What Did Make the Chinese "Chinese"?

Some Geographical Perspectives

BY DAVID N. KEIGHTLEY

Any reflection on the origins of civilization in China has to consider both the "whatness" and the "whyness" of the question: what the early culture was and why it assumed the particular forms that it did.[1] I have discussed, in a number of papers, the religious, aesthetic, and stylistic choices that, in my view, helped to define the content of early Chinese culture, that represent its "whatness."[2] Some of these strategic cultural features would include: (1) A stress on hierarchical social distinctions; (2) the ability to mobilize labor on a massive scale; (3) an emphasis on the group rather than the individual—expressed in the impersonality and generality of artistic and literary representation, and generated and validated by a religion of ancestor worship that defined individuals in terms of their role and status in the system of sacrifice and descent; (4) an emphasis on ritual in all dimensions of life; (5) an emphasis on formal boundaries and models, as revealed in part by the great stress on social discipline and order in ethics and cosmology; (6) an ethic of service, obligation, and emulation; (7) little sense of tragedy or irony.[3] The issues addressed here represent some of my speculations on the "whyness" of the issue. They are designed to stimulate enquiry and reflection without necessarily hoping to convince.

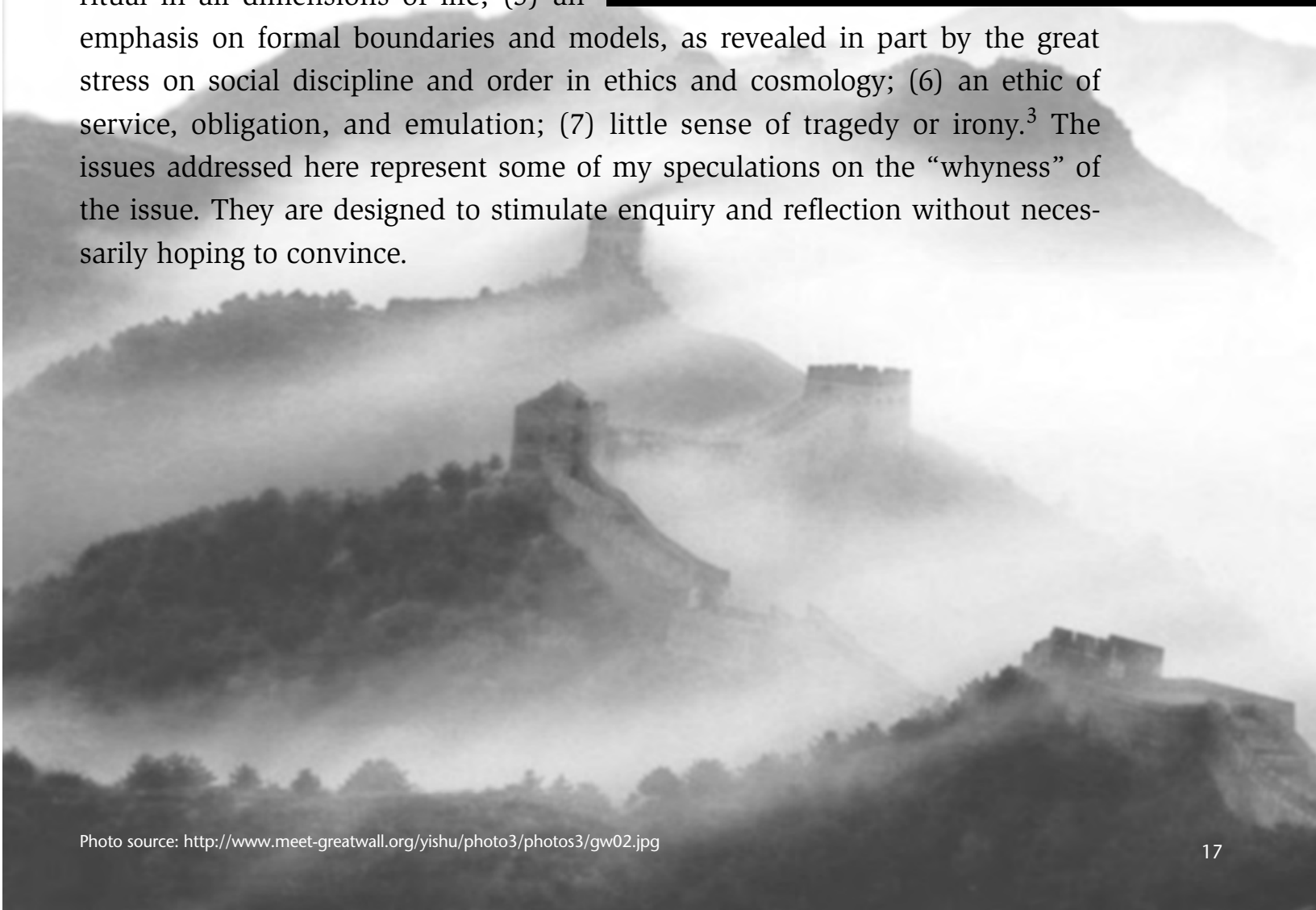

Photo source: http://www.meet-greatwall.org/yishu/photo3/photos3/gw02.jpg

And we can ask, what made the ancestors "ancestors"? . . . in the sense of what were the factors that led the early Chinese to make their ancestors, and their High God, in the particular ways that they did.

A consideration of the origins of civilization in China is likely to be shaped by what the literate Chinese of the early historical period thought, or claimed, had made them what they were. The kind of selective reshaping of the past, the creation of historicized fiction, that the Zhou (circa 1045–221 BCE) engaged in to justify their own political and cultural situation is, of course, not uncommon. One thinks, for example, of Israelite historiography, which has also reworked, if it did not create, the early history of Israel to tell a particular story of the chosen people.[4] In the case of China, the transmitters of the received texts chose to emphasize the story of a morally-superior, centralizing elite, a story that can certainly be challenged on a variety of historiographical, regional, and class-based lines. Nevertheless, the early texts do much to establish the cultural terminus, at least that reserved for elites, to which early Chinese civilization, under a teleological perspective, may be seen as heading. I am prepared to define the emerging culture of the Eastern Zhou (771–221 BCE), Qin (221–206 BCE), and Han (206 BCE–CE 220) elites—with its respect for the written language, its concern with ritual and filiality, and its creation of a bureaucratic state that was nevertheless permeated with metaphors and practices that derived from kinship ties—as "Chinese," and to treat the significant legacies those cultures inherited from the Shang as proto-Chinese.[5]

