure (*dili* 地理) and vital dynamics (*dimai* 地脈) of the world. To secure this *cosmos* was thus a matter of directing energetic flows and tracing mountain ranges (*dao3* 導). In other words, it was a matter of maintaining the geographical paths (*dao4* 道) and pneumatic channels (*mai* 脈) originally identified by Yu. These mountainous paths and channels –which formed the very structure (*li* 理) of the world– were preserved by periodically touring them in ritual journeys performed by the king, known as “tours of inspection”. Considering the sumptuousness and complexity of these territorial displacements, the king also had the option to re-create Yu's actions in an architectural replica of the *cosmos*, known as the “Luminous Hall”. Whether he toured the world itself or a replica of it, the monarch always fulfilled his ritual obligation of preserving cosmic integrity by walking (*dao4* 道). This walk was actually known as the regal way (*wang dao* 王道), an expression used by Confucians to refer to the act governing.³⁰⁵ This walk consisted in reiterating “...the survey of the

³⁰⁵ Levi (2009) p. 690.

Great Yu, whose procession throughout the empire was the equivalent of an ordering of the world”³⁰⁶, making “the course of the cosmos”³⁰⁷ visible. Regal reiteration of cosmogonic activities was the basis of the cosmic power of peripatetic rites, which were conceived as having “...a performative power (of) virtually divine status”³⁰⁸. Bearing such a crucial cosmological role through the control of cosmic ritual activities, the kingly claims for absolute power were efficiently and convincingly validated.

Therefore, the royal preservation of order depended not only on the maintenance of divisions but also on the preservation of the natural flow of energies and the structural stability of the world, inasmuch as the ultimate source of the flood was pneumatic stagnation and territorial disruption. Mountains, however, not only were the geographical sites that determined the king’s movement across space but also the preferred beneficiaries of regal sacrificial offerings. In fact, in their mountain excursions, both Yu and Shun offered sacrifices to mountains. This reveals yet another aspect of the sacral character of mountains, signaling they also served as the abode of spirits. Although this particular characteristic of mountainous regions is extensively documented in the *Shanjing*, it is also attested in the *Yugong* and the *Shundian*, which record mountains received the *lu* as well as the *wang* and *feng* types of sacrifices, respectively. This implicitly suggests they were conceived as hosting spirits, for in early China sacrifices were offered only to numinous entities.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Levi (2009) p. 690.

³⁰⁷ Levi (2009) p. 690.

³⁰⁸ Levi (2009) p. 685.

³⁰⁹ Sterckx (2006), Sterckx (2007)

Furthermore, this view is confirmed by a passage of the *Shundian* –that I have referred to above ³¹⁰ –, which asserts that various sacrifices were offered to the “multiple spirits”³¹¹ (*qun zhong* 群神) of mountains. Acknowledging and taming spirits was hence another major feature of mythical processions across mountains. It is thus unsurprising that their ritual reenactments in the “tours of inspection” performed by Shihuangdi and Wudi also included the super elaborated *feng* and *shen* sacrifices. Ritual offerings to mountains were not an imperial novelty, insofar as the Shang –as explained in the previous chapter– also offered sacrifices to mountains, granting them important cultic status. What is really new about the Warring States-early imperial treatment of mountains is the paramount importance given to them in the acquisition of numinous power and the construction of politico-religious authority. In fact, to the degree that the mythical accounts of the flood served as one of the major religio-cosmological narratives for the legitimization of imperial ascendancy, it is remarkable that ancestors played no part in it. In the *Shundian* and *Yugong* instead of ancestors, mountains and rivers, and hence the natural environment, were the most important numinous agents and the leading subjects in the tales describing the re-ordering of the world and the obtention of numinous potencies. This signals a major divergency between late Zhou and late Shang religious cultures. This difference lies not so much in the nature of mountain worship and the religious ideas which revolved around as in the degree of numinous power, ritual efficacy and politico-religious significance that was ascribed to mountains. Although the Shang worshiped mountains and rivers –comprising an important but largely overlooked, numinously powerful territorial component in their religious culture–, the most

³¹⁰ See p. 68, this chapter.

³¹¹ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 639.

accessible religious mediators in their pantheon were not features of the landscape but ancestors, with the result that regal ascendancy and religious power were ultimately grounded in the claim that the deceased relatives of the nobility –that is, royal ancestors– were the most reliable and efficient –although not necessarily the most powerful– intercessors before Shang Di, Shang’s highest deity. Texts such as the *Shundian* and the *Yugong* do not reflect this belief at all, proposing a notably divergent view of the appropriation of divine potencies and the construction of politico-religious authority. In these accounts ancestors are totally absent, and the monarch –in the form of a mythical hero such as Shun or Yu– is depicted as acquiring numinous power directly from mountains and rivers, without the need of any sort of mediator whatsoever. Furthermore, this allegation of the regal capability to directly obtain access to numinous potency was at the basis of the belief that the very existence of the world depended on the ritual action of the monarch, insofar as this stability resulted from his exclusive ability to manipulate and control the divine realm. In this way, while the Shang monarch considered possible to acquire numinous power from mountains –as seen in the ritual importance of bronzes and the exceptional cultic status of the mountain power–, it did not conceive this potency to be as readily accessible as that of ancestors, insofar as it did not share no blood lines with mountain ranges. Consequently, even though the mountain power was regarded as tremendously powerful in numinous terms, it was conceived as inevitable distant and particularly capricious, hence as difficult to tame and utilize for ritual purposes. Contrarily, to the extent that early Chinese emperors discarded the need of an ancestral intermediary to obtain divine potencies, they regarded directly acquiring it from mountains as wholly viable. Therefore, the rising cultic importance of

the mountain as a source of divine power marked a shift from ancestor to territorial worship³¹², which finds its roots in certain historical events.

This switch toward the mountain in search for religious power and political legitimacy was caused by the crisis of the late Zhou feudal system and the raise of territorial states. After the loss of Zhou's ancestral territories on the west at hands of the Quang Rong invaders³¹³ and the forced relocation of the regal capital³¹⁴, the Zhou kings began to experience a gradual lost of politico-religious legitimacy, culminating in 707 B.C, when King Huan of Zhou was wounded in battle by an arrow: "This represented more than just a physical wound; it meant that the Zhou king's status as Son of Heaven was now discredited.... (as a result) the authority of the Zhou king was no longer taken seriously; thereafter, the Zhou king merely served as nominal head of the Zhou feudal system".³¹⁵ The demise of Zhou's politico-religious authority was completed with the ultimate disintegration of the feudal system itself as a consequence of the rise of independent and self-sufficient kingdoms which grounded their authority not in terms of their affiliation to the Zhou royal house but with regard to their ability to effectively control regional territories through direct governmental management³¹⁶, which was forcibly extended to the agrarian hinterland.³¹⁷ In this way, the authority of these kingdoms was based not on kingship ties but on areal

³¹² Puett (2002) pp. 238, 257-258, Von Glahn (2004) p. 34, Lewis (2006) p. 147, Lewis (2007) pp. 185-186, Cook (2009) pp. 238, 249.

³¹³ Cook (2009) p. 244.

³¹⁴ Shaughnessy (1999) p. 350.

³¹⁵ Hsu (1999) p. 552.

³¹⁶ Bilsky (1975) pp. 14-16, 58-66, 126-146, 162-169, 183-190, 274-308, 318-324.

³¹⁷ Lewis (1999)a pp. 603-616.

domination. This socio-political change eventually reflected on religious beliefs, which went from centering on ancestor worship to focusing on the adoration of features of the landscape, such as mountains and rivers. The mythology of Yu as the tamer of the flood, the traveller of mountains, the re-orderer of the world and the guarantor of cosmic stability was intimately associated to this new type of politico-religious authority³¹⁸, serving as a narrative for its legitimization. In the construction of the mythologic-religious justification of the rising territorial state the mountain was of paramount importance as a site of sacrality and hence as a source of numinous and political power.

Conclusion

The texts explored in this chapter suggest mountains were conceived as sacred spaces during the Warring States and early imperial periods. Furthermore, they signal that the mountain, as a numinous force, was of paramount importance in the regal construction and maintenance of a comprehensive sacral spatiality and hence in the politico-religious justification of absolute imperial power. To the extent that accessing and controlling mountains' divine properties was prerequisite for controlling the territory itself, early Chinese emperors looked forward to obtain their numinous potencies by any means possible. Mountains therefore were not only numinously powerful but politically crucial, inasmuch as political authority was grounded in the access to divine powers. Accessing these powers resulted from traversing space by following mountains and offering them sacrifices. The profusion of mountains throughout the territory traversed by the king defined the sacral quality of the entire

³¹⁸ Lewis (1990) p. 169, Lewis (2009) p. 557.

Chinese realm. To repeat, the sacrality of the mountain determined the sacrality of the *Zhongguo*. In this way, the mountain was a sacred space in Eliadean terms, bearing each of the characteristics elements which composed this sacrality: order, liminality and reality.

In the first place, the mountain established the contours of a sacred space by permitting the definition of the cardinal directions (or periphery) and the center. Furthermore, the cosmological function of the mountain was both spatial and temporal, this meaning that the mountain, as geographical feature, served to organize the world both spatially and temporally, providing an absolute and unequivocal point of reference for the forging of the *cosmos*. In its spatial functionality, the mountain was the ultimate geographical landmark, an easily identifiable physical feature of the landscape that could provide effective orientation to anyone; this locative quality of the mountain was exploited for cosmological purposes by applying different numerological schemes to the Chinese landscapes and specifically to the mountains in them. The terrestrial divisions of the *Yugong* and *Shundian* in fact can be understood as resulting from the implementation of defined mathematical patterns to specific geographical spaces, in other words, they can be read as applied works on geographical numerology. That numerological schemes were used for cosmological purposes is not casual, and as Granet has explained, in Ancient China numbers were thought of as emblems and/or symbols with the power to evoke systems and organizations, numbers were understood not as isolated but as relational entities³¹⁹. Although there are different sets of mountains in the *Shangshu*, the function of the mountain as a cardinal marker remains the same. The

³¹⁹ Granet 1959 pp. 102-129.

spatial exploitation of the mountain clearly reflected a mathematical –and probably astronomical– preoccupation with the exact ordering of the space, as well as with the methodological creation of a cosmos as a perfectly ordered and perfectly balanced entity. In this way, by ordering space by means of mountains, the late Zhou and early imperial Chinese constructed their *cosmos* and asserted the sacrality of their territory.

Mountains not only defined the sacrality of territory by structuring it as a centrally located and cardinally-oriented space but also by also charging it with numinous life. In fact, besides from delineating the contours of a quadrate world they also shaped the internal numinous dynamics of this ordered space: Mountain ranges –together with rivers– served as pneumatic channels –allowing *qi* to circulate freely across the landscape– at the same time that they provided shelter to a multitude of different spirits which required regular sacrifices. Consequently, mountains made of the Chinese realm a liminal space. This liminality was construed by the presence of the spirits as well as by the regular flow of energetic fluxes and the fixation of the territory via mountains. The disruption of the liminal properties and functions of mountains hence signified the physical disintegration and structural destabilization of the world. To the extent that the maintenance of mountain liminality depended on the ritual actions of the king, the stability of the *cosmos* was an imperial prerogative achieved by continuously renewing the ritual connection with the numinous potencies of mountain ranges.

Finally, the order and liminality of the Chinese realm forged its unique ontological status, which was defined in opposition to the peripherality and profanity of the regions extending outside the squared structure of the world, beyond the four seas.

This uniqueness expressed in the two major expressions used to refer to the Chinese empire: *Zhongguo* 中国 –that is, the the “Middle Region” or “Central Country”– and *Shenzhou* 神州, i.e., the “Continent of Spirits”. According to John Lagerwey, the name “...‘continent of the spirits’ (Shenzhou), which first came into use in the third century BC, is one of the clearest statements of what China is”³²⁰. In my view, the same applies to the much more common expression *Zhongguo*, which was used interchangeably with *Shenzhou* to denote the uniqueness of the Chinese territory in terms of its centrality –and implicitly its cardinality– and with respect to its liminality, respectively.

The two pillars of this ontological singularity were constructed by mountains. As explained in the previous chapter, the ability of the mountain to consecrate space was already an important characteristic of the Shang pantheon, which also presented a preoccupation for order and liminality. However, whereas the numinous quality of the mountain was implied in the careful sacrificial treatment Shang offered to mountains as well as in the important position they granted them in their pantheon, it was explicitly articulated and further elaborated during the late Zhou and early imperial periods when it acquired unprecedented importance religious with the notorious cosmological role which was granted to mountains. The cultic rise of the mountain was a consequence of the fall of the Zhou ancestors as effective and legitimate mediations before the heavenly realm. Confronted with the challenge of having to justify a new type of political authority which excluded kinship ties as persuasive legitimizing mechanisms, the Warring States, Qin and Han monarchs resorted to the until then overlooked territorial element of Bronze Age religious

³²⁰ Lagerwey (2010) p. 14.

culture, the mountain, in search for numinous power and political legitimacy. The novel religio-political focus on the mountain and other forms of territorial units –such as rivers and seas– implied a preoccupation for the local which was brilliantly enunciated in the *Shanjing* section of the *Shanhaijing*, a text that will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three:

Liminality and strangeness in the *Shanjing* 山經

Besides from the *Shundian*, *Yaodian* and *Yugong* chapters of the *Shangshu*, the other text which portrays the numinous quality and the cosmological function of the mountain is the *Shanhajing* 山海經, usually translated as the "Classic of Mountains and Seas"³²¹ but most precisely rendered as "Itineraries through Mountains and Seas".³²² This classic is divided in two major books, the *Shanjing* 山經 ("Itineraries through Mountains") and the *Hajing* 海經 ("Itineraries through Seas"). The following analysis shall focus on the first five *jing* 經 ("books" or "itineraries"), which correspond to the earliest part of the text, dated to the third century BC.³²³

The *Shanjing*, which I shall refer simply as *Sj*, is probably one of the richest sources for the study of mountains in Ancient China and the most commonly used for this purpose. Bearing a similar textual structure to the *Yugong*, the *Sj* is organized as a description of various mountain chains, with the difference that in the *Sj* the number of mountains listed is greater and their descriptions are more detailed. Therefore, if in

³²¹ As in Birrell (1999)

³²² As in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (2007) and Strassberg (2002), although Strassberg prefers the term "guideways".

³²³ Birrell (1999) p. xv, Fracasso (1993) pp. 359-361, Company (1996) p. 34 & Lagerwey (2010) p. 13. The first five books (*jing*), known as the *Wuzangshanjing* 五藏山經 ("The Five Treasures of Itineraries through Mountains") are generally regarded as being of late Zhou/Warring State composition. Also see Poo (1998) p. 95, Bujard (2009) p. 788.

the *Tributes* mountains chains are simply listed in brief entries consisting of a few characters, in the *Sj* each mountain range is ascribed an entire chapter of the book, consisting of dozens of characters. In this way, the *Itineraries through Mountains* consists of five books, with each book corresponding to one of the five cardinal directions: south, west, north, east and center; twentyfour chapters corresponding to twentyfour different mountain chains; and 447 entries corresponding to 447 mountains. Finally, each entry consists of a description of a specific mountain's flora, fauna, minerals, rivers (sources) and spirits.

Therefore, the *Sj* offers particularly abundant information pertaining to mountains and a wide range of topics related to them. No other early Chinese source which refers to mountains present such a specific level of detail and, consequently, it might be said that the *Sj* could serve as the ultimate reference for those looking to obtain an accurate picture of the way in which the early Chinese thought of mountainous formations. In fact, the *Sj* introduces us to a much more complex and complete picture of the mountain than any other text of the period, certainly richer than that the one offered by the *Yugong*, the other major source for the subject.

As I have suggested, the *Sj* present various similarities with the *Yugong*, having a similar textual/cosmological format. However, while in the *Yugong* the sacrality and centrality of the mountain is largely implied in the narrative structure of the text, in the *Sj* these features are highlighted and constitute essential parts of the text. In the *Sj*, the cosmogonical and cosmological functions of the mountain are preserved, and the world is still constructed and organized around mountains, with rivers and seas as constitutive elements of second order; with rivers still being born in mountains and

seas still serving as the bordering areas of the world. However, what is truly different about the *Sj* is not so much the quantity of data that it provides as much as the nature of this data and how it relates to the numinous quality of the mountain. In other words, the *Sj* focus not only in the cosmological function of the mountain but also, and most importantly, in the numerous constitutive elements of its sacrality and the varied expressions of its numinous condition, explaining in detail the various manners in which the sacrality of the mountain was conveyed. Moreover, this sacrality is revealed not only in the structure of the world and its constitutive elements but also in the properties of such elements and the characteristics of such structure. In this manner, it is the very structure and numinous content of the world which is defined and constructed by mountains, their spatial dispositions as well as the entities they contained.

In the previous chapter, inspired on Eliade's insights on the subject, I have explained that the mountain was considered to be sacred as soon as it permitted the numinous, the divine to express itself in the world through a specific spatial and temporal order, which took place only because the mountain served as an unequivocal point of reference in both temporal and spatial terms. In this manner, the mountain was responsible for the generation of the *cosmos* as an ordered world and this responsibility granted it sacrality. Nevertheless, just as the sacral quality of the mountain manifested in its capacity to order the world and provide the numinous realm with a spatial-temporal frame, it also did in the different objects and beings which populated mountainous formations, all of which exhibited a liminal constitution indicative of sacrality.

In fact, in the *Sj* both the objects -such as stones minerals, plants and fruits- and the subjects -such as animals, deities and other bizarre creatures- located in mountains have supra-human, "miraculous" abilities and powers, having the capacity to cure, to make ill, to provide someone with numerous grandchildren, to prevent someone from having descendants, to prevent or cause catastrophes, to grant peace to the world and to bless, heal, protect, kill or harm in general. These "magical properties" of things inhabiting mountains are recognizable in almost all passages of the *Sj*. In order to illustrate the prevalence of this theme as well as the overall structure of the text itself, I shall proceed to quote certain passages which content I consider to be specially relevant for the purpose of understanding the particular characteristics of the things that inhabited mountains (special attention should be given to the lines that I have highlighted in cursive):

"Three hundred leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Robustnavel. There are no plants or trees in its summit, but quantities of *gold* and *jade*. There is a great amount of water on its lower slopes. The River Fleaforest rises here and flows southeast to empty into the Great River. The River Plump rises here and flows south to empty into the River Bed. The River Plump contains *plump-remains snakes*"³²⁴

"Three hundred and seventy leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Notround. To the north it looks on Mount Allnavel and overlooks Mount Peakworship; to the east it looks on Glaze Marsh, which is where the waters of the Great River run a hidden course; its source shoots out a noisy bubbling. There are excellent fruit trees on this mountain. Their Fruit is *like a peach; their leaves are like the jujube's*, and they have yellow blossom with a scarlet calyx. *If you eat some, you won't feel tired out*"³²⁵

"A hundred and eighty leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Greattool. The River View rises here and flows west to empty into Flowing Sands. The River View contains numerous patterned flying-fish which look

³²⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 47

³²⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 21

like carp. They have a fish body but a bird's wings; they have bright blue markings and a white head with scarlet mouth. These flying fish often travel to the West Sea and sport in the East Sea. They fly by night. They make noise like a *Wonderbird chicken*. They have a sweet-and-sour taste. If you eat some, it will cure madness. *Whenever it appears, there will be bumper harvest over all under sky*"³²⁶

"Three hundred and sixty leagues to the southwest is a mountain called Mount Hiddenabyss. Cinnabar trees are numerous on its summit. Their leaves are like the paper mulberry; their fruits is as large as a gourd, and they have a scarlet calyx with black veins. If you eat it, it will cure jaundice, and its effective against fire. Turtles are plentiful on its south face, and jade is abundant on its north face. The River Reed rises here and flows west to empty into the sea. In this river are *many fine and coarse whetstones*. There is an animal on this mountain. In appearance, it has a *horse's body with bird wings ; it has a human (face?) and a serpent's tail*. It enjoys giving humans a lift. Its name is the which-lake. There is a bird here which looks like an owl and it has a human face, a monkey's body, and a dog's tail. Its name comes from its call: *Wherever it appears, that town will have a sever drought*"³²⁷

"Two hundred leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Tallyhonour. Palm and wild plum trees are numerous on its summit, and there are quantities of *gold* and *jade* on its lower slopes. The deity Longriver Doubt lives here. This mountain is a place where *frequent rainstorms, winds, and clouds come from*"³²⁸

"A hundred and eighty leagues further north is a mountain called Mount Muddledusk. It has no grass or trees, but quantities of *copper* and *jade*. The river Hubbub rises here and flows west to empty into the sea. There is a *snake with one head and two bodies* on this mountain. Its name is the plump-remains. *Wherever it appears, that kingdom will have a major drought.*"³²⁹

Although these few passages are far from being comprehensive in their scope, they do serve to illustrate some of the most outstanding features of mountainous entities.

