

PREFACE

This work has had a long gestation period and, as some readers will recognize, parts of it have been published previously in articles. It is essentially an attempt to answer certain questions which have puzzled me. Some of these questions were first brought to my attention when I was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, studying with Peter Boodberg and Wolfram Eberhard, such as why is there so little myth in early Chinese texts and what was the shape of the cosmos in the minds of the early Chinese? Others I trace back to my undergraduate days at U.C.L.A. where I studied archaeology with Richard Rudolph and took a course in Chinese art history with J. Leroy Davidson, such as what is the meaning of the *taotie* on Shang Dynasty bronzes and what is the relationship between their decor and their ritual purpose? To David Keightley and David Nivison, I owe the problem of how Shang divination worked and to David Keightley, the admonition that I should be able to trace the origin of the structures of Warring States thought which I described in *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*, although if I had taken this admonition seriously at the time, I would still be working to obtain my doctorate.

Some of these questions lead to even more fundamental ones. We cannot understand the problem of myth in early China without understanding the relationship of myth to the structure of religion, nor can we understand the meaning of the *taotie* 饕餮 without considering the problem of meaning in primitive art more generally. No attempt to answer such questions can be definitive. Indeed, any attempt is necessarily both speculative and incomplete and I offer my own solutions herein with a sense of trepidation, and in the belief that such questions must be addressed directly if we are to progress in our understanding of the development of early Chinese thought and if we are to achieve the more complete understanding of the range of possibilities of the human mind which the study of ancient China should allow us. However faulty my own solutions may be, they should at least provoke others to consider these problems.

Although in the Introduction to this work, I have provided a very brief introduction to Shang archaeology in order to make the rest of the work comprehensible to the nonspecialist, I have not made any attempt to provide either a comprehensive account of Shang archaeology or of the contents of the oracle bone inscriptions. I refer the reader to K. C. Chang's *Shang Civilization* for the most comprehensive account of Shang archaeology in English, and to *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, Fourth Edition, for a more recent summary. K. C. Chang, editor, *Studies of Shang Archaeology* also provides useful background and an introduction to current arguments. The best introduction to the contents of Shang oracle bone inscriptions in a Western language is Tsung-tung Chang, *Der Kult der Shang Dynastie im Spiegel der Orakelinschriften*, which includes translations of original inscriptions and an introduction to Shang religion. Léon Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou la voie royale: Recherches sur l'Esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque* is concerned with the interplay between the social, political and ritual structures and makes extensive use of the oracle bone inscriptions. Those who wish to learn to read the inscriptions for themselves are referred to David Keightley's *Sources of Shang History*, an invaluable reference work, although it is now somewhat dated by the publication of the *Jiaguwen heji* and other recent works. Other general works are included in the bibliography.