Nobody, of course, can fully know why the Chinese became Chinese. Only God, or Shang Di 上帝—the early Chinese name for their High God—knows. But, on Robert Green Ingersoll's principle that "an honest God is the noblest work of man," even Shang Di himself can be understood as a construction of the early Chinese—so that we could still ask, why did the Chinese make Shang Di in the way that they did?[6] And we can ask, what made the ancestors "ancestors"?—not in the sense of what it was to be an ancestor, which I have attempted to address elsewhere,[7] but in the sense of what were the factors that led the early Chinese to make their ancestors, and their High God, in the particular ways that they did.

Speaking broadly, we are faced with at least two approaches to questions of this sort. One approach is represented by the great, cold slabs of social science analysis, involving categories like matriarchy, patriarchy, slave society, and oriental despotism, slapped onto the Chinese evidence. These give their users a gratifying sense that they have pigeonholed and understood what was going on, but, in my view, they squeeze much that was uniquely Chinese out of the scenario, making the Chinese case just one further example of universal laws. The other approach, and here I am certainly exaggerating, argues that all history is local history, that generalizations are difficult and misleading, and that we should simply focus on particular texts and situations in their own right without attempting to develop broader, explanatory meanings. Historians, in this view, should not ask why things happen, but only what happened and how. Consider, for example, David Hackett Fischer's view of the matter. After arguing in favor of "how," "what," and "when" questions, he writes:

> *These are urgent questions, and they are empirical questions, which can be put to the test. The reader will note that none of them are "why" questions. In my opinion—and I may be a minority of one—that favorite adverb of historians should be consigned to the semantical rubbish heap. A "why" question tends to become a metaphysical question. It is also an imprecise question, for the adverb "why" is slippery and difficult to define. Sometimes it seeks a cause, sometimes a motive, sometimes a reason, sometimes a description, sometimes a process, sometimes a purpose, sometimes a justification. A "why" question lacks direction and clarity; it dissipates a historian's energies and interests.*[8]

I have much sympathy for this view. The problems of causation are so complex, and compounded now by the insights of the chaos theorists, that it would seem almost foolhardy to attempt to explain why anything happened. But a careful consideration of how the Chinese became Chinese, of what factors may have played a strategic causative role in the adoption of particular cultural choices, may throw instructive, if inevitably speculative, light on why they did so.