³²⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 22

³²⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 31

³²⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 25

³²⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 41

An initial observation would be that, with the exception of minerals, all mountainous entities are living beings such as fruits, plants, trees, animals and deities. Another important aspect is that this flora and fauna is characterized as "powerful" in the measure in which possesses exceptional abilities that manifest themselves either as a consequence of their human consumption, observation or wearing. As mentioned above, these powers are either beneficial or harmful in terms of their effects on humans. In relation to this it should be noted that since the *Sj* is particularly preoccupied with the effects these entities have on humans, with their respective properties being defined in such terms, it is in consequence a remarkably functionalist text, considering worthy of mention and classification only those things which somehow relate to humans whether in medicinal, spiritual/ritual or agricultural terms, among several other subjects. In other words, the spiritual world of the *Sj* has been constructed almost in exclusive reference to the spiritual and ritual necessities of early Chinese society. More specifically, the *Sj* appears to reflect the preoccupation of a distinctive type of ritual specialists, which are usually the ones responsible for satisfying these types of needs in any given society.

In fact, most of the descriptions in the *Sj* give the impression of having been written from the point of view of a ritual specialist preoccupied with the medicinal properties of plants, the harmful effects of certain animals, the characteristics of deities, the proper ritual ways to address them and generally concerned with the numinous properties of natural phenomena and the peculiarities of the spiritual world at a local level. All of these religious concerns usually belong to popular religion, the fact the *Sj* contains them grants the text a character which stands in striking contrast to the elitist religious preoccupations of the *Shundian* and the *Yugong*. The origin and

nature of these notorious differences are rather complicated issues that I shall explore at the end of this chapter. Now it will suffice to mention that the fact the *Sj* bears preoccupations natural to popular religiosity might indicate the text was either written by religious specialists knowledgeable on popular religion or compiled by literati based on knowledge gathered by local religious specialists. The second alternative is most likely since in a traditional society as that of Ancient China, where literacy was almost entirely restricted to government and administration, religious specialists functioning in farm villages and the like were often illiterate and rarely resorted to written sources as devices for the storage and transmission of ritual knowledge, replacing this with oral transmission. In this way, it is plausible the *Sj* was born as the result of some group of literate ritual specialists writing down an oral tradition belonging to illiterate ritual technicians. As I shall explain later on, the characteristic bizarreness of the *Sj* might have been rooted in the technical and ritual origin of its content.

Furthermore, the bizarreness of mountainous entities in the *Sj* served to communicate the sacrality of the mountain in a distinctive manner. By way of the supernatural qualities and special powers of mountainous creatures, which bore both positive and negative effects on human beings, the liminal nature of mountainous regions was conveyed. In fact, the presence of bizarre entities and their magical properties constitutes one of the most notorious attributes of the *Sj*, specially when compared to the *Yugong*. Whereas the *Tributes* merely describes the mountain in cosmological terms, the *Sj* has the particularity of offering a more complex picture of the mountain's sacral spatiality, which is revealed not only by virtue of its cosmological function, but also, and most importantly, by means of liminal quality, as

expressed in the different creatures which populate it. In this way, in the *Sj*, plants, animals, trees, minerals and deities function as the most effective means to convey the sacrality of the mountain, which is portrayed as a space where "... the supernatural is indissolubly connected with the natural... (and) nature (is) always expressing something that transcends it".³³⁰ That the strangeness of the mountainous fauna and flora added to the mountain's cosmological function as a characteristic indicative of sacrality is very clear from the very narrative structure of the text. As is easily observable in the different passages I have just quoted above, the standard structure of a *Sj* paragraph includes, in the first place, the name and the geographical location of the mountain and, in the second place, a description of its minerals, animals, plants and trees, as well as their properties. I interpret this narrative structure as reflecting the two major aspects of the mountain's sacrality: Whereas the first part, implied by the information on the mountain's geographical location, addresses the cosmological component (order and orientation) of the mountain, the second part, illustrated by the description of varied mountainous entities, refers to its liminal constituent. In this way, a standard *Sj* entry conveys the sacrality of the mountain by depicting it as an ordered and a liminal space.

However, out of these two components of the mountain's sacrality, the cosmological one had a primordial position, preceding over the liminal one. There was, certainly, a logical reason for this: For narrative purposes, before it described a mountain, the text had first to locate it. However, the primacy of the cosmological function of the mountain over its liminal quality was also grounded on the very ontological structure of the world. To explain, before defining the contents of the *cosmos*, the mountain

³³⁰ Eliade (1957) p. 118.

had first to create it. As explained in the previous chapter, the sacrality of a space was given by its ability to grant order and orientation in the landscape. In order to be sacred, a space had first to be ordered. And, as I have described above, to order the space was precisely what Yu did with landscape. Furthermore, he achieved this by means of mountains. Therefore, insofar as the very existence of space rested on the mountain's capacity to accomplish order in the landscape, the cosmological ability of the mountain necessarily preceded over its liminal quality. To repeat, the mountain defined not only its own sacrality but also that of the territory itself. In this manner, order and orientation shaped the first dimension of the sacred character of the mountain and the territory. There was, however, a second dimension of this sacrality which was characterized by liminality, and that manifested in a variety of extraordinary plants, creatures and minerals. This dimension revealed that the mountain, as a sacred space, was not an empty container. It was a sphere that also had contents; and contents with properties that were unique because they were not from this world but from that other world of the numinous. Accordingly, the very structure of a *Sj* entry revealed the two most fundamental ontological dimensions of reality and introduced the two most distinctive functions of the mountain, explaining the mountainous capacity to connect the heavenly with the earthly as depending on two modalities: on the one hand, in the capacity to order the world and forge *cosmos* and, on the other hand, to provide access to (or to channel) numinous power through different beings and objects. These two forms were nothing but the two faces of one coin. This coin was the mountain as a site of sacrality.

When referring to the secondary aspect of the mountain I have just used the verb "to provide" in reference to what the mountain does with "numinous power". I have used

it in this way because I believe this verb captures what defines the secondary function of the mountain, that is, the channeling of "spiritual powers". In fact, the role of the mountain, as I have suggested above, is not only to convey territorial patterns, structures and relations but also to contain numinous substances and properties. In other words, the geographical existence of mountains and the spatial relation between them is only one of the ways in which the numinous realm manifests in the world, the other major way in which it does this consists in serving as abode for creatures with unusual appearances and extraordinary powers. The point here is that is not through the mountain itself but through these different animals, plants and minerals which it houses that the ultimate character of mountain numinosity is revealed. In my view, the fact that the entities located in mountains are commonly defined as "strange" (*yi* 異, *guai* 怪)³³¹ is indicative of the fact that they are understood as being foreign to this world and therefore as having a heavenly origin. However, these entities are not entirely heavenly, they are rather a mixture of numinous and terrestrial elements just at the mountain itself. This is why the

³³¹ In the *Sj* two characters are used to convey "strange" or "strangeness": *yi* 異 and *guai* 怪. Whereas *yi* appears in only one occasion in the *Sj* and two in the *Haijing*, *guai* has twenty one occurrences. Birrell has translated *yi* as "different" or "unusual", and *guai* variously as "weird", "strange" and "curious". However, both terms can be rendered as "strange" or "anomalous" according to Company (1996). These characters are always used in reference to a subject, whether animate or inanimate. For example, *yi* is used twice in relation to a "creature" or "entity" as in *yiwu* 異物 ("strange creature") and *wuyixing* 物異形 ("strange-looking creature"). Similarly, *guai* is employed in allusion to birds (*guainiao* 怪鳥), serpents (*guaishe* 怪蛇), insects (*guaichong* 怪蟲), animals (*guaishou* 怪獸), trees (怪木), rain (*guaiyu* 怪雨), stones (*guidan* 怪石) and deities (*guaishen* 怪神). For occurrences of these characters in the original text see <http://ctext.org/shan-hai-jing?searchu=怪> and <http://ctext.org/shan-hai-jing?searchu=異>. For translations see Birrell (1999) pp. 3,4, 22, 24, 25, 44, 75, 81, 89, 100, 101, 102, 105, 146, 261 & Company (1996) p. 28. n. 14.

strangeness of mountainous entities is less related to a pure celestial condition than to a liminal quality. Simply put, the eccentric character of mountainous plants, animals, minerals and spirits is not merely a consequence of their divine origin but rather a result of the fact that even while they are not from this world they are able to exist in it through/in the mountain; it is the mountain, and only the mountain which is able to do this: to serve as a space where "extraterrestrial" creatures can abide in terrestrial conditions.

Strangeness, therefore, is a consequence of liminality, which in turn is a characteristic of sacrality. In the previous chapter I have already explained the relationship existing between sacrality and liminality, asserting that all sacred places are liminal because they are able to communicate the earthly with the heavenly realms. While this analogy is easily understandable from what I have said about the *Yugong*, that between sacrality and strangeness is, in an initial reading, not so much, deserving further clarification. In the *Sj*, the bizarre aspects and extraordinary properties of the various mountainous entities were indicative of sacrality inasmuch as they variously depicted liminality. To explain, the text introduced a novel association between sacrality, strangeness and mountains, which was grounded in an effort to figuratively express the liminality of the mountain by means of bizarre entities. This bizarreness suggests that the *Sj* preserved the Shang understanding of the sacred realm -and of mountains, being sacred spaces- as being inherently strange and bizarre.³³² Furthermore, as I have suggested before, it is remarkable that is impossible to find this sort of correlation in the *Yugong*. A subject that I shall

³³² In Shang religious culture, this strangeness was communicated through the unusual, dualistic and liminal designs of bronze vessels. See chapter 1.

discuss in the following pages, as it seems to be the result of specific historical circumstances. Subsequently, I shall explicate the relation between the mountain as a sacred space, the claim for exclusive access to mountainous regions and the construction of political and sociological legitimation for the Ancient Chinese elites.

That in the *Sj* that which is sacred is thought of as bizarre is explicitly stated in the prologue of Book Six, which while referring to “all this Earth contains” (*di zhi suo zai* 地之所載), assures that

“From divine spirits its born, its creatures having strange appearances”³³³

In view of this passage, it is quite clear that for the authors of the *Sj* numinous entities (*shen ling* 神靈) were known for engendering “strange-looking creatures” (*wu yi xing* 物異形). Although this particular passage does not belong strictly to the *Sj*, which extends until Book Five of the Classic, the description it provides perfectly applies to the entirety of the book, including its first part, dedicated to mountains. Anomaly is, in

³³³ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Birrell (1999) and Strasberg (2002) as references. The passage is particularly difficult and open to interpretation. To illustrate this compare the following renditions: "Things possessing anomalous forms are those born with divine natures" [Strasberg (2002) p. 31] or "All creatures that are born from the deities and the spirits have their different forms" [Birrell (1999) p. 105]. The problem I have recognized in these translations is that they assume the subject of the sentence is the “strange-looking creature” (物異形) to which the passage alludes to. This assumption, however, is mistaken, inasmuch as the ultimate subject of the entire passage –which is a little longer than this– is not the creature (or creatures) but “all which earth contains”, that is, *di zhi suo zai* 地之所載, the expression which opens the epilogue of the sixth book of the *Shj*, which serves as a brief description of the whole world, including its divine spirits (*shen ling* 神靈) and their appearances (*xing* 形). Original text is *shen ling suo sheng qi wu yi xing* 神靈所生其物異形. Available at <http://ctext.org/shan-hai-jing/hai-wai-nan-jing>.

fact, a general characteristic of the different creatures in the *Sj*. As I have asserted before and as the above-quoted passage suggest, this eccentricity expresses variously throughout the different creatures, plants, trees and spirits which populated mountainous regions. Furthermore, one main feature is particularly prevalent among them; that is hybridity.

Most of the entities in the *Sj* are indeed hybrids, this meaning that they are composites of two or more entities. Examples of hybridity are copious throughout the Classic of Mountains, I shall quote a few. Some of the following have already been quoted above, nonetheless I rather recall them here for explicative purposes:

"There is a tree on this mountain which looks like *the paper mulberry tree*, but it has scarlet veins and its sap is like lacquer and has a sweetish taste. If you eat some of it, you won't starve, and it can relieve exhaustion from hard work. Its name is the white perilla. It can be used to make jade a blood-veined color"³³⁴

"The River View contains numerous *patterned flying-fish* which look like carp. They have a fish body but a bird's wings; they have bright blue markings and a white head with scarlet mouth... They make a noise like a Wonderbird chicken. They have a sweet-and-sour taste. If you eat some, it will cure madness "³³⁵

"*Cinnabar trees* are numerous on its summit. Their leaves are like the paper mulberry; their fruits is as large as a gourd, and they have a scarlet calyx with black veins. If you eat it, it will cure jaundice, and its effective against fire"³³⁶

³³⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 9

³³⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 22

³³⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 31

"There is a *bird here which looks like an owl and it has a human face, a monkey's body, and a dog's tail...* Wherever it appears, that town will have a sever drought"³³⁷

"There is a *snake with one head and two bodies* on this mountain. Its name is the plump-remains. Wherever it appears, that kingdom will have a major drought."³³⁸

"The River Tailbanner contains numerous *quick-horses*; they have an ox's tail, a white body and a single horn. They make a noise like someone calling"³³⁹

"The River Lapping contains numerous *pearl-turtle fish*, which look like dried meat strips but they have eyes and their six feet bear pearls. They taste sweet-and-sour. If you eat some, you won't have boils"³⁴⁰

"The deities of these mountains all have a dragon's body and a human face"³⁴¹

"The deities of these mountains who have the appearance of a hog's body and a human face... the other deities all have the appearance of a hog's body and they wear a jade on their head... the remaining deities all have the appearance of a hog's body with eight feet and a serpent's tail"³⁴²

"The deities of these mountains have the appearance of a human body and a dragon's head"³⁴³

"The deities of these mountains have the appearance of an animal's body and a human face, and they wear antlers on their head"³⁴⁴

"The deities of these mountains have the appearance of a human body and a ram's horns"³⁴⁵

³³⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 31

³³⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 41

³³⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 43

³⁴⁰ Birrell (1999), p. 58

³⁴¹ Birrell (1999), p. 10

³⁴² Birrell (1999), p. 52

³⁴³ Birrell (1999), p. 57

³⁴⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 59

³⁴⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 62

"...mountain called Mount Stonebrittle... its plants are mostly dwarf allium which look like garlic but have white flowers and black fruit. If you eat it, it is effective for itching"³⁴⁶

"... mountain called Mount Bamboo.... There is a plant here named the yellow-heron, which looks like ailanthus. Its leaves are like hemp, and it has white flowers and red fruit which look like bloodstone. If you bath with it it cures itching and it is effective against swellings"³⁴⁷

"...mountain called Mount Littleblossom ...Among the plants on this mountains is the dwarf figtree which looks like rockfern, but it grows over rocks and it also grows up trees. If you eat it, it will cure pains of the heart"³⁴⁸

"... mountain called Mount Tallyape... The plants on this mountain are mostly dwarf allium variety, which looks like a mallow, but has scarlet flowers and yellow fruit which looks like a bay's tongue. Eating it prevents people from suffering from delusions"³⁴⁹

"... mountain called Mount Float.... There is a plant on this mountain named the incense-herb. It has hemp leaves and square stalk with scarlet flowers and black fruit. It has an aroma like the scent-herb. If you wear it in your belt, it is effective for sores"³⁵⁰

It is possible to deduce from these passages, that hybridity was a common attribute of trees, plants, animals and deities. All of these extraordinary mountainous entities were composed of two or more ordinary entities. In such manner, the mountain's bizarre animals resulted from a blend of body parts from different animals or also from a mixture between animal and human parts. Something similar occurred with mountain deities, which were commonly formed of a human face and an animal body.

³⁴⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 14

³⁴⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 14

³⁴⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 13

³⁴⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 13

³⁵⁰ Birrell (1999), p. 15

Mountainous trees and plants, on the other hand, also comprised parts from different trees or plants. Consequently, each type of bizarre entity originated from the combination of different parts of a specific type of ordinary entity. It is noteworthy that human elements were never totally excluded from these combinations and therefore from the very constitution of the sacred realm; the fact that they are included indicates that humanity was also an integral component of sacrality in the *Sj*, something which is consistent with the overall liminal character of the this realm. Interestingly, mountain deities were the ones which included more human parts, while animals, plants and trees did not include them. More importantly, if we consider humanity to be indicative of "the profane" and animality of "the divine", then deities, as composites of human and animal parts, corporeally displayed the liminal nature of the sacred realm. Something similar occurred with mountainous animals, plants and trees, all of which were physically constructed from "ordinary elements", and in this way, their extraordinary/sacred forms were modeled from ordinary/profane parts; hence their physical constitutions were essentially liminal, expressing the transitional character of mountains. Finally, the freakish appearances of mountain animals, plants, trees and deities were typically alien, and even though they were made from elements which were to be found in our world, the manner in which they were arranged was decidedly bizarre and otherworldly. In this way, one of the main characteristics of hybridity was that of being aesthetically grotesque. Hybrids creatures were remarkable because their appearances were utterly strange. This condition of strangeness was by no means casual and it also related to liminality, and hence to sacrality.

Studies on hybridity in early Chinese religion are few, however they offer varied perspectives, corresponding to rather different approaches, as aesthetics, mythology, artistic technique and elaboration process, regionalism –affiliation to southern early Chinese culture– and historical origin –connections to Shang religiosity. Of these different inquiries, the most systematic attempt is owed to Robert F. Campany. In his book *Strange Writing*, based on the *Shj* and other similar Ancient and early Medieval texts, he refers to hybridity as one of the forms belonging to the "taxonomy of anomaly".³⁵¹ Campany speaks of how anomaly is defined by the stretching, straddling and crossing of boundaries.³⁵² In reference to the analysis just developed, I not only judge Campany to be right in defining mountainous anomaly, and more specifically mountainous hybridity, in these terms but also consider that his definition finely complements to the Eliadean understanding of sacrality which I have adopted and developed here. Indeed, Campany's boundaries are not too different from Eliade's conception of sacrality as a limit or a portal, that is, as a space defined by the convergence between the heavenly and terrestrial realms, which I have referred to here as "liminality". Actually, from an Eliadean perspective, insofar as the *Sj* was a text concerned with sacrality, it was necessarily a text about boundaries and how these could be trespassed, stretched and straddled. Consequently, it should not surprise us that Campany defines hybridity in particular, and anomaly in general, precisely in these terms. When Campany systematizes and categorizes the different possible "crossings" between those boundaries he is actually defining in terms of liminality the various modes in which sacrality is expressed in the type of texts that the *Sj* belongs to, a genre that he defines as characterized by multiple and

³⁵¹ Campany (1996) pp. 237- 248, *passim*.

