



Religion of Western Chu

Ghorban Elmi¹ 

1. Associate Professor, Department of Comparative Religions and Mysticism, Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: gelmi@ut.ac.ir

Abstract

This article, in a descriptive and analytical way, investigates the nature, elements and function of religion in ancient China, during the Western Chu period. The works left from this period - including iconography and writings on ritual bronze vessels, writings on occult bones, royal tombs and some later works - express their religious beliefs and rituals. The religion of western chu included the belief in Tien as the Supreme God, the spirits of ancestors, the spirits and gods of nature, and the belief in life after death. The Supreme God was at the head and the rest of the spirits and gods were at a lower level and were his agents. Tien is a personal deity, ruler of all existence, creator and sustainer of all beings. He sends revelations to help people and judges them with justice. In addition to believing in Tien, they believed in life after death, that man has two souls: one is P'o, who after death, will fall to the lower world and live a dark life there. Another is Hun, who ascended to Tien's Palace and lives there happily. In order to obtain favorable living conditions, or at least to be safe from calamities, one must respect and worship God, spirits and ancestors and make sacrifices for them. Unlike the Shang period, in the Chu period, not the spirit of the dead ruler but the living ruler himself is the intermediary between Heaven and Earth, who should rule the people justly according to Tien Ming.

Keywords: Chu, religious beliefs, rituals, Tien.

Introduction

For the historian of culture as well as for the historian of religions, China represents an unusually advantageous field of research. Just as the Chinese people arise from many and various ethnic combinations, its culture constitutes a complex and original synthesis in which the contributions of several sources can nevertheless be discovered. The religious structures that we have just sketched do not exhaust the rich documentation on the Chou period. We shall complete our exposition by representing some cosmogonic myths and the fundamental metaphysical ideas. For the moment we will point out that scholars have recently agreed to emphasize the cultural and religious complexity of archaic China.

Research Findings

The works left from this period - including iconography and writings on ritual bronze vessels, writings on occult bones, royal tombs and some later works - express their religious beliefs and rituals. The religion of western Chu included the belief in Tien as the Supreme God, the spirits of ancestors, the spirits and gods of nature, and the belief in life after death. The Supreme God was at the head and the rest of the spirits and gods were at a lower level and were his agents.



At the beginning of the dynasty the celestial god T'ien (Heaven), or Shang Ti (The Lord on High), shows the characteristics of an anthropomorphic and personal god. He resides in the Great Bear at the center of the heavens. The texts bring out his celestial structure: he sees, observes, and hears everything; he is clairvoyant and omniscient; his decree is infallible. Tien is a personal deity, ruler of all existence, creator and sustainer of all beings. He sends revelations to help people and judges them with justice. Heaven (T'ien) remains the protector of the dynasty. The king is the "son of T'ien" and the "regent of Shang Ti." This is why, in principle, only the king is fit to offer him sacrifices. He is responsible for the normal progression of the cosmic rhythms; in case of disaster-drought, prodigies, calamities, floods-the king subjects himself to expiatory rites. T'ien and Shang Ti are invoked in agreements and contracts.

Conclusion

From what has told, it is clear that the religion of western chu included the belief in Tien as the Supreme God, the spirits of ancestors, the spirits and gods of nature, and the belief in life after death. The Supreme God was at the head and the rest of the spirits and gods were at a lower level and were his agents. Tien is a personal deity, ruler of all existence, creator and sustainer of all beings. He sends revelations to help people and judges them with justice.

In addition to believing in Tien, they believed in life after death, that man has two souls: one is P'o, who after death, will fall to the lower world and live a dark life there. Another is Hun, who ascended to Tien's Palace and lives there happily. In order to obtain favorable living conditions, or at least to be safe from calamities, one must respect and worship God, spirits and ancestors and make sacrifices for them. Unlike the Shang period, in the Chu period, not the spirit of the dead ruler but the living ruler himself is the intermediary between Heaven and Earth, who should rule the people justly according to Tien Ming.

In addition to believing in Tien, they believed in life after death.

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Print ISSN: 2228-5563
online ISSN: 2588-4816

Religions and Mysticism

University of Tehran
Faculty of Theology
and Islamic Studies



Schindler, Bruno (1923), "*The development of Chinese conceptions of Supreme Beings*," *Asia Major: Introductory Volume*, pp. 298-366.

Cite this article: Elmi, G. (2024). Religion of Western Chu. *Religions and Mysticism*, 56 (2), 553-573. (in Persian)

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22059/jrm.2024.371550.630499>



Article Type: Research Paper

Received: 23-Jan-2024

Received in revised form: 6-Mar-2024

Accepted: 10-Mar-2024

Published online: 16-Mar-2024