One can point to at least two directly opposed explanations about the origins of Chinese civilization, both involving, explicitly or not, assumptions about class that many, if not all, of the historical protagonists actually involved in the process might have found entirely foreign. The first, which we might label "Zhou traditional," emphasizes the rise of the *junzi* 君子, "noble man," who constructs an enlightened social hierarchy dominated by the benevolent concern of paternal elites who venerate the ancestors for the blessings they shower upon them and their dependents. The second, let us call it "Marxist," emphasizes the rise of an elite that conceals its violence and exploitations by appealing to a superstitious, self-interested ideology of respect, awe, and obedience rooted in a paternalistic kinship structure that invoked the ancestors to justify the continuing domination of their descendants. The model that one favors will, of course, greatly depend upon one's own point of view and temperament, to say nothing of one's class status.

Most of us, I suspect, without bothering to articulate in detail the methodological issues involved, adopt a middle ground in these matters, avoiding the big, abstract theories and the rigid reliance upon class analysis, but nevertheless seeking to make cultural connections and strong inferences that appear to explain particular features of Chinese civilization in their own terms. My own approach, I hope, has been within this moderate camp. I believe in getting our

I believe in getting our hands "dirty," in looking carefully at particular texts, particular archaeological sites, particular institutions, attempting to determine how they functioned at the micro level, attempting to recapture some of the realities of early Chinese experience—or, as I should more properly say, of local experiences in various parts of early China.

hands "dirty," in looking carefully at particular texts, particular archaeological sites, particular institutions, attempting to determine how they functioned at the micro level, attempting to recapture some of the realities of early Chinese experience—or, as I should more properly say, of local experiences in various parts of early China.[9] And it is then allowable, I hope, to take the insights that such dirty-handed analysis permits, and use them to propose larger patterns, to posit the existence of synergistic cultural relationships in various parts of early China, and to suggest theories of causation. I am proposing significant linkages rather than final solutions.

The Impact of Geography

I am not prepared to subscribe to the view of the environmental or geographical determinists, who believe "that social and cultural differences between human groups can ultimately be traced to differences in their physical environments."[10] Cultural production, is, I believe, more complicated than that, but at the same time it is by no means divorced from geographical considerations.[11] And in the Chinese case, I would urge the importance of considering the influence that a series of local environments may have played in influencing the social and economic and ideological choices that various cultures made during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age.

I most emphatically do not subscribe to Wittfogel's theories of a pan-Chinese agro-managerial despotism that developed to construct and administer the needs of the large-scale water-control works required by the environment; I think that, for the North China Plain at least (see n. 27), he has his history backwards.[13] The disposition and ability to organize Chinese society in the ways Wittfogel proposed antedated by a considerable period the construction of the works he had in mind. But it is, I think, worth considering the degree to which geography—the climates and environments of ancient China, together with their paleo-flora and paleo-fauna—helps to explain the cultural forms that were to develop within its boundaries.

The variations in human biology that distinguish the inhabitants of contemporary north and south China evidently existed in Neolithic times if not earlier.[14] What cultural consequences these variations might have involved, I do not know. But if we turn to environmental factors, I wonder, for example, about the possible cultural impact of water tables and soil chemistry in north and south China. Higher water tables in the south may have made the Liangzhu 良渚 inhabitants bury their dead on the surface (as in the case of the Sidun寺墩 burial M3), in altar mounds on hillsides (as at Huiguanshan 匯觀山,[15] or in relatively shallow graves, just as the dampness encouraged them to build stilt houses (as at Hemudu 河姆渡).[16] The inhabitants of the drier north, by contrast, buried their dead in increasingly deep pits beneath the surface. Status, in the north, was evidently linked to the size, and hence to the depth, of the grave pit. Denied that means of expression in the south, the Liangzhu inhabitants appear to have invested their labor in high-status grave goods, such as highly-worked jade *cong* 琮 tubes and *bi* 璧 jade disks.[17]

Climate, I would suggest, may also have had a bearing in other ways on mourning, burial practices, and the invention of the ancestors. In modern Bali, we are told, "the conventional time required for putrefaction [of the royal corpse] to be completed" is forty-two days.[18] The relative shortness of this particular time interval may be related to the hotter climate in Bali. Could one, however, establish a link between ancestor worship and climate? Quick putrefaction allows little time for the "translation" of the dead to take place, so that the mourners at the time of the burial would still have been dealing with the "real, unabstracted" personality of the deceased. A longer interval, however, encouraged by the colder climates of north China, would have permitted a long period of decay, more pre-burial ritual activity, and thus a more radical transformation to the ancestral status.[19] The Liangzhu solution—to burn the corpse, as in the Sidun burial M3—would, of course, have been another way of speeding up the translation to ancestor.