³⁵² Campany (1996) p. 245.

continuous references to the realm of the strange. My own analysis of the mountain and its entities is framed in this same scheme and is very much indebted to Eliade's insights on the subject. To a certain extent what I attempt in this chapter is to apply a combination of these two complementary approaches to the analysis of the *Sj*. Persuaded by Campany I understand the text as one concerned with strangeness; and inspired by Eliade I read it as a text preoccupied with liminality. Integrating these views I argue that in the *Sj* "the sacred" was understood as "the strange". This argument however is not completed merely by combining the two aforementioned approaches, as I follow my own logical procedures to support this assertion. The point of convergence I ponder to exist between strangeness and sacrality –and hence between Campany's and Eliade's arguments– is liminality, which is conveyed through hybridity.

Hybridity, in fact, was not a phenomenon exclusive to the *Sj* but a general characteristic of early Chinese religion which has been studied by only a few scholars across the years. Apart from the *Shj*, which is probably the best source for the study of the subject in Early China, other sources are the drawings of the Chu Silk Manuscript, the decorative figures in certain tombs of the famous Mawangdui archaeological site, sculptures and other artistic creations of the southern reign of Chu, as well as the artistic decorations on Shang bronze vessels, which I have described on chapter one. For a long time, scholars have been intrigued by the fact that most of these sources, including Shang bronze vessel decor and the *Sj* entities, have a connection with the Warring States, southern kingdom of Chu, with some arguing the existence of a contact between this reign and the ancient dynasty, a contact which might have been not only artistic but also historical and cultural. This

thesis, however, is controversial. What is definitely clear is that the abovementioned drawings, decorative figures and sculptures were creations of Chu. Furthermore, all these artistic works depict composite, bizarre-looking creatures that resemble those described in the *Sj*. These similarities are so striking that some scholars have suggested the entities from the Chu Silk Manuscript are actual graphic representations of such creatures. Regardless of the accuracy of such statement, this manuscript, indeed contain representations of creatures quite similar to those described in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, showing entities of human-like shapes with squared or multiple heads, several extremities, hooves and antlers and also beings whose bodies are so weirdly shaped that are almost impossible to define, even in terms of combinations of different animal parts. Chu sculptures, for their part, are equally bizarre, depicting long creatures, situated on a pedestal, with reptilian, human or undefined looks, huge antlers and large, overhanging tongues³⁵³. Finally, Mawangdui tomb decoration illustrates a series of dragons engaged in human activities as hunting (with bows, spears or bare hand) and horse-riding.

These different artistic representations are not exactly like the descriptions in the *Sj*. However, they share several characteristics with them. In first place, all the creatures I have briefly described are hybrids, resulting from combinations of different elements, some of which are not as readily identifiable as in the *Sj* but most

³⁵³ The Warring State understanding of sacrality as defined by strangeness might find its origin in the Shang dynasty. For example, of the Chu sculptures I have briefly described above, John Major says that "...these figures also obviously to some extent represent three-dimensional treatments of the taotie figure of bronze decor: large, vacuous eyes, horns, antlers, tiny, grasping arms, fiercely fanged upper jaws. The difference is that they are treated in the round and provided with lower jaws and lower bodies. But they clearly derive from the same symbolic representational system". Major (1999) pp. 132-133.

resembling animal and human parts. In second place, these creatures are openly bizarre, having utterly abnormal shapes and looks, some of them being particularly intimidating, although not necessarily malevolent³⁵⁴. Moreover, some are even more bizarre than the ones described in the *Sj*, possibly because drawing offers more possibilities for the expression of strangeness than writing. In fact, graphic representations seem to have been a better platform than written descriptions for the characterization of bizarreness, as this seems to have been the preoccupation behind these works of art.

The emphasis given to abnormality in the composition of these artistic objects, combined with the fact that they seem to have been used for religious purposes, directly relate them not only with the aesthetics of the *Sj* but also with the functionality behind this aesthetic, that is, conveying the nature of sacrality. If *Sj* creatures are strange, then the ones from these other sources are even more. The preoccupation behind these efforts to create singularly strange-looking beings is, however, always religious in nature, to the extent that formats may change but the religious intentionality remains the same. The importance of strangeness is such that some of these creatures can hardly be defined as combinations of known "normal" beings, many of them being completely unrelated to something actually existing in our world. In the case of these artistic objects, therefore, extreme monstrosity displaces hybridity in the efforts to convey strangeness as connotative of sacrality. On the other hand, the accent on bizarreness seems to be related to an interest in efficiently conveying liminality, since although these creatures appear to be from somewhere outside this world they still exist in it, just as any other living creature which inhabits a

³⁵⁴ Major (1999) p. 128

mountain. Nevertheless, in the case of the Mawangdui tomb drawings liminality, and hence sacrality, is communicated in a way that is much more similar to the *Sj* in that the figure of a dragon, while is clearly a celestial creature still performs human activities,. Moreover, it does so with grace and playful spirit.

The fact that hybridity and, most importantly, strangeness are to be found in several sources besides the *Sj* seems to indicate that these characteristics were prevalent in the representation of sacrality in early China, and that the early Chinese –particularly during the Warring States and early imperial periods– thought of deities and supernatural entities as grotesque beings.³⁵⁵ Consequently, the "symbolics of the strange" were not exclusive to the *Sj* but rather a general rhetorical and graphical method for the representation of the sacred realm. Acknowledging this implies recognizing that the *Sj* participated in a common language for referring to religious affairs, in which hybridity was just one of the means by which this was achieved. On the other hand, accomplishing this was mostly a matter of creating a certain aesthetic experience, an experience characterized by bizarreness and for which different formats were used. In the written format hybridity was particularly useful for achieving this effect. However in more visual formats the evocation of hybrid entities sometimes felt short and even more strange designs were used in order to attain the desired effect. Hybridity hence was functional and meaningful only in reference to strangeness, and as soon as it failed to reflect it, it was discarded. In the light of this, the preeminence of hybridity in the *Sj* should be understood as part of a general

³⁵⁵ This conception of the numinous world as characterized by bizarreness –and hybridity in particular– was mostly confined to popular religious culture, although in the southern reign of Chu appear to have permeated elite religiosity. See Major (1978), Harper (1985), Poo (1998) pp. 53-62, Major (1999), Von Glahn (2004) pp. 78-97 & Lewis (2006)a pp. 289-290.

effort to aesthetically communicate strangeness. Insofar as strangeness was characterized by hybridity –hence liminality– and it was equated with sacrality, this effort was also an attempt to convey the sacred realm in terms of liminality.

In the *Sj* hence the sacred was conveyed through various modalities, these modalities were the variations of the strange –expressed in the different types of hybridity– and were rooted in the multiplicity of the liminal. Mountainous entities were nothing but the varied forms in which the limits between the numinous and the terrestrial could be crossed, each of them embodying a specific transgression of these limits. Out of these crossings, hybridity was the most common. The profusion of hybrid creatures in mountainous regions suggests that it was understood in liminal terms, as a portal, a door and a threshold between the heavenly and terrestrial spheres. This understanding of sacrality as defined by liminality, which expresses through hybridity and strangeness, can be traced back to the bizarre decorations of the Shang bronze vessels, and the *Sj* appears to have preserved this conception.³⁵⁶In this late Warring State text, however, strangeness was conveyed textually and figuratively rather than structurally and aesthetically, not by means of the forms and shapes of forged metal but through their bizarre appearances. In this way, the hybrid character of mountainous entities conveyed sacrality through liminality. Mark Edward Lewis has already signaled this, asserting that the “... theme of hybridization is crucial to the significance of the mountain as a sacred zone, for it is the physical embodiment of the liminal status that is the key to the mountain’s power”³⁵⁷. However, in the *Sj* liminality was suggested not only by means of hybridity,

³⁵⁶ See chapter one.

³⁵⁷ Lewis (2006)a p. 290.

as bizarre beings were foreign to this world also in terms of their properties. Mountainous entities were strange not only because they had unusual aspects but also since they possessed extraordinary properties. These unusual abilities connoted the transitional character of the mountain in a particular manner.

In fact, as it is inferable from the passages quoted above (pp. 87-89), not only the appearances but also the peculiar properties of mountainous creatures -which often consisted of curative powers that manifested themselves only when the entity was eaten, worn or observed by humans- were indicative of their liminality, inasmuch as these powers were exclusive to mountainous entities, besides being incredibly effective and tremendously versatile, as demonstrated by their ability to deal with a wide range of issues, from preventing fires, through curing boils or madness, to causing droughts and alleviating delusions, sores, swellings, itching and even "pains of the heart". I interpret these curing abilities to be indicative of the mountainous entities's capacity to successfully channel numinous power, and ponder their exceptional effectivity and versatility as indicating that such exceptional properties originated from the numinous realm, defining the sacral character of mountainous spaces. Therefore, both of the bizarre looks and the supernatural properties of mountain entities had the capacity to suggest an "otherworldly quality", this quality, however, was expressed in worldly forms. Ultimately, the liminal nature of mountainous entities was rooted in that besides the fact their semblances and properties were wholly otherworldly, they still existed in this world by inhabiting the mountain. Liminality, in this way, was conveyed structurally -in the form of composite corporeal entities-, aesthetically -through the creation of uniquely abnormal semblances and phenomenologically -by way of their supernatural properties.

Among mountainous entities, the only ones whose liminality (sacrality) was not conveyed neither physically, aesthetically nor phenomenologically were minerals and stones. These entities are the only ones the *Sj* does not describe as having special properties or powers. In contrast to plants, animals and deities, mountainous minerals/stones were not compounds of ordinary minerals/stones; they were just regular minerals/stones without special properties. The apparent normality of these objects, however, stands in opposition to the striking eccentricity of the other mountainous entities, and in a first examination is hard to see in which specific way stones and minerals participated of the "symbolics of the strange" which is so prevalent in the text. The very presence of these objects in the mountain, however, unequivocally denotes that they were strange. Considering that hybridity is a phenomena mainly based on bizarre aesthetics and properties whose primary function is that of expressing the transitional character of mountainous creatures, as well as the sacred nature of the mountain itself, the fact that both minerals and stones lacked from this abnormality while still inhabiting mountains, lead us to the question of how specifically they were thought of as strange and/or if they were conceived as hybrids of some kind themselves, that is, as objects which simultaneously reflected and constituted the liminal character of the mountain as a sacred space. In answering this I would like to recall that already for the Shang people minerals, and specifically the ones used to forge bronze, were conceived as possessing a liminal capacity. In chapter one I have referred to this and interpreted it according to the Eliadean framework as connoting liminality. The occurrence of minerals in the fantastic mountains described in the *Sj* suggests that the understanding of minerals as possessing the capacity to host numinous forces

continued during the Warring State. Actually, that minerals and stones –such as iron, copper, silver, gold, jade and cinnabar, among others– were conceived as strange and transcendental is plausibly deductible from some of the information that the *Sj* itself provides regarding minerals (metals) and semi-precious stones. Nonetheless, the text contents itself with simply mentioning them in a rather formulaic manner:

“Five hundred leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Stagcry. It has no plants or trees, but *a great deal of gold and stone*”³⁵⁸

“Fifty-five leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Flowthroughvale. The river Flowthrough rises here and flows south-east to empty into the River Rapids. *White gold and white jade are plentiful on this mountain*”³⁵⁹

“Three hundred and eighty leagues further north is a mountain called Mount Clawmark... *Jade is in abundance on its south face, and iron on its north face*”³⁶⁰

“Two hundred leagues further northeast is a mountain called Mount Horsesuccess. *Patterned stones are plentiful on its summit. There are quantities of gold and jade on its north face*”³⁶¹

“Two hundred leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Showlook. Gold and jade are plentiful in its summit. On its lower slopes are numerous fine grindstones and coarse whetstones”³⁶²

These passages are only a small sample of the great variety of minerals and stones that are mentioned in the text, their mentions, indeed, are so impressively numerous that it can only speak of the importance that these objects had for the early Chinese. One has to simply look at the numbers to corroborate this: copper is mentioned on

³⁵⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 7

³⁵⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 29

³⁶⁰ Birrell (1999), p. 37

³⁶¹ Birrell (1999), p. 45

³⁶² Birrell (1999), p. 69

twenty six occasions (“scarlet copper” being mentioned twenty one times), gold sixty three times (including white “white gold”³⁶³, yellow and scarlet) jade sixty nine times (including green, blue and white), iron twenty eight times, cinnabar twenty four times, grindstones twelve times, silver is mentioned ten times, whetstones seven times, tin six times, green jasper four times³⁶⁴, and lapis lazuli two times.

Considering that they are so profusely mentioned in the text, the fact that these minerals and stones are not the object of any sort of detailed descriptions should not mislead us, as soon as they are integral parts of the bizarre mystique of the mountain, being systematically introduced alongside with the most outrageous plants, trees, animals and deities. In other words, just at those other entities, the presence of metals, stones and gems seems to be indicative of the sacrality and strangeness of the mountain itself, and the numinous quality of these rocks is implied in the very fact that they inhabit the mountain together with such incredible, and undoubtedly sacred, creatures. On the other hand, from a more formal perspective, the sacred quality of these gems is also a logical consequence of their mere inclusion in the literary description of this geographical formation as a space of sacrality.

In terms of numinous power, among the different mountainous metals and stones mentioned in the *Sj*, jade appears to have been particularly important, being extensively used for ritual purposes:

“... the peaks in the Classic of the Mountains of the West, from Mount Moneycome to Mount Blueroanhorse, number nineteen mountains... In sacrificing to them, the ritual is: uses torches, observe a purification

³⁶³ Birrell (1999), pp. 3, 29, 83, 90, 92, 94

³⁶⁴ Three time together with “green jade”, Birrell (1999), pp. 25, 39, 51

method of one hundred days; use one hundred *lapiz lazuli*; for the wine ritual, serve it in one hundred jars; for the pendants use one hundred ritual *oblong jades* and hundred *ritual round jades*"³⁶⁵

"...the peaks in the classic of the Western Mountains... from Mount Orshipmy to Mount Wigwatch... the deities of these mountains all have a ram's body and a human face. In sacrificing to them, the ritual is: use a *lucky jade* and bury it, for the sacrificial grain, use millet and rice"³⁶⁶

"...the peaks of the classic of the Northern Mountains... the deities of these mountains... In sacrificing to them, the ritual is: use animals of the same colour, use a male chicken and a pig, and then bury them; for the *lucky jade*, use a ceremonial *oblong jade tablet*..."³⁶⁷

"Fourteen of the other deities all have the appearance of a hog's body with eight feet and a serpent's tail. In sacrificing to these, the ritual in all cases is: *use a jade*, but do not bury it"³⁶⁸

Without any doubt, jade was the stone preferentially used to address the gods, tame them, keep them satisfied and gain their numinous power. The other stone that is introduced as having the same function is lapis lazuli, although this happens on one single occasion. Jade, in turn, is mentioned in several passages prescribing ritual offerings. The fact that both jade and lapis lazuli were given such a protagonistic role in the performance of sacrifices indicates that they were conceived as possessing numinous power and/or as having the capacity to channel and convey this power. On the other hand, if they were offered to deities as aliment is, quite probably, because they were thought to possess unusual properties. In fact, semi-precious stones are known for being scarce and strange-looking, two characteristics that the Ancients appear to have thought the gods might appreciate for their food. Furthermore, in a

³⁶⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 17

³⁶⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 26

³⁶⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 42

³⁶⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 52

few passages the godly nature of these gems is explicitly stated. For example, in reference to the the lapis lazuli on Mount Secret, the text assures that

"the ghosts and spirits of the sky and the earth *eat* this gem and accept it as a ritual offering"³⁶⁹

Similarly,

"The River Cinnabar contains jade grease... The great god Yellow *ate* this jade grease and enjoyed it as a ritual offering"³⁷⁰

According to these passages some stones actually served as aliment for the gods,. Some others were under the direct influence of a *di* (a great god) and even received a proper name:

"There are stones on the summit. They are named the *Chequers of the Great God Terrace*. They are multicolored and patterned, and they look like quail eggs. The stones of the great god Terrace are used when prayers are offered up to the hundred deities. If you wear this stone, you won't succumb to malign forces"³⁷¹

In the case of the so-called "Chequers of the Great God Terrace" the power of the *di* Terrace was transmitted through a specific, anomalous stone, which also had the capacity to protect from "malign forces" those who wore it. Although the case of the Chequers is quite singular, I believe that it speaks of the general manner in which the Ancient Chinese thought of gemstones and minerals, that is, as sacred, strange and powerful. Furthermore, the importance and bizarre character of gems is further

³⁶⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 21

³⁷⁰ Birrell (1999), p. 21.

³⁷¹ Birrell (1999), p. 80

reinforced by the incredible number of strange stones which are named in the text: “laundry stones”³⁷², “collar wall jade stones”³⁷³, “...the poisonstone ...effective for poisoning rats”³⁷⁴, “chiming stones”³⁷⁵, “smooth dark stones”³⁷⁶, “patterned stones”³⁷⁷ “collar-stones”³⁷⁸, “needle stones”³⁷⁹, “semi-precious stones”³⁸⁰, “red quartz stones”³⁸¹, “bloodstones”³⁸², “fief-stones”³⁸³, “alum stone”³⁸⁴, “cinnabar stone”³⁸⁵, “ache-stones”³⁸⁶. Besides, a few strange shells are also mentioned: “patterned cowrie shells”³⁸⁷, “yellow cowrie shells”³⁸⁸, “hard grinding shell”³⁸⁹.

³⁷² Birrell (1999), p. 13

³⁷³ Birrell (1999), p. 15

³⁷⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 16

³⁷⁵ Mentioned four times in Birrell (1999), pp. 18, 19, 31, 79

³⁷⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 47

³⁷⁷ Birrell (1999), pp. 35, 45, 48, 68, 74, 75, 78, 100

³⁷⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 51

³⁷⁹ Birrell (1999), pp. 56, 59

³⁸⁰ Birrell (1999), pp. 24, 25, 28

³⁸¹ Birrell (1999), p. 74

³⁸² Birrell (1999), p. 87

³⁸³ Birrell (1999), pp. 87, 92, 97, 98

³⁸⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 90

³⁸⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 94

³⁸⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 100

³⁸⁷ Birrell (1999), pp. 25, 37

³⁸⁸ Birrell (1999), pp. 30, 72

³⁸⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 35

Furthermore, it is an historiographically and archaeological proven fact that, besides from bronzes, minerals and gemstones were widely used as ritual paraphernalia in Early China. Their ample usage for religious purposes suggests that these objects, just like bronze-alloys objects, were conceived as sacred because of their mountainous origin, inasmuch as they were mostly obtained from mountainous regions. It has been demonstrated that jade, for example, was used for ritual purposes since at least *circa* 6.000 BC by the Xinglongwa (6200-4500 BC) and Zhaobaogu (5400-4500 BC) cultures in Northeast China, together with ceramic, lithic, bone and shell items, as part of ritual offerings for the death, animal and fertility cults in the context of monumental ritual architectural structures.³⁹⁰ Jade and stone production already reached an important degree of elaboration in the Hongshan culture (4500- 3000 BC), which succeeded that of Zhaobaogu and continued the tradition of monumental ritual buildings but introduced novel locations, such as mountains³⁹¹, and new religious themes in ritual objects, such as stone and jade dragons, tortoises, birds, pigs, cicadas and tigers³⁹². However, it was in the central plains around the same time, during the Yangshao period (5000-3000 BC)³⁹³, that jade/stone production developed to impressive and sophisticated levels of art-workmanship and a variety of Neolithic cultures, all throughout Central China, engaged in jade/stone production, developing their own distinctive styles³⁹⁴ and using

³⁹⁰ Shelach (2000), p. 402; Liu and Chen (2012) pp. 130, 132, 172, 174

³⁹¹ This is the case of the Niuheilang mountainous ritual complex, briefly explained in chapter 1. Complex of similar characteristics have been found in Dongshanzui and Hutougou among several other Hongshan culture sites, all located in mountainous areas. See Liu and Chen (2012), p. 178

³⁹² Bagley (2006), p. 200; Guo (2003), pp. 36-37; Liu and Chen (2012), p. 172

³⁹³ Liu (2004), p. 16

³⁹⁴ Zhang (2005), p. 45; Liu (2004), pp. 123, 136

varied jade objects as status markers and ritual paraphernalia³⁹⁵. According to Lu Liu “these objects were probably used as ritual paraphernalia in religious ceremonies by elites who controlled cosmological knowledge and ritual power, and the interregional distribution of similar forms of jades represents the interaction of elites who controlled ritual power”³⁹⁶. Additionally, cinnabar has also been found in the floor of certain buildings³⁹⁷, as well as in a few tombs from circa 4500 - 4000 BC (Chengtoushan site, Daxi culture (ca. 5000–3300)³⁹⁸; Taosi site, Late Longshan culture (2600-2000 BC)³⁹⁹. This gem appear to have been used for ritual purposes.

Together with jades, stones and cinnabar, ceramic vessels were also used to denote high rank. All these different items frequently appear together in the burials of Neolithic individuals that appear to have held great socio-political, religious and economic prominence in their communities. Archeologists interpret these sort of items as indicating status. Given that the existence of high ranking individuals is understood as a sign of social complexity, the abundance of these items is though to be directly proportional to the degree of stratification, inequality and socio-political complexity of these societies. Consequently, the more stratified a Neolithic culture is,

³⁹⁵ See Liu 2007 pp. 65-66, 146-150. Liu (2004) assures that “the Qijia culture, using pronounced gender differentiation and status markers (such as jade/stone bi disks) in mortuary contexts, was apparently a stratified society” (p. 146); she adds: “There is a strong correlation between the total number of grave goods and the quantity of jade bi disks in tombs ($R^2 = 0.78$), suggesting that the variability in grave goods is mostly affected by the presence of prestige goods” (pp. 149-150)

³⁹⁶ Liu (2004), p. 121

³⁹⁷ Liu (2004) pp. 83-84; Liu and Chen (2012) p. 192

³⁹⁸ Liu and Chen (2012) p. 199

³⁹⁹ Liu (2004) pp. 16, 135-136.

the more items of this nature it exhibits⁴⁰⁰. In this manner, scholars agree that during the Neolithic period, ceramic vessels, semi-precious and regular stones formed the core of a ritual culture directly linked with the gradual monopolization of cosmological knowledge, religious activities, and socio-economic and political power. In this manner, the production of these sorts of artifacts developed parallel to the process in which Chinese societies became increasingly stratified, complex and unequal, and a ruling group, with an advantaged political and economic situations and interests distinguishable from the rest of the community, emerged⁴⁰¹. According to archaeological research, the purpose of pottery-making and stonework was that of symbolically expressing and ideologically legitimating the power this elite came to gain; however, at the same time, this type of craft production was the very means whereby religious and political ascendancy was created and sustained by the elite. In other words, by converting these items in the focus of ritual/religious activity the gentry found a way to claim exclusive access to numinous power, access in which it simultaneously founded its political power. The basis of all these mechanisms whereby this minority acquired politico-religious authority was economic prosperity, inasmuch as wealth was a requisite for the elaboration of such fine objects not only in terms of manufacturing them but also with respect to the ability to procure the necessary raw materials to do so; however, this ability implied not only an income but access to communication routes. Therefore, one of the major preoccupations of these emerging ruling groups was to secure access to lithic materials, many of which

⁴⁰⁰ Liu (2004) states that “stratification is measurable archaeologically by identifying specific status markers in the contexts of ritual and economic subsistence (Earle 1987: 290–291). It is also noted that different political strategies used by elites in negotiating for power may lead to variability in economic control (Blanton et al. 1996; Renfrew 1974” (p. 15)

⁴⁰¹ Liu (2003) assures that “...jade ritual items were closely associated with the development of social inequality and control of ritual power” (p. 6)

came from distant regions and were therefore scarce in local areas. According to Liu, this was precisely the case of jade and cinnabar⁴⁰²: “Since cinnabar was probably a scarce resource in this region, control of the access to cinnabar deposits and production process may have become an opportunity for some individuals or families to gain prestige and power”.⁴⁰³ Thus, it was the rarity and scarcity of these materials, totally inaccessible for the commoners, that made them so special in the eyes of the Neolithic communities and so effective in the creation of socio-political prestige and religious mystique. As I shall explain, the understanding of minerals and stones as ritual objects in the *Sj* derived from their perceived strangeness.

Something quite similar occurs with copper and bronze items, which gradually displaced jade/stones artifacts as status markers. The earliest copper artifact found in China have been uncovered in the Jiangzhai site of the Banpo culture (4800-4300 BC.) during the Yangshao period of Central China, around the mid course of the Yellow River (Huanghe)⁴⁰⁴, while the oldest bronze items so far discovered are personal and utilitarian artifacts belonging to the Majiayao culture (3300 - 2500 BC) of the Upper Yellow River, also located in the Central Plains; copper and tin have also been found in these same deposits (Copper, tin and bronze artifacts often appear together in archaeological sites since in order to produce bronze copper and tin are needed)⁴⁰⁵ However, it was only during the Longshan period (3000 - 2000 BC)⁴⁰⁶ that

⁴⁰² “Jade artifacts are elite goods because of the rarity of the raw material, and the need for specialized skills and intensive energy input during the production process” in Liu (2004), p. 120.

⁴⁰³ Liu (2004) p. 85

⁴⁰⁴ Zhang (2005), p. 66; Liu (2004) p. 36; Liu and Chen (2012) p. 234

⁴⁰⁵ Liu (2004), p. 224, Liu and Chen (2012), p. 234

⁴⁰⁶ Liu (2004), p. 27

bronze and other copper-alloys started to be used as unequivocal symbols of politico-religious power. The site of Taosi (2600–2000 BC), which correspond to this period, provides the earliest example of bronze artifacts being used in ritual ceremonies associated with high-status individuals⁴⁰⁷. In these ceremonies, jade objects still performed identical functions to bronzes, although these gradually commenced to monopolize the manifestation of wealth and power. As explained in chapter 1, the first culture to have used bronzes as the preferred objects for these purposes was Erlitou (*circa* 2000-1600 BC). This society witnessed the process in which jades, stones and ceramics came to be displaced by bronzes as status markers (Liu and Chen 2003 p. 33). The earliest known gold and silver artifacts also date to this same period. They have been found in deposits belonging to the Siba, Tianshanbeilu, Lower Xiajiadian and Sanxingdui cultures (*circa* 2000-1500 BC) (While Siba and Tianshanbeilu were located in Northwestern China (Tamir River Basin), the Lower Xiajiadian was situated in Northeast China and Sanxingdui in Southwestern China, around Yazi River in Sichuan province.⁴⁰⁸

In this way, even before the development of bronze vessel production, the numinous power of minerals and stones as the basis for the elites' ritual power was associated with the mountain. From Neolithic times, the acquisition of mountainous resources was crucial to support the elites' claim of exclusive access to numinous power and thus to back the politico-religious authority of the king and the nobility. The *Sj* loyally reflects not only this ancient ritual culture based on metals and stones but also, and most importantly, its intimate relation to mountains, suggesting that the divinity

⁴⁰⁷ Liu (2004), p. 224

⁴⁰⁸ See Liu and Chen (2012), pp. 308-310, 335, 342, 344, 372-374

thought to reside in such objects ultimately rested in their mountainous origin. Therefore, despite the fact that generally *Sj* minerals and gemstones were not depicted as possessing strange looks and supernatural abilities, they were still conceived as transcendental, integrally participating of the mountains' sacrality, as indicated by both their very presence in mountains and their extensive usage as ritual paraphernalia. To the extent that the understanding of the mountain as a source of numinous powers continued during the Warring States, the interest of the elites to ensure exclusive access to mountainous regions also did. In fact, the importance of restricting access to these areas is explicitly recognized in the *Guanzi*:⁴⁰⁹

“If a mountain’s reveals its riches, a lord should carefully seal it off with an earthen boundary (*feng*) and offer sacrifices to it. At a distance of ten *li* from the sealed area he should construct an altar. This being done he should make those who are riding dismount and walk and those who are walking should be required to quicken their steps. Those who violate these orders should be sentenced to death without pardon. In this way, they will be kept far away from any opportunity to exploit the mountain’s wealth”⁴¹⁰

This paragraph is very clear about the way in which a ruler should manage mountains containing “riches”, that is, restricting its access (“a lord should carefully seal it off”) by sacralizing it (“offer sacrifices to it”; “constructing an altar”), under the conviction that these measures would effectively keep others “away from any opportunity to exploit the mountain’s wealth”. Another passage of the same book recommends something quite similar:

⁴⁰⁹ The *Guanzi* is an Ancient Chinese text concerned with providing guidelines for rulers and which was written between the fourth and second centuries B.C by several authors. See Rickett,(1993) pp. 244-251

⁴¹⁰ Sterckx (2011), p. 155

*"Establish sacrifices to restrict entrance to the mountains and the marshes. Establish the manufacture of weapons and implements to bring about the production of all sorts of goods. Then the entire world will be benefited and you may devote your attention to formulating major policies concerning stripping the mountains bare of trees, drying up the marshes, increasing profits, and expanding trade. You should extract metal from the mountains to establish a money supply"*⁴¹¹

In this passage the monarch is once more advised to argue religious reasons for preventing commoners from accessing mountains with the purpose of having exclusive access to their resources. By extracting "metal from the mountains", he is said, the "manufacture of weapons and... all sort of goods", the establishment of "a money supply" and the formulation of "major policies", together with the stripping of mountain trees, will become possible. This same restraint on entrance to mountains is typified in certain passages from the *Sj*:

"Three hundred and eighty leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Monkeywing... *You can't climb up this mountain*" (Italics are mine)⁴¹²

"Four hundred leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Truedrag... *You can't climb up it*" (Italics are mine)⁴¹³

"Two hundred and eighty leagues further north is a mountain called Mount Bigwhole. It has no plants or trees... This mountain has four faces, but *you can't climb up it*" (Italics are mine)⁴¹⁴

These extracts proscribe "climbing up" certain mountains, a requirement that, in the light of the evidence, was probably related to an interest in refraining others from

⁴¹¹ Italics are mine. Rickett (1998), pp. 444-445

⁴¹² Birrell (1999), p. 3

⁴¹³ Birrell (1999), p. 4

⁴¹⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 40

extracting certain stones and minerals. In my view, the fact that these sort of proscriptions are extant in the *Sj* suggest that this text participated in the religious culture of the late Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. If this assertion is correct, then the preoccupation of the text with defining which mountains contained which minerals and which stones was, to a great extent, a reflection of the economic and ritual interests that the early Chinese elites had in mountainous formations. On the other hand, the portraying of these spaces as populated by strange creatures might have been the result of a concern with depicting them as artificially inaccessible in order to procure privileged access to them. This approach, however, might be a little forgetful of the actual religious concerns that the Early Chinese certainly had with the mountainous.

As a matter of fact, the ample and systematic ritual use of minerals and stones in Early China can still be interpreted in Eliadean terms as denoting an understanding of them as having numinous properties since they were scarce and rare, something that could have induced Neolithic and Bronze Age societies to perceive them as being essentially abnormal and hence sacred. Moreover, it is undeniable that the emphasis on strangeness and rarity, either as a consequence of scarcity or of intrinsic properties, is a common trait of both *Sj* depictions and Neolithic/Bronze Age communities' ritual uses of mountainous stones and minerals. And if we take a close looks at the different stones and minerals mentioned in the *Sj* and compare them with the hybrid, bizarre-looking plants, animals, deities and gods in the same text we will find that they also have impressive and distinctive appearances. It is true that a jade is less extraordinary than a serpent with several human heads or a plant whose fruits look like a baby's tongue; however when compared with many other existent stones a

piece of jade, with its bright deep green color and extremely hard consistency, is clearly odd looking. The same applies to cinnabar, iron, gold, silver and copper, all of which have bright colors and original shapes. In my view, the peculiar aspect of these stones and minerals was importantly influential in causing the early Chinese to think of them as "tokens of the beyond", which were "foreign to the earth" and were "coming from elsewhere" as extracts from the numinous plane⁴¹⁵; the prevalent ritual uses of these objects might be a reflection of this understanding.

Among hybrid creatures, deities are probably the most important. There are gods of two kinds, the *shen* 神 and the *di* 帝. The *shen* are the gods specific to a certain mountain range, presiding over a defined number of mountains. They all have the same hybrid appearance and are mentioned at the end of each mountain chain in quite a formulaic manner. As an example:

"In sum, the peaks of the Gem mountain range, from Mount Girlstool to Mount Worthleap, number sixteen mountains over a distance of 3,500 leagues.

In appearance, the deities of these mountains all have a horse's body and a dragon head. In sacrificing to them, the ritual is: use animals of one color; use a single male chicken, and then bury it, for the sacrificial grain, use sticky rice"⁴¹⁶

Or

"In sum, the peaks of the Bitter mountain range, Part III, from Mount Restgive to Mount Bigblueroanhorse number nineteen mountains over a distance of 1,184 leagues.

⁴¹⁵ All these expressions are taken from Eliade (1956) p. 27.

⁴¹⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 91

Among these mountains deities, sixteen all have the body of a pig and a human face. In sacrificing to them, the ritual is: use animals of a single color, use a single ram for the sacrificial victim, for the pendant use a single multicoloured jade, and then bury it⁴¹⁷

Therefore, *shen* are hybrids of a specific type belonging to a particular mountain range and which are to be sacrificed to according to a characteristic ritual procedure. The fact that these deities are addressed by means of precise ritual actions suggests that they preside over the mountain range to which they are related to and that the function of such rites is "to feed" the gods by offering them sacrifices, taming the mountains and permitting access to their numinous powers. In other words, these deities are responsible for making communication between humans and mountains possible; it is through them and more specifically through the specific rites that are directed to them, that mountains become spiritually accessible to men. Having such an important function, these hybrids are particularly powerful, occupying a position of certain predominance over other entities of the same type.

In the communication with mountains, the correct performance of rites is specially important and the emphasis given to the specificity of both the location and appearance of the *shen* seems to be related to a preoccupation with knowing the exact ritual manner in which godly personalities can be honored and their power accessed. Rituality, in this manner, is determined by regionality, as soon as rites are always defined in reference to specific locations. Consequently, in the *Sj* the sacred is not only strange but also local for in order to access the mountain's numinous power it is necessary to be informed of the specific characteristics of its presiding

⁴¹⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 84

deities, otherwise it is impossible to perform the appropriate rites required to obtain access to the numinous capacities of mountainous entities. The necessity to specify the rites particular to each deity (or group of deities) appears to have been born out of the belief that without the performance of them, the mountain would remain eternally inaccessible and therefore dangerously foreign to humans. If this assumption is right –as I believe it is, considering the profusion of these sort of entries in the text–, then one of the main functions of the text was to serve as a manual for those interested in obtaining numinous power from mountains and, with that, access to the heavenly realm. To the extent that ritually addressing mountains depended on identifying its various creatures, in the *Sj* sacrality acquires a marked local character. The book, in fact, besides from being animated by an interest in reflecting strangeness as indicative of sacrality, it was also filled with a pretension for geographical and religious accuracy that was at the basis of its alleged ritual efficacy.

The other type of deities were the *di*. Anne Birrell translates this term as "great god" and I shall adopt her translation here. She also clarifies that the term usually refers to male deities, appearing as a prefix or a suffix in a deity's name, while "the great goddesses are either designated by the stopgap names of Nü, or Huang, or O, or else by their name alone"⁴¹⁸. Considering, however, that such "stopgap names" exist mostly in the *Hj* and are practically absent in the *Sj*, I shall refer to the concept and term of *di* indistinctly regardless of the genre, as if when we speak of a *di* we could be referring both to a male and a female deity; in any case, the quoted passages will still indicate if they are referring to a great god or a great goddess. I do this because

⁴¹⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 224

of simplification purposes, keeping in mind that both great gods and great goddesses present several similar characteristics that can be easily group under the rubric of *di*.

That said, it should be explained that, similarly to the *shen*, the *di* also had a local quality, being tied to specific places although these places were not mountain ranges but individual mountains. Contrarily to the *shen*, the *di* were deities with unrepeatabe characteristics, not belonging to any type of deity existing in other mountains. There are, however, some notable exceptions to this rule; in some cases, the deities attached to a specific mountain were not *di* but *shen*, and this we know because when the text refers to them the soubriquet "great god" is not used. In these cases the deity belonging to a mountain is a lesser god or goddess. Here again, I shall prefer to refer to these types of *shen* simply as *di*, because of the striking similarities existing between them. The most notable affinity between all these deities and the most singular characteristic of the *di* is that they are individual entities with appearances and properties specific only to them. We might properly refer to these entities as "gods", very much in the way the Greeks used this word. Moreover, the *di* were also mythological characters with their own peculiar abilities and stories, some of them with notable effects on the geographical and spiritual landscapes. Because of their mythical properties, among the many mountainous entities, the *di* are undoubtedly the most powerful and the ones that have the most enduring and important effects on the world outside mountains. The *Sj*, however, groups only a few mythical personages, most of which are collected in the second book of the classic, the *Hai Jing* or "The Classic of the Seas". The reason for this seems to be related to the later date of composition of this book.

Although the *di* had very defined characteristics and mythological functions , many of them shared several features with other hybrid entities:

"Three hundred and fifty leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Jade. This is where Queen Mother of the West lives. In appearance, Queen Mother of the West looks like a human, but she has a leopard's tail and the fangs of a tigress, and she is good at whistling. She wears a victory crown on her tangled hair. She presides over the Catastrophes from the Sky and the Five Destructive Forces"⁴¹⁹

"Ten leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Greenwaist. This is, in truth the Secret City of the Great Deity.... To the south it looks on Level Islet where Yu's father was metamorphosed, and there are many wasps of different kinds here. The goddess of the mountain, Warrior Net, presides over this place. In appearance, the goddess has a human face and panther markings. She has a small waist and white teeth, and her ears are pierced with tinkling metal ornaments. When she calls, it is like clinking jade"⁴²⁰

"Three hundred and fifty leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Sky... There is a god here who looks like a yellow sack. He is scarlet like cinnabar fire. He has six feet and four wings. He is Muddle Thick. He has no face and no eyes"⁴²¹

The association of the *di* with a particular mountain is very clear from these passages. In reference to Mount Jade it is said that "this is where the Queen Mother of the West lives" and speaking of Warrior Net it is assured that she is "the goddess of the mountain" while when alluding to Mount Sky it is stated that "there is a god here". On the other hand, in terms of their appearance, Queen Mother of the West, Warrior Net and Muddle Thick all present typically hybrid traits; similarly, they are portrayed as being in equal standing to any other hybrid entity. This assumption, however, might be misleading since some of these *di* are actually very important

⁴¹⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 24

⁴²⁰ Birrell (1999), p. 71

⁴²¹ Birrell (1999), p. 26

mythological characters. Muddle Thick (*Hun Tun*) and the Queen Mother of the West in particular are two central deities in the Taoist pantheon. Nevertheless, the remarkable importance of these deities is largely implied in the text and their particular deeds and functions are completely ignored, although this might be because the writers of this book simply decided to omit this data considering the nature of the book. The case of Muddle Thick might be an exception to this rule, the very appearance of this creature suggesting its function. This deity is quite strange-looking indeed, having no face and no eyes; coincidentally, in the Taoist literature the concept *Hun Tun* connoted "emptiness", "formlessness" and "chaos", an idea that might find a corporal equivalent in the absence of face and eyes.