Does the regularity of the climate patterns in north China help to account for the regularity of the ancestral cult and the reliability of divine intervention that we find in the early textual evidence?[20] Note that the Mandate of Heaven, the doctrine (usually employed as part of the victor's propaganda) in which Heaven confers rulership on the virtuous and destroys the wicked, provides a simple moral explanation for historical causation. Such a view of history does not encourage, nor is it congruent with, the kind of political and psychological complexity one encounters in either Mesopotamian or Greek mythology. Consider, for example, the account of the Death of Ur-nammu, with its Job-like theme of a life unfairly ended by the gods,[21] or the origins of, and personal rivalries dramatized in, Homer's Trojan War—there is no Mandate here, but personal emotion, dislike, hatred, and disagreement congruent with the harsh and unpredictable environment of the cultures that produced these mythologies. It is consistent with such an ecological view of the cultures concerned that the Greeks, in their mythology and literature, address the hostility of the gods and the quirkiness of fate; the Late Shang and Zhou Chinese address the importance of harmoniously following the rules.

Consider too the cultural reaction to the shifts in the Yellow River during the third millennium BCE. These may have been catastrophic to the Neolithic communities inundated in the North China Plain,[22] but were somehow, optimistically, seen as manageable, not existentially threatening, by the early Chinese legend-makers: the Sage Emperor Yu 禹 had taken care of it and rendered China habitable. This optimism stands in contrast to, say, the treachery and malevolence represented by the Mediterranean sea, for the early Greeks, or by the harsh and unpredictable environ-

Does the regularity of the climate patterns in north China help to account for the regularity of the ancestral cult and the reliability of divine intervention that we find in the early textual evidence?

ment of ancient Mesopotamia.[23] The cultures of Neolilthic China were incomparably richer than those of Neolithic Greece; the early Chinese had—in terms of climate, crops, and other resources—much to be optimistic about. That the early Chinese, unlike Gilgamesh, say, did not quarrel with their gods or ancestors may have been in part because there was less to quarrel about, ecologically and environmentally.

Indeed, the relative benevolence of the early Chinese environment may also help to account for the pacific and abstract cosmogonic legends of the Eastern Zhou, which stand in sharp contrast to their Mesopotamian counterparts. The Babylonian epic, *Enuma elish*, for instance, "describes the creation not as a beginning, but as an end, . . . the result of a cosmic battle, the fundamental and eternal struggle between those two aspects of nature: Good and Evil, Order and Chaos."[24] Impersonal forces are certainly found in the Chinese cosmogonies—one thinks, in particular, of the alternating forces of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, "inherently complementary, not antagonistic," or the various cycles of the five phases (*wu xing* 五行) with their cycles of "conquest" and "generation";[25] their interactions are disciplined; the texts do not present them as battling in violent and unpredictable ways. And the distinctions are also evident in myths about the creation of man. For the Babylonians, Marduk had created man:

> I will establish a savage (*lullu*), 'man' shall be his name.
> Verily, savage-man I will create.
> He shall be charged with the service of the gods
> That they might be at ease!" [26]

Man, in short, was once again at the mercy of hostile or dominant powers, created to serve at their pleasure. In early China, by contrast, man was to be at the service of men—or former men, the ancestors—and most early creation myths involved the genesis of the elite lineages to serve as a charter for such expectations.