Certain deities have orientational functions:

"Two hundred and ninety leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Glaze. The deity Bedrush Harvest lives on it.... This mountain, as you look toward the west, is the place where the sun sets, and its aura is round. The deity Red Glares presides over this place"⁴²²

The function of these type of deities is certainly related to the cardinal function of mountains which is so prevalent in the *Yugong* but also present in the *Sj*:

"Five hundred leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Lacquercry... This mountain is situated in the East Sea and it looks out onto Mount Mound. Flaring light rises from it at times, and at times it sets. This is the station of the sun"⁴²³

⁴²² Birrell (1999), p. 26

⁴²³ Birrell (1999), p. 7

Another interesting fact about the *di* is that they often partake in stories of mythological nature, that is, stories that explain the origin and/or the nature of certain features of the landscape:

"Four hundred and twenty leagues further northwest is a mountain called Mount Bell. His son is called Mount Drum. In appearance, Mount Drum has a human face and a dragon's body. He and Awe Osprey murdered Lush River on the south flank of Mount Offspringline. The great god then hacked them to death on the east side of Mount Bell which is called Craggy Cliff. Awe Osprey turned into a huge osprey. He looks like an eagle but he has black markings, a white head, a scarlet beak, and tiger claws. He makes a noise like the dawn goose. Whenever he appears, there will be a major war. Drum also turned into a hill pheasant. He looks like a kite, with scarlet feet and a straight beak, and with yellow markings and a white head. He makes a noise like a goose. Wherever he appears, that town will have a severe drought"⁴²⁴

This paragraph in particular offers an explanation for the origin of Craggy Cliff, which was created when the two gods were killed by the *di* Flame, another important mythological character and who is simply referred to as "a great god" here⁴²⁵. Many passages of the *Sj* refer to actions of a *di* as having notable and enduring effects on the landscape, which, together with the production of other every-day physical phenomena, are the *di*'s most substantial mythological functions. Moreover, the great virtue of this passage is to offer revealing clues regarding the relationship between mountains and the *di*. In fact, in the opening lines it is said that the *di* ("great god") Mountain Drum is the son of Mount Bell. The interesting thing about this assertion is that it not only implies that a *di*, as I have already said, always belong to a particular mountain but also that the mountain itself is equivalent to a *di* as soon as it is able to

⁴²⁴ Birrell (1999), p. 22

⁴²⁵ This indicates how the *Sj* often assumes that the reader is informed of a mythological corpus and also that the text should be understood in reference to this corpus, which is never entirely revealed in the text.

give birth to a great god; this is because the assertion that a mountain is the father of a god always assumes that a mountain itself is a god and/or that it is in equal standing to a god himself. In other words, this passage simultaneously suggests that the *di* have direct and privileged access to a mountain's numinous power and that there is great conceptual interchangeability between the different mountainous entities, something which is further reinforced by the story of how both the gods Mount Drum and Awe Osprey were killed by a great god to then become an osprey and a pheasant, respectively. The fact that two lesser gods became animals of special qualities, that is, strange animals, clearly connotes that numinous power could be equally conveyed by an animal as much as much by a god, and that these entities were proportionally divine in nature. Moreover, this was not the only case in which a deity took the shape of an animal:

"Two hundred leagues further north is a mountain called Mount Showdove... There is a bird on this mountain which looks like a crow, but it has markings on its head and it has a white beak and scarlet feet. Its name is the Sprite Guard.... This is the great god (*di*) Flame's youngest daughter. Her name is Girl Lovely. Girl Lovely was sporting in the East Sea when she drowned and did not come back. That is why she became the Spirit Guard. For eternity she carries wood and pebbles in her beak from the West Sea to dam up the East Sea"⁴²⁶

In this particular case an hybrid animal, specifically an hybrid bird, called the Spirit Guard, was born when a goddess of name Girl Lovely, the daughter of the *di* Flame, drowned. In this passage, the idea of the corporeal multivalency of the numinous realm is repeated, so a goddess is born from a god, and a bird is created out of a drowned goddess: life and death follows each other but the numinous, as the strange and powerful, remains unchanged regardless of the creature that posses it or

⁴²⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 48

expresses it. Furthermore, the ascendancy of the numinous is conveyed not only corporally, in the form of different extraordinary entities, but also mythologically, by means of stories of fantastic stories such as the bird that is born from a drowned goddess. However, the mythological nature of the geographical landscape is reinforced by several other passages in the book. These consist of stories which tell us how different *di* and *shen* are the cause and origin of several natural phenomena.

For example, some gods are responsible for the existence of light, night and day:

"One hundred and fifty leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Highhorse... The deity Alligator Siege lives on this mountain. He has the appearance of a human face, ram's horns, and tiger claws. He usually frolics in the deeps of the Fishhawk and Brocade rivers. When he comes out and goes in, there is a blaze of light"⁴²⁷

"Three hundred leagues further southwest is a mountain called Mount Fertile... The deity Plough Father lives on this mountain. He constantly frolics in the deeps of the River Purecool . When he comes out and goes in, there is a blaze of light"⁴²⁸

"A hundred and fifty leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Manlyman...The deity Within Babe lives on this mountain. In appearance, he has a human body and he holds two snakes next to his body. This god constantly frolics in the deeps of Long River. When he comes out and goes in, there is a blaze of light"⁴²⁹

"Two hundred leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Longkeep. The deity of this mountain, White, the great god Young Brightsky lives here... In fact, this is the Palace of the Prime God, Stone Clan. This god is the chief who presides over the turning back of the setting sunlight towards the east"⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 85

⁴²⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 94

⁴²⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 100

⁴³⁰ Birrell (1999), pp. 24-25

The first three passages indicate that light was thought to be caused by the coming and going of certain deities dwelling in rivers, while the fourth explains how twilight occurred. Whereas the creation of light is adjudicated to the *shen* Alligator Siege, Plough Father and Within Babe, the workings of the setting sunlight are the attribution of the *di* Young Brightsky. This certainly points to the existence of certain common functionalities between different types of deities. In fact, regardless of the special rank that Young Brightsky occupies as a sky god in the Chinese pantheon⁴³¹, all of these deities are in charge of luminescent phenomenas. Other deities, in turn, have meteorological functions:

"Two hundred leagues further west is a mountain called Mount Tallyhonour.... The deity Longriver Doubt lives here. This mountain is a place where frequent weird rainstorms, winds, and clouds come from"⁴³²

"Twenty-seven leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Wallspan... The deity Sky Dolt lives on it. This mountain has frequent weird storms"⁴³³

"A hundred and thirty leagues further east is a mountain called Mount Glare... The deity Counting Cover lives on this mountain. In appearance , he has a human body and a dragon's head. He usually frolics in the deeps of the River Brocade. When he comes out and goes in, there is sure to be whirlwind with torrential rain"⁴³⁴

"A hundred and twenty leagues further southeast is the mountain called Mount Gushcourt... The two daughters of the great god live on this mountain. They often sport in the deeps of the Long River, and then the winds make the Lapping and Source rivers merge with the deep waters of the Squall and Roil rivers. This is the space between the Nine Rivers. When the two goddesses come out and go in, there are sure to be whirlwinds and teeming rain"⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ Birrell (1999), p. 271

⁴³² Birrell (1999), p. 25

⁴³³ Birrell (1999), p. 81

⁴³⁴ Birrell (1999), pp. 85-86

⁴³⁵ Birrell (1999), p. 100

Similarly to the deities that cause light, most of these deities cause rain, whirlwinds and storms as a consequence of their movements across rivers. In the case of "the two daughters of the great god", they are also responsible for the movement of waters from the Lapping and Source to the Squall and Roil Rivers, all of which are actual subsidiaries of the Yellow River, around which the so-called Nine Rivers are organized. In fact, in Chinese mythology "the two daughters of the great god" are goddesses of the Yangzi River⁴³⁶. This particular passage is indeed tremendously revealing regarding the essential participation gods had in the very functioning of the natural world for Ancient Chinese. Deities, including the *shen* and the *di*, are not only responsible for the creation of light, rain and winds but also for the normal operation of Ancient China's most important rivers. In other words, the gods do not simply inhabit mountains as unreachable numinous entities but constantly and effectively participate of the terrestrial plane through their powers and abilities. Apparently, in the manifestation of these powers in the world, rivers are of paramount importance, serving as devices that connect mountains and their entities with the rest of the realm; this particular point constitutes another similarity between the *Sj* and the *Yugong*, where, as I have shown, rivers play an analogous role.

On the other hand, rivers permit the acquisition of a god's numinous power in a way similar to that in which other mountainous entities' properties, such as plants and animals, are acquired:

"Fifty leagues further southwest there is a mountain called Mount Highfore. There is a river on the mountaintop. It is extremely cold and it turns clear. It

⁴³⁶ Birrell (1999), p. 266

is the rice drinking-water of the great god Terrace. Those who drink it will never have pains in the heart"⁴³⁷

According to this passage, it is the mountain river's waters that allows an individual to obtain the curative powers of the *di* Terrace. Taking this particular case as a representative example, it is clear that the major similarity between the manner in which the properties of mountainous plants/animals and of mountainous deities are acquired resides in that, in both cases, the method of acquisition is consumption. However, contrarily to mountainous plants, trees and animals, the numinous power of a *di* or a *shen* cannot be consumed directly but in the form of some other substance of being that the god, or some property of him, mutates into; this related to the fact that among mountainous entities, deities are the closest to the mountain, and therefore to the celestial plane, but the farthest from men, with ritual sacrifices being the most accustomed method of communication with them. In relation to this, the fact that there was great physical multivalence in the expression of the numinous and that this caused great commutability between mountainous entities should not lead us to conclude that there were no hierarchical relations between them. As said before, the *di* and the *shen* presided over individual mountains or mountain ranges, therefore occupying a ruling position among mountainous entities. Furthermore, the *di* appear to have presided over the *shen*, as is suggested by some passages:

"Mount Blueroanhorse is the great god of these mountain deities. In sacrificing to him, the ritual is..."⁴³⁸

"Mount Godsgranary is the great god of these mountain deities. In sacrificing to him, the ritual is..."⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Birrell (1999), p. 95

⁴³⁸ Birrell (1999), p. 93

⁴³⁹ Birrell (1999), p. 99

In these passages the equivalence between mountains and *di* is once more reiterated, so the great gods which preside over the others "mountain deities" have the names of the very mountains that they govern. A novel element is incorporated to the *di*, this is their ritual accessibility, a function that that is usually ascribed to the *shen* throughout the text. The reason for the pyramidal relationship existing between the *di* and the *shen* is certainly related to the fact that the *shen* lack from many of the special functions and capabilities of the *di*, with the exception of a few lesser deities that also have similar abilities. Furthermore, according to these passages, the *di* not only possessed unique functions but also included those of the *shen*. Consequently, the main difference between these deities truly resides in that while the majority of the *shen* participate of sacrality exclusively through their ritual functionality, the *di* and some few *shen*, in turn, do the same by means of both their ritual functionality and their mythological preeminence and symbolic import. While the former solely permit access to numinous power, the latter do this but also, and most notably, offer a logical explanation for specific characteristics of the sacred and geographical landscapes.

It is this capacity to effectively and convincingly explain different every-day phenomena that is at the basis of the mythological functions of these deities. In fact, all the different properties of the *di* and the *shen* that I have briefly exposed above serve as elucidations on the origin of varied occurrences such as rain, storms, light, sounds, twilight, etc. These stories are certainly mythical as soon as they tell how "...something was accomplished, began to be"⁴⁴⁰. Thence, since myths deal with the

⁴⁴⁰Eliade (1956), p. 95

origin of things, they also address the issue of being and, more precisely, of the process in which things "come into being". According to Eliade, "it is for this reason that myth is bound up with ontology, it speaks only of realities, of what *really* happened, of what was fully manifested"⁴⁴¹. Assuring this, he immediately adds that "obviously these realities are sacred realities". I believe these stories perfectly fit into this model and that a revealing conclusion arises when it is applied to them: for the Ancient Chinese all reality, and the ultimate origin of all existence, had to be grounded on the mountain because it was in it that the sacred existed and the divine descended. It was in the mountain that absolute reality was located and where complete manifestation of the celestial was possible. Only there "what *really* happened" and "what was fully manifested" could have ever taken place.

The Eliadean characterization of mythology as inherently related to sacrality and as heavily concerned with "reality" or, more precisely, with "the origin of reality", certainly serves to explain the fact that in the *Sj* mythical creatures are essentially connected to mountains. Actually, from this viewpoint, it should not surprise us that mountains exclusively hosted mythological characters considering that the mountain was thought to be a sacred space and, according to Eliade, mythology is intimately associated with sacrality. In other words, mythological beings and mythical stories are necessarily related to mountains as soon as they are essentially sacred in nature.

Another characteristic of the mythological creatures that I have introduced is that, out of mountainous creatures, these are the only ones that decisively intervene in the world outside mountains. These interventions stand in contrast to the other ways in

⁴⁴¹ Eliade (1956), p. 95

which mountainous creatures influence the world, which is mostly through human consumption, the difference here lies in that the influence effected on the world through consumption does not depend on the entity that is consumed, regardless of the fact that it contains numinous power, but on the possibility of a human coming into close contact with such entity; in the case of deities, in turn, they are actively participant in the intervention, and the effect they cause does not depend on a third party, not even in their own will because, actually, this is simply a consequence of their very nature, their mere existence. Therefore, deities not only intervene without depending on an external agent but also do so unintentionally. Furthermore, these interventions are not by any means trivial, quite the opposite, they are fundamental for the normal functioning of the *cosmos*. In relation to this, it is interesting to note that in the *Sj* the cosmos is portrayed as resting on the involuntary actions of deities, as this suggest that the authors of this "classic" (*jing*) conceived of the *cosmos* as generating spontaneously from the celestial plane. Finally, and in relation to this, the intrusive character of deities should be understood as but another reflection of their essentially mythological nature, as long as myths often describe "... the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world... (and) it is the irruption of the sacred into the world... that establishes the world as a reality".⁴⁴² In this manner, it is unsurprising that mountainous deities had mythological qualities considering that they were responsible for the few occasions in which the sacred realm, that existed exclusively in the mountain, interfered in matters away from this sacred area and into the domains of "the profane"; as explained above, rivers also were of importance in the communication between these realms, helping deities to reach out to extra-mountainous territories.

⁴⁴² Eliade (1957) p. 97.

Summarizing, the deities of the *Sj* convey two rather different aspects of sacrality. On the one hand, deities connote the mountain's sacred quality by permitting access to numinous power through their ritual accessibility: Deities rule over mountain ranges or individual mountains and the only way to accede to their divine potencies is to properly perform certain rites. On the other hand, certain deities, specially the *dí*, denote the manner in which the sacred realm serves as the unseen foundation, the "ultimate reality", for all the perceptible phenomena in the world. Furthermore, these components of sacrality relate to two different functions of the mountain as a sacred space. Namely, that of communicating the profane with the divine (liminality) and that of founding reality. Previously we have addressed both of these functions, as they are also present in the *Yugong*. The difference here lies in the specific manner in which mountainous deities participate in these "mountainous functions" and how this implies a particular understanding of sacrality that differs importantly from the one existing in the *Tributes*.

The specific way in which sacrality is conveyed in the *Sj* is essentially ritual, mythological and fantastical, two facets that play minor roles in the *Yugong*. As a matter of fact, in the *Sj*, rituality and mythology are two elements of sacrality that are introduced in direct connection with deities and exclusively through them; and deities are completely absent in the *Tributes*. The introduction of these elements adds to the series of associations that are exclusive to this text, not existing in the *Yugong* or any other similar sources. Furthermore, because of their novelty, the ritual and mythological facets also expand the conception of sacrality in the book, importantly enriching the notion of *cosmos*. More specifically, the deities of the *Sj*, the stories and

abilities of the *shen* and, particularly, the *di*, repeatedly deal with the themes of origin, foundation and causation, revealing that a *cosmos* is not only "an order" and "a structure" but also, and most importantly, a functioning system, a living organism that has beginnings and ends, implies causes and consequences and which, most of all, possesses an inner logic; an organism and a system that is alive and is forever-functioning because it is eternally connected with the numinous, which, at the same time, continuously reveal itself in both the most conventional and most outrageous ways.

In brief, both the appearance and the properties of mountainous entities conveyed liminality and incarnated sacrality, and their characteristic strangeness reflected this transitional character proper of the sacral condition. Furthermore, the eccentricity of these entities did not merely reflected sacrality, it also constituted it. So far I have suggested that these entities were sacred because they inhabited a sacred space. Although I consider this assertion to be correct, it might mislead us to conclude that mountains themselves determined the liminal quality of these creatures. I would rather say that both mountains and mountainous entities participated, simultaneously and equally, of sacrality, having not a relation of dependence but of interconnection. In my view, the relation between the mountain and its entities was not hierarchical but dialectical. Although it is truth that the plants, animals, trees and minerals of mountains were indeed sacred because they were located in mountains, it is false that they acquired this sacral quality through the mountain itself. They instead received it directly from the divine realm and what the mountain did was to provide a frame where this connection could take place, serving as a portal of the numinous.

On the other hand, the mountain, as a geographic formation, and mountainous entities, as strange creatures with incredible powers, participated of sacrality in rather different manners; while the mountain itself expressed the numinous in terms of the constitution of a spatial-temporal order, mountainous entities conveyed the heavenly in terms of the incarnation of uniquely effective powers and strange appearances. In this manner, the mountain and its creatures conveyed two different, although complementary, forms of liminality, mountainous entities covering an aspect of sacrality that the mountain was unable to convey by itself; this aspect, as I have explained above, was characterized by strangeness and power, added to the cosmological one and it was a distinctive addition of the *Sj*. It is only in this text, consequently, that the sacred realm acquires a twofold manifestation.

As soon as the mountain was "in need" of various entities in order to effectively express the full range of elements that the sacred realm included, these entities had the ability to consummate the revelation of the sacred through the frame the mountain provided. This frame hence, meant little without contents, and these contents were the plants, animals, trees and deities living in mountains. The *Sj* seems to be implying that without these contents, the mountain would fail to comprehensively reveal its own sacrality, because if the mountain was understood as a portal, a space where the numinous could take place, this process of incarnation and expression of the heavenly could have never been completed without the presence of the different mountainous entities; since sacrality consisted not only of an order, as in the *Yugong*, but also of a power, characterized by strangeness and effectivity, these creatures were quintessential for the physical manifestation of the heavenly in the world. Therefore, in the *Sj* the mountain successfully and completely

performs its function as a portal –that is, a “sacred space”– only by means of its myriad creatures.

The centrality of mountainous entities in the effective communication of the numinous nature of mountains is associated with the inclusion of the theme of the strange/powerful in the understanding of the sacred. This theme, which –as I have insisted– is specific to the *Sj* and is totally absent in the *Yugong*, has the virtue of expanding the concept, and reality, of mountain sacrality beyond the limits of cosmology and cosmography to the fields of "magic" zoology, botanics, mineralogy, theology and mythology. This conceptual amplification of "the sacred" in the *Sj* suggests the existence of interests different from those dominant in the *Yugong*, a text mostly preoccupied with abstract and rational subjects rather than with strange and bizarre ones. The differences between these two texts are indeed quite intriguing. Although both of them share a similar structure, as I have noted at the beginning of this chapter, their content and tone are far from being identical. While the *Yugong* focuses mostly on the manner in which mountains and rivers helped *Yu* in his effort to order the world and establish a *cosmos*, the *Sj* considers this cosmological feat as merely one component, and a rather secondary component, of the constitution of sacrality. Actually, solely a basic analysis of these texts will reveal that the numerical-geometrical and cosmographical preoccupations which are central to the *Tributes*, are not as important to the *Sj*. These aspects, instead, are largely implicit in the text, defining only the first layer of the sacral quality of the mountain. As I have explained before, this is particularly clear in the structure of a *Sj* entry, where the opening lines are dedicated to the spatial location of the mountain and the river associated with it. The space that this description occupies, however, is strikingly brief and it functions

merely as an introductory note. Contrarily, the length and detail that each entry dedicates to the description of the specific entities inhabiting each mountain is considerably large and it constitutes the core of a *Sj* paragraph. This serves to illustrate that for the *Sj* is not order but liminality the most notorious characteristic of the mountain.

However, this is not to say that order and orientation are entirely absent from the *Sj*, they are not. Order and orientation are still important to the text.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, they are achieved by means of movement, just like in the *Yugong*. The mobile nature of the *Sj* is given by its very narrative structure: The book functions as a tour across mountains. The relation between this movement and Yu, however, is much less clear than in the *Yugong* and it can not be discerned from the text itself: Yu is mentioned only in the epilogue of the text, and not a single time in any of the descriptions of mountains, rivers and entities. Therefore, the mountain journey of the *Sj* is not recounted directly in reference to Yu. In fact, not only Yu is absent from the core of the text but no verbs denoting actions which convey spatial displacement or the physical reshaping of the environment are included. Contrarily to the *Yugong*, in the *Sj* movement across mountains was portrayed by simply describing them, but the description itself entailed mobility, inasmuch as mountains were located one right

⁴⁴³ Dorofeeva-Lichtmann has highlighted the preoccupation of the *Sj* for the construction of an ordered and well balanced space and characterized it as a process achieved by spatial movement. Considering the association of this space with spirits, she has regarded this space as sacred. My own approach contrasts with this stance in that –inspired in the work of Eliade– I consider order itself to be sacred, regardless of its association with spirits. In this way, restricting sacrality to the presence of spirits, Dorofeeva Lichtmann has regarded the *Yugong* as a secular, administrative text. As I have explained in the previous chapter, I differ with this view. See Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (1995), Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (2003), Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (2007) & Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (2009) 636-644.

after the other and their locations were always specified by using the previous one as a point of reference: “X miles south of Y, there is Z mountain”. Moreover, to the extent that for a mountain to be located the former one had to be situated first, the world was ordered by traversing space by means of mountains: The definition of a point in the space –or, what is the same, the location of a mountain– depended on previously marking another point –another mountain. Consequently, by moving from one mountain to the other, the different points of space were established and the world was successfully ordered, acquiring a definite spatial structure (*dili, dimai*).⁴⁴⁴ As in the Yugong, in the *Sj* the definition of this structure rested on tracing routes through mountains and rivers. Although the text does not depict Yu tracing them, it traces them itself by describing various mountain chains and the rivers that are born from them. The geographical descriptions offered by the text form a complex web of interconnected mountain and river systems. Actually, as signaled by Dorofeeva-Litchman, the very character used to refer to each of the five mountain systems located in every cardinal direction, *jing* –usually translated as “classic”– refers not only to a book but also, and most definitively, to a threat ⁴⁴⁵in the terrestrial web of the world. A *jing* is an itinerary⁴⁴⁶ or a guideway⁴⁴⁷, a route or path delineated by a series of mountains –and tangentially by rivers. This is suggested by the fact in the *Sj*

⁴⁴⁴ Dorofeeva-Litchmann has suggested that this cosmic structure was communicated by the layout of the text itself in a similar fashion to the Chu Silk Manuscript and other early Chinese textual cosmographs. See Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) pp. 69-71, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2005)b.

⁴⁴⁵ Nylan (2001) pp. 11, 16, Lewis (1999)c pp. 297-302. According to Lewis (1999) *jing* also conveyed the actions of “demarcating” and “dividing” (p. 298), hence the *Shanjing* might also be translated as the “Demarcations of Mountains”.

⁴⁴⁶ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) pp. 71-78, Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) pp. 253 - 259.

⁴⁴⁷ Strassberg (2002)

jing was employed as a verb to describe the Yu as “passing through”⁴⁴⁸ or “crossing”⁴⁴⁹ the “famous mountains of the world” (*xiatianmigshan*). These pathways can be easily interpreted as pneumatic channels, because of their intimate association to rivers –and hence to water, an equivalent of the pneuma or energy (*qi*) of the *cosmos*, as explained in the previous chapter– and since the text was classified under the *Xingfa* section of the *Hanshu*.⁴⁵⁰ The energetic metaphor developed in the *Yugong* is hence repeated in the *Sj*. To the extent that a *jing* ultimately referred to “...something running throughout an area and serving to define or regulate it”⁴⁵¹, the work of Yu consisted in tracing mountains and rivers routes to define and regulate the energetic and geographical structure of the world.

In this way, and despite certain differences, the *Sj* is strikingly similar to the *Yugong*. Nevertheless, although both texts concur in attributing great importance to order and orientation as well as to mobility, assuring that achieving the former resulted from performing the latter, they differ importantly in the manner in which they portray the forging of the *cosmos*. Whereas in the *Yugong* the ordering of space is described as resulting from a mountain journey performed by a third party (Yu), in the *Sj* the action of ordering the world by traversing mountains is performed by the text itself (or the

⁴⁴⁸ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) pp. 254-255.

⁴⁴⁹ Birrell (1999) p. 103.

⁴⁵⁰ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2003) p. 61. n. 108. & Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2007) p. 262. n. 134.

⁴⁵¹ Lewis (1999) p. 297.

narrator himself)⁴⁵², allowing the reader to take on the role of Yu himself by reading it. Inasmuch as reading the text equaled to traversing the mountains, the description of movement across mountains functions as a ritual repetition of the cosmogonic act initially performed by Yu. Recognizing the ritual character of the *Sj*, helps to explain why in this text the procession through mountains and the tracing of terrestrial paths across space is not recounted as a struggle against the flood, like in the *Yugong*, but simply as a tour. In fact, the imminent menace of the flood is totally absent from the *Sj*, being mentioned only at the very end of the *Haijing*, where it is said that

“The surging waters of the flood overflowed to the sky... So then the great god ordered Yu to finish spreading the soil and to fix (the contours of) the nine provinces”⁴⁵³

This reference clearly echoes the account of the flood provided in the *Yugong*, however it appears in the last entry of the *Shj*, having no counterparts in the rest of the text, particularly in the *Sj*. This serves to illustrate how the quelling of the flood was not a central preoccupation to the mountain procession described in the *Sj*. The

⁴⁵² This makes the *Sj* a *tu*, i.e., a text device to achieving a defined technical result, a “template for action” in words of Bray (2007) p. 2. In this particular case the effect desired was that of re-creating the ordering of the world. With respect to this, Dorofeeva Litchmann (2007) has highlighted the “instrumental character” (p. 249) of the text, defining it as having the “...properties of a *tu* (scheme-map)” (p. 261). Similarly, Dorofeeva Litchmann (1995) has stated that “...the SHJ may be regarded as a “reconstructed” instrument for rulership which enabled the ruler to consolidate his control over the world” (p.88). I concur with this view, however I interpret the technical, ritual and cosmographical character of the *Sj* as essentially ritual in Eleadean terms, and hence as implying the reenactment of a mythical event. In my view, the *Sj* was ritually effective and cosmological potent to the extent it allowed the recreation of the route originally traced by Yu in his efforts to reorder the world.

⁴⁵³ Translated directly from the Chinese taking Birrell (1999) as reference. Original text is 洪水滔天... 帝乃命禹卒布土以定九州. Available at <http://ctext.org/shan-hai-jing/hai-nei-jing?searchu=%E6%BB%94&searchmode=showall#result>. For a translation see Birrell (1999) pp. 195-196.

lack of importance which the chaotic menace of the flood has in the text is correlated by the paucity of terms describing the touring of the land in terms of the paving of routes and/or the dredging of rivers. In the *Sj*, the tracing of routes across the earth implies no particular effort and it finds no aquatic or telluric opposition. I suspect the reason that it does not is that the *Sj* is not a text devised to describe a mythical event –as the *Yugong* is– but one conceived to allow its reenactment by offering a detailed description of a spatial route based on mountains and rivers, which was defined in imitation of the route originally traced by Yu in his flood-quelling actions. Inasmuch as the text took the cosmogonic activities of Yu as modelic, it was ritual in nature. In this way, the function of the *Sj* was no different from that of the “tour of inspection” and the “Luminous Hall”. However, the *Sj* differed from those other ritual schemes in the manner in which it fulfilled that function.

In fact, in the *Sj* the imitation of Yu’s efforts was not reduced to the recreation of a spatial journey, encompassing also the identification of mountainous entities and the performance of sacrifices to deities as devices for the appropriation of numinous powers. Out of these ritual instruments, the only one which figures in the *Yugong* and the *Shundian*, and rather timidly, is the performance of sacrifices to deities. Sacrifices, however, play a minor role in those texts, which contents themselves with simply mentioning only one type of sacrifice offered to mountains the *lu* and the *wang* sacrifices, respectively.⁴⁵⁴ In contrast, the *Sj* specifies the ritual offerings required to tame the presiding spirits of each major mountain range in the Chinese realm, describing numerous types of mountain sacrifices. Therefore, whereas the *Sj* grants major importance to sacrificial offerings, the *Yugong* and *Shundian* devotes

⁴⁵⁴ See pp. 76-77 above.

very little attention to it. The preeminence of sacrifices in the *Sj* reveals an understanding of the sacrality of the mountain which diverges from the one offered in the *Yugong* and *Shundian*, signaling another major difference between these texts. To explain, sacrifices assume a sacrality which is defined not by order and orientation but by liminality, and which hence rests not in the capacity to spatially organize but in the ability to serve as a portal for numinous potencies, particularly that of mountain deities. In this way, the minimal role that sacrifices play in the *Yugong* relates to a view of the mountain's sacrality which emphasizes its cosmographical capacities. Viceversa, the major role attributed to sacrifices in the *Sj* refers to a conception of the sacrality of the mountain which stresses its liminal quality. These divergent understandings of mountainous sacrality also determined different portrayals of the touring of the land: Whereas in the *Yugong* the ordering of the world consisted primarily in tracing routes, in the *Sj* achieving world order rested mainly on offering the appropriate sacrifices to mountains. Nevertheless, inasmuch as sacrifices were directed solely toward deities, they did not address the entire liminal content of the mountain, and the numinous power of its various other entities was appropriated by eating, wearing or seeing them. Therefore, sacrifices were only one of various forms of appropriating the numinous potencies of mountains. Furthermore, all forms of appropriation of numinous powers –whether ritual or not– rested on the identification of entities, which was effected by describing their particularities. In order for the correct sacrifice to be performed, the deity first had to be described with precision, it had to be successfully identified. Similarly, acquiring the divine potencies of an animal, bird, plant or tree depended on knowing its characteristics, particularly important was to specify if the powers of the entity could be obtained whether by consumption, observation or carrying. As I have suggested above, most of a

standard *Sj* entry was aimed at providing this sort of information, offering a the detailed description of the different entities inhabiting a particular peak. In this way, the ritual character of the mountain procession described in the *Sj* surpassed the offering of sacrifices. To the extent that the entire content of the text was designed to show how to effectively appropriate the numinous powers of mountainous entities, it was comprehensively ritual in nature. The efficaciousness of this rituality was grounded on the accuracy of the descriptions offered. Moreover, since describing and identifying entities rested on recording them, writing was at the basis of ritual efficacy.⁴⁵⁵ This directly relates the *Sj* to late Zhou and early imperial popular religion as attested in diverse almanacs⁴⁵⁶, which made extensive use of scripture as a method to control spirits.⁴⁵⁷ Actually, in this sort of esoteric religious practices, Yu had an important role, however not as the traveller and ordered of the world, but as the exorcist and tamer of ungoverned and malevolent demons.⁴⁵⁸ The taming of these ghostly figures depended not only on writing them down but also on performing a type of ritual walk known as the “Pace of Yu” (*Yubu* 禹步).⁴⁵⁹ This pace was performed for various purposes, but particularly to assure the wellbeing of travelers, which were suppose to complete it before departing on a journey in order to avoid being harmed by potentially aggressive goblins.⁴⁶⁰ The association of Yu with this

⁴⁵⁵ Company (1988) pp. 149-151, Sterckx (2002) pp. 36-37

⁴⁵⁶ Harper (1985), Poo (1998) pp. 69-101, Harper (1997), Harper (1999) pp. 843-852, Poo (2009)

⁴⁵⁷ Harper (1985) p. 478-479, Company (1988) pp. 145-152, Company (1996) pp. 122-126.

⁴⁵⁸ Harper (1999) pp. 872-873.

⁴⁵⁹ Also translated as the “Walk of Yu” or the “Step of Yu”, depending on the preferred rendition for *bu* 步.

⁴⁶⁰ Harper (1997) pp. 240-242, Poo (2009) 301-303.

sort of ritual displacement serves to clarify the nature of the mountain journey described in the *Sj*. The *Yubu* was a ritual movement designed not to order space but to tame spirits. The *Sj* bears strikingly similar characteristics to this march, and although it is doubtless it involved activities aimed at ordering space, its ultimate purpose was none other than to effectively control the diverse numinous forces of mountain ranges. Therefore, Yu's displacement across the Chinese realm as described in the *Sj* was less modeled on the *Yugong* than on the *Yubu*, relating to a series of religious beliefs which are nonexistent on the *Yugong*. As I shall explain, the religious culture associated with both the *Yubu* and the *Sj* –which differs from the Tributes on its emphasis on bizarre/hybrid entities and mantic techniques of numinous control– appears to be related with the ritual tradition of the *fangshi* 方士 or “master of recipes/techniques”.⁴⁶¹ To conclude, the ritual efficacy of the *Sj* stemmed not only from reenacting Yu's mountain procession but also from taming and appropriating numinous forces by writing them down.⁴⁶²

Considering hence the importance the identification of numinous entities had for controlling the divine potencies of mountains, in order for the peripatetic efforts of Yu to be successful, an impressive level of precision was required. Achieving this exactitude was intimately related with attaining a detailed knowledge of various localities. To explain, the journey of Yu certainly functioned as a device for the definition of the contours of an ordered space by tracing the veins of the earth along mountains and rivers. However, it also served as a catalog, a detailed description of

⁴⁶¹ Company (1996) renders *fangshi* as “masters of esoterica”. For different translations see Harper (1985) 479, 488, 490, Company (1996) p. 36, Harper (1997) p. 243.

⁴⁶² Company (1988) pp. 149-151, Lewis (1999)c pp. 34-35, Sterckx (2002) pp. 36-37

the numinous entities inhabiting each corner of the realm as well as a ritual manual which specified the myriad ways to acquire their numinous potencies. Therefore, traversing mountains signified not only the ordering of space but also, and most notably, the definition of its liminal nature. Ultimately, marching across mountains was not only a spatial but also a spiritual journey. In this way, the *Sj* characterized the Chinese territory as a comprehensive and multiform numinous landscape, ultimately defining its sacrality as based on its liminality. Addressing the liminal quality of space was a matter of addressing the specificity of its numinous components, which were all rooted to defined territorial sections. Furthermore, this locative focus of the *Sj* signals two major things. On the one hand, it reinforces the association of the text with popular religion by revealing its close ties to local society and culture. On the other hand, it suggests that the preoccupation for ensuring the control of numinous was necessarily related to a concern for securing the domination of specific regions⁴⁶³, particularly in relation to the fact that deities presided mountains. Considering that mountains were governed by deities, controlling them amounted to controlling mountains themselves as territorial units. Similarly, the efforts to acquire the numinous potencies of mountainous entities denoted an effort to dominate these spaces. The locative character of the *Sj* signified Yu came to be associated with local culture and the ability to control regional spirits.⁴⁶⁴

Consequently, the spiritual dominion of the mountain entailed a territorial control of the world. The locative nature of the *Sj* hence reveals a political dimension germane

⁴⁶³ On the relation between the *Sj* and local society, religion and culture see Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) pp. 88-89, Von Glahn (2004) pp. 82-84, Lewis (2006)a pp. 234-235, Lagerwey (2010) pp. 13-14.

⁴⁶⁴ Lewis (1999) p. 169, Lewis (2006)b pp. 43-44.

to it. As I have explained in the previous chapters, in early China political power was founded on exclusive access to numinous power. Whereas the late Shang and early/middle Zhou founded regal authority on ancestor worship, the late Zhou, Qin and Han asserted they obtained it from the numinous forces located in the territory itself. The *Sj* is manifestly indebted to this worldview.⁴⁶⁵ To the extent that access to numinous forces was at the basis of political authority, and since these divine potencies were believed to be located in the territory, specifically on mountains, the *Sj* appears to have served not only as a ritual manual but also as a political instrument conceived to ensure the effective control over the territory. John Lagerwey has described the political relevancy of the text precisely in relation to its locative concerns, asserting that "... this book is proof that, already in the royal period, being Son of Heaven required knowledge of and sacrifices to local gods... (this) may be considered *prima facie* evidence of the reciprocal and contractual nature of the relationship between the state and local society"⁴⁶⁶. Therefore, the intimate relationship which existed between religious knowledge and political power in early China loyally reflected on the ritual culture of the *Sj*. Furthermore, to the extent that it was an essentially ritual text, the *Sj* was essentially political as well. In fact, since the mountain march described in the *Sj* was designed to recreate the mythical actions of Yu, it had a definitive political connotation: By indicating the monarch the exact route which Yu had allegedly followed in his tour, the text showed him the way to secure the stability of the *cosmos*, providing him with an infallible instrument to preserve the world and maintain his politico-religious uncontested. The *Sj* hence served as a Nevertheless, unlike the *Yugong*, in the *Sj* the maintenance of cosmic balance –and

⁴⁶⁵ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (1995) p. 88.

⁴⁶⁶ Lagerwey (2010) pp. 13-14.

hence the justification of regal ascendancy— was not only a matter of touring but also of knowing how to appropriate the numinous powers of mountains: By teaching the monarch how to obtain the divine potencies of mountainous entities —especially mountainous deities, the text allowed him to laid the foundations of his political power. In the actual historical record, the function the *Sj* apparently fulfilled was actually performed by the *fangshi*, a group of ritual specialists which advised early Chinese emperors in the construction of governmental authority.

The *fangshi* were particularly active in the courts of emperors Qin Qihuangdi and Wu Handi, they claimed possessing knowledge on various mantic techniques, including medicine, divination, numerology, exorcism and astrology, among others.⁴⁶⁷ Encompassing such a large and diverse scope of capacities, the term *fangshi* is particularly vague and it appears to have been a general designation for “specialist” or “technician”, that is, someone having expertise on a particular discipline.⁴⁶⁸ Most, if not all, of these specialties were of religious character. In particular, the *fangshi* were known for their capacity to control spirits. The Fengshanshu chapter of the *Shiji* mentions the case of Li Shaojun, who claimed having the capacity to “use creatures” (*shiwu* 使物) at his will:

⁴⁶⁷ Dewoskin (1983) pp. 22- 29, Poo (1998) pp. 197-199, Harper (1999) pp. 814-830. Harper (1999) prefers to speak of “natural experts and occultists” than of *fangshi*, asserting that the *fangshi* were a distinctive group among these, characterized by their eclecticism (p. 827). This distinction, however, is debatable, to the extend that it is unclear if the term *fangshi* was referred to a defined type of specialist or if it was a generic term for various type of specialists. Finding myself inclined to interpret the expression “master of recipes” or “master of techniques” in generic terms, I ponder “natural philosophers and occultists” to be *fangshi* themselves.

⁴⁶⁸ Dewoskin (1983) pp. 1-6, Nylan (2009) p. 738.

“Claiming that he could make spirits serve him (*shiwu* 使物) and prevent old age he travelled about the courts of the various feudal lords, expounding his magic (*fang* 方)”⁴⁶⁹

In his translation of the *Shiji*⁴⁷⁰, Burton Watson has rendered *fang* as “magic” and the *fangshi* as “magicians”. However, *fang* can also be translated as “technique”, which is the rendition I have preferred in this work. It is noteworthy that the technique which Li Shaojun claims to possess is that of “using creatures” (*shiwu*), inasmuch as the *Sj* itself also attempted to gain control of “strange-looking creatures” (*wuyixing* 物異形).⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, many of the abilities (*fang*) attributed to the *fangshi* correlates to the divine potencies attributed to the creatures (*wu*) of the *Sj*. Whereas in the fantastic reality of the *Sj* the abilities to cure from illness, protect from wrongdoing and predict events, among others, were portrayed as supernatural capacities of mountain creatures, in the actual socio-political and religious reality of early China were ascribed to the “masters of techniques”. This suggests that the text was written by these type of literati as a repository of their religious knowledge and esoteric techniques.⁴⁷² Actually, in the *Sj* the numinous power of these entities rested not on themselves but on the application of a defined type of technical procedure to them, which enabled the successful exploitation of its potencies. While this numinous

⁴⁶⁹ Chinese characters in parenthesis are mine. Watson (1993) p. 25. Original text is 能使物，卻老。其游以方遍諸侯. Available at <http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=5770#dic416>.

⁴⁷⁰ Watson (1993)

⁴⁷¹ See p. 139, this chapter.

⁴⁷² Campany (1996) p. 36. Strassberg (2002) pp. 7-8.

potency resided on the entity, its conversion into a distinct divine power derived from performing a technical operation. Therefore, the text itself locates the effective appropriation of numinous potencies in technical knowledge and it introduced a corpus of knowledge which ultimately belonged to a specialist. The marked technical character of the *Sj* thus reinforces the hypothesis that it was of *fangshi* authorship.⁴⁷³ It is even possible the *fangshi* had claimed to base the efficacy of their medicinal, divinatory and apotropaic services on the usage of mountainous materials, which would imply an association of these specialists to specific regions, inasmuch as it might have been impossible for just one of them to dominate such a large amount of data. Regardless, whereas the assertion that these *fangshi* abilities were of mountainous and locative character remains speculative, it is undeniable that the *fangshi* capacity to control spirits was related to mountains and territories. In fact, Sima Qian's *Shiji* provides ample evidence on how the "master of recipes" systematically assisted early Chinese monarchs in his efforts to spiritually –and thus politically– control the land. Furthermore, the *fangshi* were the ones who championed the performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices at Mt. Tai.⁴⁷⁴ These sacrifices were thought to indicate that the emperor enjoyed the exceptional favor of Heaven and the totality of the "famous mountains and great rivers" (*mingshan dachuan* 名山

⁴⁷³ With respect to this, Company (1996) has asserted that "its writing has been not implausibly attributed to masters of esoterica (*fangshi* 方士), but if that attribution is correct then the various "masters" responsible for the knowledge collected in the *Shj* must have belonged to quite different traditions of learning and the *Shj* should then be seen as representing multiple bodies of knowledge and skill..." (p. 36). Considering that, as I have explained, the term *fangshi* referred to various sorts of specialists and that the *Sj* indeed reflects "multiple bodies of knowledge", I suspect the hypothesis timidly suggested by Company is actually correct.

⁴⁷⁴ Lewis (1999)b, Puett (2002) pp. 242-244.

大川)⁴⁷⁵ and were performed for the first time by Qin Shihuangdi in 219 BC, the third year of his reign.⁴⁷⁶ Since the First Emperor was indecisive about how to perform the sacrifices, he sought the advice of Confucian scholars, but seeing they were incapable of coming to an agreement on the nature of the offerings, he dismissed them and decided to perform the sacrifices imitating those directed toward Shangdi 上帝 at Yong 用 by the *taizhu* 太祝 (“Master of Invocations”⁴⁷⁷, “Great Supplicator”⁴⁷⁸ of “Great Invocator”⁴⁷⁹).⁴⁸⁰ The actual characteristics of the sacrifices were purposely kept secret.⁴⁸¹ Once he finished, Shihuang ordered the construction of a stela to commemorate the occasion.⁴⁸² More than one hundred years after this, in 110 BC, Han Wudi performed the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices at Taishan for the second time in history.⁴⁸³ He would conduct them at least four other times during his administration.⁴⁸⁴ In implementing them, he closely followed the indications of the *fangshi*, who claimed that successfully performing them would allow the monarch to

⁴⁷⁵ Watson (1993) p. 3.

⁴⁷⁶ Watson (1993) p. 12, Tsai (2003) p. 86, Bujard (2009) p. 782.

⁴⁷⁷ Watson (1993) p. 12.

⁴⁷⁸ Dawson (1994) p. 96.

⁴⁷⁹ Bujard (2009) p. 786.

⁴⁸⁰ Watson (1993) p. 12., Dawson (1994) p. 96. For the original text, see <http://ctext.org/shiji/feng-chan-shu?searchu=%E5%A4%AA%E7%A5%9D&searchmode=showall#result>

⁴⁸¹ Dawson (1994) p. 96.

⁴⁸² Watson (1993) p. 12.

⁴⁸³ Lewis (1999) p. 50, Tsai (2003) p. 87, Harrist (2008) pp. 226-227, Bujard (2009) p. 787.

⁴⁸⁴ Harrist (2008) p. 226.

become an immortal.⁴⁸⁵ Nevertheless, these sacrificial offerings also had pronounced territorial overtones, inasmuch as Sima Qian describes them in direct relation to the various mountain sacrifices offered in the tours of inspection and also in association to the worship of “famous mountains” and “great rivers”. Actually, the *Fengshanshu* chapter of the *Shiji* functions not only as a description of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices but also of several other sacrifices offered to mountains, rivers, asterism and the earth, as well as of several other religious practices associated with these phenomena.⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, as discusses in the previous chapter, the territorial character of the sacrifices performed at Mt. Tai is reinforced by the fact that the character for *feng* referred not only to a type of sacrifice but also the act of enfeoffment, suggesting that this ritual offering was intended to achieve control over the peak.⁴⁸⁷ These type of offering, however, was not restricted to Taishan only, insofar as the *Shundian* asserts that Shun offered the *feng* sacrifice to the twelve mountains.⁴⁸⁸ Therefore, the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices were aimed not only at obtaining immortality but also at ensuring regal control over the entirety of the Chinese realm.⁴⁸⁹ That early Chinese monarchs, and specifically the First Emperor of Qin, were preoccupied with obtaining ritual control of the territory is also indicated in the *Shiji*, which affirms that

⁴⁸⁵ Lewis (1999)b p. 59.

⁴⁸⁶ For a translation of this chapter see Watson (1993) pp. 3-52.

⁴⁸⁷ Tseng (2011) pp. 70-88.

⁴⁸⁸ Tseng (2011) p. 100. See p. 110. n. 231, previous chapter.

⁴⁸⁹ This has already been suggested, although not precisely in this terms by Mark Edward Lewis. See Lewis (1999)b p. 79.

“When Qin adopted the name of ‘emperor’ (*di* 帝) and the capital was established at Xianyang, the five peaks and the four watercourses were all likewise in the east. From the Five Emperors down to Qin, prosperity alternated with decay, and some of the famous mountains and great rivers were within the territory of the feudal lords and some within the territory of the Son of Heaven. The ceremonies used at these places fluctuated and varied from age to age, so they cannot be completely recorded. When Qin unified all under Heaven, orders were given that there should be a systematization of those offerings which had been regularly made by the officials responsible for sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the famous mountains (*mingshan* 名山), the great rivers (*dachuan* 大川), and the ghosts and spirits (*guishen* 鬼神).”⁴⁹⁰

In this way, one of the first things Shihuang did after taking control of China was to reorganized the sacrifices to all major deities in order to ensure effective dominion over the most important sacrificial offerings. The desire to obtain hegemonic mastery of ritual activities was accompanied by the adoption of the title *di* 帝. The fact the First Emperor –and the Han emperors after him– used this title to refer to himself is extremely significant, insofar as in early China the character *di* was also employed to signify “great deities”⁴⁹¹ –in the translation of Anne Birrell⁴⁹², including the ones who presided over the mountains of the *Sj*.⁴⁹³ Therefore, according to Sima Qian, the political unification of China was founded not only on the appropriation of but also on

⁴⁹⁰ Dawson (1994) pp. 99-100. Original text is 至秦稱帝，都咸陽，則五嶽、四瀆皆并在東方。自五帝以至秦，軼興軼衰，名山大川或在諸侯，或在天子，其禮損益世殊，不可勝記。及秦并天下，令祠官所常奉天地名山大川鬼神可得而序也。 Available at <http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=5740#char24207>.

⁴⁹¹ *di* 帝 was also one of the characters used to refer to Shang highest deity, *Shangdi* 上帝, and the signifier for the sacrifices offered to the *sifang*, River and Mountain Powers in Shang religion. See chapter 1.

⁴⁹² Birrell (1999) p. 224.

⁴⁹³ As Michael Puett has asserted, the identification of the Chinese emperor with a *di* amounted to an exercise of self-divinization which was at the basis of his totalistic religio-political aspirations. See Puett (2002) pp. 236-242.

the assimilation to spiritual forces on the part of the monarch. As a *di* –that is, a “great god”– himself, the emperor expected all existing numinous entities to submit to his authority, including those reigning over mountains. This interest of early Chinese emperors to take control over spirits of the land is also documented in the keeping of a centralized catalog of sacrifices to local gods known as the “register of sacrifices” (*sidian* 祀典).⁴⁹⁴ Actually, the abovementioned passage could well be a reference to this register, which granted particular importance to the absorption of mountain cults⁴⁹⁵. In the abovequoted passage, this is suggested by the assertion that famous mountains (*mingshan* 名山) were the recipient of sacrifices. Furthermore, according to Marianne Bujard, many of the cults included in the *sidian* were under the direct control of the *fangshi*.⁴⁹⁶ Parallel to this, Yu himself came to be associated with local mountain cults, serving as “...a patron for those seeking recognition for cults established at the level of the province or indeed any locality”⁴⁹⁷. The reason for this might well have been related to the capacity of both the *fangshi* and Yu of controlling spirits, including those of mountains. That the interest for controlling sacrifices to mountains was also an interest for controlling the presiding spirits of peaks is clearly suggested in the following entry from the *Shiji*:

“On the First Emperor’s return journey, when he passed Pengcheng he purified himself and prayed and offered sacrifices, wishing to recover the Zhou cauldrons from the River Si. He made 1,000 men dive into the water in search of them, but they did not find them. So he went south-west and crossed the River Huai and proceeded to Mount Heng and the Nan province. Sailing down the Yangtze, he

⁴⁹⁴ Lin, Fu-shih (2009) pp. 398, 441, 445-446, Lewis (2009) p. 591, Sterckx (2009) p. 861, Lagerwey (2010) p. 13.

⁴⁹⁵ Lewis (2006)a p. 233, Bujard (2009) pp. 804-807.

⁴⁹⁶ Bujard (2009) p. 802.

⁴⁹⁷ Lewis (2006)b. p. 44.

reached the shrine at Mount Xiang. They encountered a great wind, and were almost unable to cross over. The Supreme One asked his scholars of broad learning: 'What sort of deity is the Lady of the Xiang?' The scholars of broad learning replied: 'We hear that she was the daughter of Yao and the wife of Shun and is buried here.' At that the First Emperor was furious and he made 3,000 convicts cut down all the trees on Mount Xiang, making the mountain naked. The Supreme One then returned from Nan province via the Pass of Wu."⁴⁹⁸

This story serves to illustrate that Qin Shihuangdi could not tolerate that a mountain spirit refused to accept his authority and that regardless of her pedigree –as the daughter of Yao and the wife of Shun, two major mythical characters– he did not hesitate in punishing it for her insolence. Moreover, inasmuch as this punitive action takes place in the context of one of the First Emperor's tours of inspection, the account indicates that the ritual touring of the land also involved the unconditional submission of all territorial spirits, a pursuit which clearly echoes the ritual efforts to identify and control mountainous entities in the *Sj*. As I have explained, this text is not simply a fantastic and extravagant description of the sacred realm but a book which encompasses multiple references to actual religious beliefs and ritual practices of the late Zhou and early imperial periods, in particular those associated with the mantic specialists known as *fangshi*. These interrelations are reinforced by the fact the epilogue of the *Sj*, which summarizes the number of mountains travelled by Yu (counting up to 5,370), relates the activities of this mythical character with the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, asserting that

⁴⁹⁸ Dawson (1994) p. 69. Original text is 始皇還，過彭城，齋戒禱祠，欲出周鼎泗水。使千人沒水求之，弗得。乃西南渡淮水，之衡山、南郡。浮江，至湘山祠。逢大風，幾不得渡。上問博士曰：「湘君神？」博士對曰：「聞之，堯女，舜之妻，而葬此。」於是始皇大怒，使刑徒三千人皆伐湘山樹，赭其山。上自南郡由武關歸。
Available at <http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=4758>.

“The number of noble families who have participated in the paramount Feng sacrifice on Mount Grand (*taishan* 太山) and have participated in the awesome Shan sacrifice on Mount Bridgefather amount to seventy-two of the families of the nobility”⁴⁹⁹

Hence the *fangshi* character of the *Sj* is confirmed by the actuality that its compilers understood the ritual touring of the Chinese realm as intimately related to the performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. Furthermore, the type of sacrifices offered to mountains in this “classic” (*jing*) strongly resemble those actually offered to various early Han local deities⁵⁰⁰, which are said to have been under the control of the “master of recipes”.

In sum, the definition of sacrality as characterized by strangeness, the emphasis on the ritual control of mountainous deities and the effort to meticulously describe, catalog and identify mountainous entities which, all correlate to the vast array of mantic capacities of the “master of recipes”. To the extent that these specialist were notably active in the courts of early Chinese emperors, the religio-ritual culture of the *Sj* and the *fangshi* techniques converged with the imperial interest for attaining numinous control over the territory. In this way, the *Sj* was “... compiled with the intention of assisting the ruler to gain mastery over his realm”⁵⁰¹ and it “... supplies the key to understanding what it means to speak of “political power” in China, and to understanding the link –still patent today in the discourse about the Motherland’s territorial claims– between the exercise of power and the control of territory”⁵⁰². To explain, inasmuch as political authority was rooted on access to numinous forces,

⁴⁹⁹ Birrell (1999) p. 103. Original text is 封於太山，禪於梁父，七十二家. Available at <http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=83965>

⁵⁰⁰ Bujard (2009) pp. 788-789.

⁵⁰¹ Von Glahn (2004) p. 84.

⁵⁰² Lagerwey (2010) p. 14.

and since these forces were believed to reside in mountainous regions, having the ability to identify and control them provided the basis for political authority. Controlling and mastering the land resulted not only from touring it but also, and most notably, from identifying and subjugating its numinous potencies. In this way, the *Sj* was a “tour of inspection” of a different kind to that described in the *Shundian* and the *Yugong*, inasmuch as it granted great importance to the description and ritual appropriation of entities. It was a type of tour, however, that strongly resembled those originally performed by the first emperors, which focused on ritual offerings to “famous mountains and great rivers”, and culminated in the performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.

Conclusion

In the *Sj*, the creation of sacred space relied not only on the construction of an ordered space, that is, a centrally situated and cardinally oriented space (*Zhongguo* 中国) but also, and most importantly, on the definition of a liminal space. The liminality of this space expressed by way of the composite and bizarre appearances of mountainous entities, as well as through their numinous powers and capacities. In the case of minerals, which did not have strange aspects, their liminal quality is suggested by the fact they were widely used as ritual paraphernalia.

Among mountainous entities, the most important were deities, specially the *di* or “great gods”, which presided over mountain ranges. Many *di* were mythical figures whose actions determined the functioning of certain natural phenomena, from the falling of rain, through the occurrence of lightning and storms to the succession of night and day. Consequently, by means of their presiding deities, the liminal character

of mountains founded the workings of the *cosmos* and physical reality itself. In this way, in the *Sj* the cosmological function of the mountain was not only cosmographical but also astronomical, meteorological and, in general, ecological. The comprehensive cosmological import of the mountain was rooted in its association to myths and the “dramatic irruptions of the heavenly into the world”. The different functions of the *di* all bore this intervening quality. These functions granted the liminality of the mountain an ontological capacity, to the extent that they originated reality. The liminality of the mountain defined the reality of the world.

This ontology of the liminal was different from that of the ordered, being rooted in the function of the mountain not as a geographical marker but as a portal, that is, a point of convergence between the heavenly and the terrestrial. In the *Sj*, these different ontologies complemented each other and liminality was also a spatial phenomena. To the extent that mountains were liminal and they situated all across the territory defining its ordered structure, they determined the liminality of the totality of the Chinese realm, which was named *Shenzhou* 神州, that is, the “Continent of Spirits”. The complementarity between order and liminality in defining the reality of China expressed in that *Zhongguo* and *Shenzhou* were used interchangeably in religious and philosophical literature.

Therefore, all of the components of Eliadean sacral spatiality were conveyed by the mountain journey described in the *Sj*. Inasmuch as the space defined by mountains was characterized by order (*Zhongguo*), liminality (*Shenzhou*) and reality (ontological uniqueness), it was a sacred space. Although it considered all of the abovementioned elements as defining the sacrality of the Chinese realm, it placed particular

importance to liminality, systematically characterizing the mountain as a space populated by bizarre-looking spirits and other strange entities. Furthermore, the manner in which this space was constructed differed from the one explained in the *Yugong* to the extent that it consisted not only in traversing mountains but also in describing mountainous entities and indicating the way to obtain their numinous potencies.

In fact, the *Sj* paid a great deal of attention to the appropriation of the divine powers of mountains. This appropriation was effected primarily through sacrifice. Each mountain chain had its own “great gods” and the text explained the specific sacrifices needed to tame them. Nevertheless, ritual was only one of the ways in which the numinous potencies of mountainous entities were appropriated, inasmuch as that wearing, eating or observing a certain bizarre entity permitted the acquisition of its divine potencies. Both ritual and technical types of numinous appropriation relied on accurate descriptions and hence on writing as a medium for spiritual control. Moreover, inasmuch as these entities were specific to each mountains, the effort to describe and control them entailed a detailed knowledge of localities. In this manner, the effort to ensure control over mountains’ numinous powers was also an effort to spiritually control territories, granting a marked locative and territorial character to the text. Both the preoccupation for the appropriation of numinous powers and the emphasis on territoriality which implied relate to certain aspects of late Zhou and early imperial religio-political culture. On the one hand, the importance the text grants to the efficacious obtention of numinous powers echoes the capacities of the *fangshi* or “masters of techniques”, a type of ritual specialists which claimed knowing techniques capable of obtaining numinous powers from creatures (*wu*), suggesting

the text was compiled by this sort of literati (*shi*). On the other hand, the locative character of the text relates to the great significance early Chinese emperors granted to the spiritual control of their territories, and particularly of the mountains situated in different regions, to the extent that mountain cults were an important part of the the “register of sacrifices” (*sidian*), an imperial compendium of different territorial cults which was indeed partially managed by the *fangshi*. Considering the locative nature of the *Sj* and its relations to techniques aimed at obtaining numinous powers as well as to imperial concerns for territorial domination, the text appears to have served as a *fangshi* manual devised to aid emperors in their efforts to numinously dominate the territories under their jurisdiction. Therefore, if the listing and description of various bizarre-looking and spiritually powerful entities shaped a portrayal of mountainous sacrality as grounded in liminality, the emphasis on the liminal character of the mountain might have been grounded on the late Zhou and early imperial efforts to support their claims of absolute religio-political power and exclusive access to the heavenly realm not on the intermediation of ancestors, which after the fall of the Western Zhou had fallen into discredit, but on the exclusive capacity to directly appropriate the numinous forces thought to reside in the territory, particularly in mountains. In the light of this, the *Sj* can be interpreted as a mantic text ultimately devised to satisfy not only religious but also political needs. These needs were satisfy by showing the specific ways to obtain divine potencies from mountains. In this way, inasmuch as sacrality was believed to be located primarily in the territory, accessing the mountain amounted to accessing the numinous plane itself. Consequently, to the extent that in early China political power was grounded in exclusive access to numinous power, accessing the mountain was of paramount importance for rulers.

The *Sj* loyally reflects the politico-religious preeminence early Chinese rulers granted to the mountain and the efforts they undertook to partake of its sacrality.

Conclusion:

The sacrality of the mountain and early Chinese religious culture.

The previous chapters have shown the mountain can be successfully understood as a “sacred space” in Eliadean terms. To the extent the mountain was a space characterized by order, liminality and reality, it was a sacred space. Furthermore, inasmuch as the mountain was the ultimate spatial marker and the most elemental unit in early Chinese cosmographical thought, the sacrality of the mountain entailed the sacrality of the entire Chinese territory as suggested by the intimate relation between mountain sacrality and terms such as *Zhongguo* and *Shenzhou*. However, the sacrality of the mountain –as well as that of space itself– was conveyed variously along the approximately 1.500 years of religious history I have covered in this work. In fact, the revision of the oracle bones inscriptions as well as of the *Yugong*, *Shundian*, and *Shanjing* texts reveals that, although sharing the characteristic elements of Eliadean sacral spatiality, the portrayals of mountainous sacrality in the Shang dynasty, the *Shangshu* and the *Shanhaijing* differed on important points with each other. These differences related to specific religious cultures and hence to defined understandings of the heavenly and the sacred realms. To revert this argument: The manner in which the numinosity and sacrality were conceived determined the manner in which the mountain as a sacred space was understood. In this way, the study of the mountain offers privileged and fascinating insights on the specificity of these religious cultures, their evolutions and interactions, specially in reference to their views on the sacrality of space. In particular, meanwhile tracking the evolution of mountainous sacrality from the late Shang through the late Zhou and early imperial periods reveal major changes in the focus of religious worship,

analyzing and comparing the contemporary but divergent portrayals of the sacrality of the mountain in the *Shujing* and the *Shanjing* unveils contrasting views on the nature of the sacred realm and the character of ritual communication with the numinous.

In chapter one, I have argued that the applicability of Eliade's work to early Chinese religion has been reduced to the plausibility of a Shang central site either in the form of a city or a mountain, dismissing the possibility of a territory and failing to understand that the Eliadean emphasis on centrality was an integral part of Eliade's thesis that order and orientation were essential to the construction of a "sacred space". Disconnecting the discussion over "the symbolism of the center" from these more comprehensive themes, scholars of early China have ignored the nuances and complexities involved in the Eliadean treatment of centrality as a component of sacrality, failing to successfully apply the concept of "sacred space" to Shang religion. By moving the discussion from the issue of centrality to that of directionality and orientation, I have interpreted the Shang preoccupation for the definition of a center (*zhongshang*) and the establishment of directions (*sifang*, *situ*, *siwu*) as an overall concern for orientation, understanding this effort in achieving effective orientation (*lizhong*) as one directed towards the creation of a sacral spatiality (*zhongshang*). In doing this, I have traced the idea of the sacrality of the mountain and the sacrality of space back to the late Shang dynasty, arguing that the preeminent position the Mountain Power held in the Shang pantheon granted the mountain a particularly powerful liminal status. I have also asserted that the bizarre, dualistic decoration of the famous bronze vessels the Shang used to communicate with their Powers was indicative of their liminal functionality and called attention to the fact the minerals used to forge them were extracted from mountainous regions,

suggesting that these metals were believed to possess liminal capacities precisely because of their mountainous origin. In this way, I have concluded that to the extent that mountains, together with rivers, were the only territorially-grounded Powers of the pantheon, they defined the liminality of the Shang territory and complemented the order and orientation of the *Sifang* scheme to shape the ontological uniqueness of the Shang world and to establish a full-out sacral spatiality. Meanwhile the *Sifang* ordered and oriented the Shang world by defining the cardinal directions, the mountain (*yue*), together with the river (*he*) and the land (*tu*), determined its liminality and defined a multiform and comprehensive numinous landscape. By viewing Shang spatiality as related not only to directionality and centrality but also to liminality, I have suggested that the Shang insistence on the definition of an strictly ordered, centrally-situated, cardinally-oriented, territorially-grounded and spiritually-charged spatiality was concerned with the construction of a world whose sense of reality was grounded on its perpetual connection to the numinous realm.

Chapter two introduced us to a new period in Chinese history, the Warring States, by analyzing two texts included in the *Shangshu*, the *Shundian* and the *Yugong*. These texts reveal that during the late Zhou and early imperial period the mountain continue to be understood as a “sacred space”. However, a major change occurred in the sacrality of the mountain as it came to be used primarily to order space and not to perform a liminal function. On the one hand, Shun’s tour inspection established a cardinally-oriented space by using sacred mountains (peaks, *yue*) as cardinal markers, plotting the course followed by Shun in his ritual displacement along the territory. On the other hand, Yu reordered the world by following mountains and rivers, reinstating the normal flow of energies and reestablishing the structure of the

world according to its innate tendencies. In this way, in both the *Yugong* and the *Shundian* mountains were portrayed as permitting the creation of an ordered –and hence sacred– space. Furthermore, the sacral quality of the space traced by means of mountains is suggested by two other facts: That the routes traced by Yu were not only geographical paths but also pneumatic channels and that both Shun and Yu offered sacrifices to the mountains they encountered in their routes. This indicates that, like in the Shang pantheon, in these texts the mountain was conceived as having a liminal quality. However, liminality was not the most distinctive component of the sacral character of mountains, and whereas the pneumatic aspect of Yu's journey was largely implicit in the *Yugong*, in the mountain journeys of both Yu and Shun sacrifices played a rather minor role when compared to the importance they gave to the definition of spatial contours.

In sum, by analyzing the *Yugong* and the *Shundian*, I have shown that in the Warring States and early imperial religious culture the mountain had both the ability to order space, to channel energies and to host spirits, permitting the construction of a sacral spatiality based on order/orientation, liminality and reality. I have also suggested that although the mountain preserved the sacral quality it had acquired in Shang religious culture its role differed importantly from the one it had in the Shang pantheon, to the extent that now the Chinese territory acquired not only its liminal character but also its centrally-situated and cardinally oriented structure through the mountain, asserting that, as a consequence of the debilitation of ancestor worship and the ascension of territorial worship, mountains came to acquire a religious preeminence which they previously lacked. In doing this, I have called attention to the preeminent role mountains had in late Zhou and early imperial myths and rituals. Based on Mircea

Eliade's definitions of myths as cosmogonic tales and of rituals as reenactments of mythical activities, I have argued that the mountain itinerary traced by Yu, as a tale about the suppression of the chaos (*luan*) of the the flood, offered a mythical explanation for the origin of the *cosmos* –that is, the world as an ordered space– as well as a mythical model for its preservation which relied on continuous movement across mountains. In fact, to the extent that the chaos of the flood represented a cosmic disruption in the natural flow of rivers, the normal disposition of mountains and the normal flow of pneumatic energies, ending with the overflowing waters amounted to reinstating the structure of the world itself. Hence the reordering of the world was effected through the deliberate efforts of Yu, who was successful inasmuch as he followed mountains and rivers, acquiescing to the natural dispositions of the environment. However, the achievements of Yu were not definitive and the looming threat of the chaos of the flood never ceased to haunt the Chinese imagination, which believed that for the world to preserve its cosmic stability the journey originally traced by Yu had to be continuously repeated, otherwise the world itself as a physical and spatial reality would crumble to ashes and disappear into confusion. Consequently, the actions of Yu functioned as a mythical model for the preservation of cosmic stability, granting tremendous ritual power to those who reenacted his journey. Inasmuch as this recreation was regarded as the responsibility of monarchs, the very existence of the *cosmos* rested on regal ritual activity. In this way, the mythical account of Yu's movement along mountains and rivers ultimately served to legitimize the absolute politico-religious powers of Chinese emperors, who reenacted Yu's activities by either touring their realm in the "tour of inspection" (*xunshou*) or by symbolically traversing the land in a replica of the

cosmos known as the “Luminous Hall” (*mingtang*). These two ritual systems allowed the monarch to sustain the cosmos by ritually reenacting the mythical actions of Yu.

The *Shanjing*, the subject of Chapter Three, offers an alternative reenactment of Yu’s journey, allowing the reader to reenact it through a detailed description of several mountains and the various strange-looking and numinously powerful entities which they hosts, including birds, animals, plants, trees and deities, some of whom are known mythical figures. After analyzing these entities, I have concluded that their hybrid physical structures, their bizarre appearances and their divine potencies were indicative of the liminal character of the mountain and that in the text it was this aspect of the sacrality of the mountain which took precedence over its cosmographical capacity. In fact, whereas the *Sj* also ascribed the mountain the ability to order space –describing the precise location of each mountain and tracing spatial contours through them– it granted considerably more importance to the description of the different entities which they contained, characterizing them as having unusual looks and powerful properties. Furthermore, the journey differed from those of the *mingtang* and the *xunshou* not inly in that it described bizarre-looking entities but also in that it placed particular attention to the appropriation of their numinous potencies. The text, in fact, offers various methods to this, from the offering of sacrifices to the performance of defined technical procedures. Regardless of the method, the obtention of numinous powers always rests on the precise identification of the entities. Inasmuch as this precision is achieved by means of a written description, the texts seems to reflect the Warring State and early imperial believed that script has the power to tame spirits and appropriate their divine potencies. The technical character of the text as well as its emphasis on strangeness suggests it

was compiled by the *fangshi*, a group of eclectic ritual specialist which assisted early Chinese emperors in his efforts to gain spiritual control over the territory. Finally, I have suggested that the text was probably devised to serve as a mantic manual for the spiritual control of the territory through the appropriation of the numinous potencies of mountains, particularly their deities, and hence to satisfy the imperial concern for acquiring absolute domination over the Chinese realm in the context of a new religious mentality which, having discarded ancestors as effective intermediaries with the heavenly realm, turned its attention towards the territory, and specifically the mountain, as an efficacious and generous source of numinous powers.

In this way, throughout these chapters I have demonstrated that the sacrality of the mountain was of paramount importance for early Chinese monarchs and one of the most distinctive elements of early Chinese religion, showing that while in passing from the late Shang, through the late Zhou, to the early imperial periods the idea that the ultimate source of political authority was the divine realm remained unaffected, the opinions regarding how to access such realm suffered notable modifications and the one who came to be generally accepted by early Chinese emperors as valid was that which assured the mountain –and not one of the various abstract principles defended in the heated debates of the Warring States– was the most trustable fount of divine potencies and hence the most solid source of political power. For early Chinese emperors, in fact, accessing the mountain was accessing the divine realm itself and the utility of texts such as the *Shangshu* and the *Sj* rested on their ability to provide exact instructions on how to access this realm and appropriate its powers. The guidelines provided in the *Sj* regarding the manner in which to access mountains and obtain their numinous powers were not the only ones available to Qin and early

Han emperors, as the *Shundian* and the *Yugong* provided their own methods to take advantage from the sacred qualities of mountains. Whereas these methods concurred with those explained in the *Sj* in attributing to the act of traversing mountains the ability to order space and hence coincided in granting a cosmographical capacity to the mountain, they, however differed notably on the importance they assigned to its liminal quality, particularly regarding the role they ascribed to the description of mountainous entities and the appropriation of their divine powers, which were largely absent in the *Shangshu* but played a major role in the *Sj*. These differences between the ritual tours of the *Yugong* and the *Sj* raise a number of intricate questions, but most importantly the following: Why were the portrayals of Yu's mountain journey in these texts so remarkably different? Why strange-looking creatures and spirits had such a minor role in the former, and bore such a preeminence position in the latter? Successfully answering this implies dealing with much more than early Chinese ritual and religious culture and delving into the complex interactions between the different religio-philosophical schools of Ancient China, a matter which had been the subject of extensive research.⁵⁰³ To the extent that fully addressing these issues is way beyond the interests of this work, the following remarks should be understood not as definite responses but as invitations for further inquiry.

Recently, the contrasts between the *Yugong/Shundian* and the *Shanjing* have been interpreted as those between administrative (or secular) and spiritual (or religious) versions of Yu's mythical mountain journey. It has been asserted that the secularity of

⁵⁰³ On these issues, particularly suggestive are the writings of Mark Edward Lewis and Michael Puett. See Lewis (1990), Lewis (1999), Puett (2001) & Puett (2002).

the former is given by the absence or scarcity of references to spirits while the spirituality of the latter is determined by the presence or profusion of references to spirits.⁵⁰⁴ I disagree with this view. In the first place, it is debatable if a secular sphere ever existed in Early China, to the extent that “...China is a religious state and Chinese society is a religious society. The religious dimension of Chinese society and the Chinese state being inseparable from each other, not taking that dimension into account makes it impossible to make sense of anything Chinese...”⁵⁰⁵. In the particular case I consider here, I believe that holding the distinction between secular and religious makes it impossible to recognize what is really at stake when comparing the *Shangshu* and *Shanjing* versions of Yu’s itinerary across mountains. In fact, as I have explained in this work, the divergences between these texts are not grounded in an opposition between secularity and spirituality but rather in divergent views over the nature of sacrality, specifically regarding the sacrality of the mountain and the space.

In the second place, although it is true the the *Yugong* and *Shundian* pay little attention to spirits, it is incorrect to assert that these are “completely absent”⁵⁰⁶ from the texts. As I have explained in Chapter Two, the fact that Yu is described as offering the *lu* sacrifice at the end of the *Yugong*’s description of Yu’s journey suggests that also in this text mountains were conceived as hosting spirits, an hypothesis which is

⁵⁰⁴ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) has asserted that “the most substantial point of difference between the “Yugong” and the *Shanhai jing* versions of Yu’s deeds, although not formulated directly, are the spirits, completely absent in the former and the key element of organization of space in the latter...” (p. 638), to then conclude that “the officially recognized version of Yu’s deeds, the “Yugong,” represents his regulation of terrestrial space as a purely administrative tour...” (p. 641).

⁵⁰⁵ Lagerwey (2010) p. 1.

⁵⁰⁶ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) p. 641.

reinforced by the *wang* sacrifices Shun is said to have offered to the “the multiple spirits of mountains and rivers”. In this way, although the references to spirits in the *Yugong* and *Shundian* are certainly scarce, specially when compare to the great deal of attention which spirits receive in the *Shanjing*, they are not missing. Therefore, the differences between the *Yugong/Shundian* and the *Shanjing* are not of nature but of degree, not a matter of absence or presence of spirits but rather a question of the importance which is granted to spirits. In fact, the *Yugong* does not appear to be concern with denying spirits as much as with “... keeping the gods at a distance or, more precisely, at the right distance, neither too close nor too far, with neither familiarity nor indifference, certainly not to cause them to disappear”⁵⁰⁷. Hence the text reflects a typically Confucian attitude toward the divine realm, to the extend that, as Dorofeeva Litchmann has signaled⁵⁰⁸, in the *Lunyu* 論語 (“Analects”) Confucius is depicted as refusing to speak of issues involving spirits:

“The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings (*guai* 怪), the use of force, disorder (*luan* 亂), or the spirits (*shen* 神)”⁵⁰⁹

Furthermore, in this passage Confucius declines addressing not only spirits (*shen*) but also chaos (*luan*) and strangeness (*guai*). Considering this, it is ever more intriguing the fact that the *Yugong* and *Shundian* do not withhold entirely from referring –either explicitly or implicitly– to neither spirits nor chaos, although they certainly refuse to discuss them, thus keeping them at a distance. Nevertheless, that

⁵⁰⁷ Levi (2009) pp. 687-688

⁵⁰⁸ Dorofeeva-Litchmann (2009) pp. 641-642.

⁵⁰⁹ Ames & Rosemont (1998) p. 115. Original text is 子不語怪, 力, 亂, 神. Available at <http://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=1271#char24618>

which these texts undoubtedly refrain from addressing is strangeness (*guai*) and as I have explained, bizarreness is the most important theme of the *Sj*. In this way, the most decisive point of divergence between the *Yugong/Shundian* and the *Shanjing* is strangeness, which is completely ignored in the former and the major subject of the latter.⁵¹⁰In my view, the Confucian refusal to address strangeness which the *Yugong* and *Shundian* manifested was ultimately a refusal to emphasize the liminal quality of the sacred realm as a consequence of their emphasis on the cosmographical component of mountainous sacrality.

In the third place, and in relation to the abovementioned point, the fact that spirits played a rather minor role in the the *Yugong* and the *Shundian* does not signify these texts discarded the sacrality of either the mountain or the space and hence does not imply they regarded these as being purely secular or administrative constructs. That is not the case. To the extent that these texts portrayed the mountain as capable of fashioning an ordered and cardinally-oriented space, they depicted the mountain as having a sacral quality rooted in a cosmographical capacity, a capacity which permitted the construction of a space whose sacrality was given by its order and orientation. Therefore, the divergences between the mountain journeys of Yu in the *Shangshu* and the *Shanjing* were not differences between secular and religious portrayals of spaces or mountains but discrepancies over the manner in which the sacrality of the territory and the mountain were defined. Whereas the former primarily defined the sacral character of space in relation to the formation of an ordered and cardinally oriented territory –granting little attention to the liminal aspect of it–, the

⁵¹⁰ The singularity of the early Chinese scholarly tradition dedicated to strangeness and its differences with the Confucian tradition has been addressed by Robert F. Campany. See Campany (1996) pp. 126-159, *passim*.

latter mainly described it with regard to the description of a liminal quality characterized by its utmost strangeness and incredible numinous power.

The fact these contradicting portrayals of the sacrality of the mountain coexisted during the same period suggests that during the Warring States and early imperial periods, religious culture, and particularly mythological thought, was a contested field of competing schools seeking for politico-religio supremacy.⁵¹¹ This reflects particularly well in the divergent appropriations of the mythological figure of Da Yu which the Confucian and *fangshi* schools developed. Whereas in the *Yugong* Yu was portrayed as the constructor of order in the *Sj* he was depicted as the tamer of spirits, two characterizations which were grounded in the same rationales which caused the abovementioned definitions of sacral spatiality and mountainous sacrality to diverge. Ultimately, the disparate portrayals of sacrality which these texts delivered determined dissimilar characterizations of the Da Yu. To explain these differences in mythological thought has been a major preoccupation for scholars of early China throughout the years. In delving into them I would like to rely on the work of Michael Puett, who has criticized the traditional thesis of reverse euhemerization –which argues that mythological characters were converted into historical figures by Confucians—⁵¹² and proposed that no original corpus of mythological thought ever existed but that different Warring State and early imperial philosophico-religious schools appropriated mythological figures to champion their own politico-religious

⁵¹¹ Lewis (1990) & Lewis (2009)

⁵¹² Boltz (1981)

agendas⁵¹³, developing competing cosmologies⁵¹⁴ In this way, it is unlikely that either the *Yugong* or the *Shanjing* reflected a pristine portrayal of Yu which later came to be altered by a rival school. It is much more plausible, instead, that each of these texts reflected a distinctive appropriation of the figure of Yu according to their own religio-political interests. This is coherent with the fact that the manner in which the exercise of authority was portrayed in these accounts depended on the specific portrayals of Yu's deeds which they developed. Therefore, whereas the image of Yu as queller of the flood and constructor of order was developed to promote the ideal of the ruler as a restless spatial pilgrim whose continuous ritual movement maintained the stability of the cosmos, the portrayal of Yu as tamer of spirits and mantic technician was advanced to champion the characterization of the emperor as the only one capable of spiritually controlling the territory, particularly the mountains. Inasmuch as the latter version also incorporated the ideal of the restless spatial pilgrim, the ideal of emperorship advocated by the *Sj* most loyally reflected the actual politico-religious convictions shared by early Chinese emperors, specifically Qin Shihuangdi and Han Wudi. The fact that it did reveals that the Chinese empire was originally founded on principles different from those sustained by Confucianism, suggesting that the Ruists acquired its supremacy over the *fangshi* later in history, imposing the ideal of the peripatetic ruler over that of the tamer of spirits and making their refusal to speak of spirits, chaos and strangeness the dominant mode of thinking in the imperial courts. Nevertheless, although this implied emperors eventually renounced to the belief they had to base their authority exclusively on the numinous control of mountains, it did not induce them to relinquish to the

⁵¹³ Puett (2001) pp. 92-101. A similar argument is suggested by Lewis (1990) and Lewis (2009)

⁵¹⁴ Puett (2002) pp. 236-237.

understanding that the mountain was the basis of cosmic structure and the ruler the guarantor of cosmic stability. Furthermore, beyond the confines of governmental authority, mountains continued to be praised for their liminal qualities in literature, poetry and painting as the home of immortals, hermits, Taoist monks and Buddhist priests.

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