Geography and environment may also have played a role in the eventual dominance of north China over south. Gary Pahl, who studied thirteen walled Neolithic settlements in the plain of the Yangzi and Han Rivers, observed that around 2000 BCE the settlements seem suddenly to have been abandoned, with their populations generally diminishing until about 800 CE. Rather than credit external intervention and attacks from the north, he suggests that the populations may have fallen victim to schistosomiasis.[27] This will require further archaeological testing, but it alerts us to the possibility that south China, for all its fecundity, may not have been as salubrious as the north. And the inhabitants of Neolithic settlements in China, north or south, may well have been susceptible to disease in general. Agriculture, as Jared Diamond explains,

> *sustains much higher human population densities than does the hunter-gathering lifestyle—on the average, 10 to 100 times higher. In addition, hunter-gatherers frequently shift camp and leave behind their own piles of feces with accumulated microbes and worm larvae. But farmers are sedentary and live amid their own sewage, thus providing microbes with a short path from one person's body into another's drinking water.*
>
> *Some farming populations make it even easier for their own fecal bacteria and worms to infect new victims, by gathering their feces and urine and spreading them as fertilizer on the fields where people work. Irrigation agriculture and fish farming provide ideal living conditions for the snails carrying schistosomiasis and for flukes that burrow through our skin as we wade through the feces-laden water.*[28]

Paleobotany may also help to explain cultural distinctions between north and south China in the prehistoric and early imperial period. The botanist, Li Hui-lin, for instance, concluded that:

> *Botanical and phytogeographical evidence of the great differences between the environments of North and South China points to the existence of two separate centers of plant domestication. Each center produced a well-rounded complex of crops independently capable of nurturing human culture.*[29]

And once again the cultural impact of these differences may have been mediated by geography.

> *While China's north-south gradient retarded crop diffusion, the gradient was less of a barrier there than in the Americas or Africa, because China's north-south distances were smaller; and because China's is transected neither by desert, as is Africa and northern Mexico, nor by a narrow isthmus, as is Central America. Instead, China's long east-west rivers (the Yellow River in the north, the Yangtze River in the south) facilitated diffusion of crops and technology between the coast and inland, while its broad east-west expanse and relatively gentle terrain, which eventually permitted those two river systems to be joined by canals, facilitated north-south exchanges.*[30]

Environment, I would also suggest, may throw light on the $64 question: Why were the early Chinese so filial, so respectful of seniors, compared, say, to the Classical Greeks whose legendary figures were so ready to challenge authority and the patriarch? Why did the authority of the kin group remain so strong in China, even as the state was emerging? Surely environment plays a role here too: seafarers and traders, people who move around, who are not tied down, who are exposed to other cultures, who are left to their own resources, and who are not under the eye of authority in the way that farmers tied to the land are, are more likely to question or ignore their parents and those who would lord it over them.[31] It is no coincidence that, by the Eastern Zhou, the Qin minister Shang Yang, keen to encourage agriculture, was concerned about merchants, who moved about too easily, and that the *Zhouli* 周禮 was concerned about registering peasants and fixing them in one

Environment, I would also suggest, may throw light on the $64 question: Why were the early Chinese so filial, so respectful of seniors, compared, say, to the Classical Greeks whose legendary figures were so ready to challenge authority and the patriarch?

place.[32] Agriculture fostered hierarchy and stability in a way that seafaring and trading at a distance did not.[33] As G. E. R. Lloyd has remarked, "Agriculture . . . had a far higher ideological profile in China than in the Greco-Roman world."[34]

I would also like to suggest, however, that the "modular" nature of the early Chinese environment with its wide latitudinal bands of common products and similar climates would have conferred a certain freedom on a peasantry disposed to flee from harsh rulers.[35] Such freedom may not have been so readily available, for example, in the Mesopotamian case, where the harshness of the environment would not have held the easy promise that the grass was greener elsewhere. I am struck, for example, by the degree to which all the Mesopotamian rulers of the Early Dynastic period boast of their conquests;[36] they show little of the Mencian or Confucian, or even Legalist, concern for attracting people or providing good government. But Chinese peasants, moving from one state to another, of course, would only have been exchanging, not escaping from, the domination of lords.

The agrarian basis of the culture also bears on what appears to have been the relative unimportance in early China of "the market as a factor in economic and political diversity." Gordon Willey, for example, has suggested "the great importance of the Near Eastern temple markets" as "institutions separate from the palace and the king."[37] And David Tandy has explored the links between the new market economy in Greece and the development of the polis.[38] That there seem to have been no economic institutions that produced a comparable social and political impact in early China is partly explainable in terms of geography. The major rivers in China flowed from west to east. They did not, accordingly, greatly encourage interregional trade—since they flowed through latitudes where the environments were similar. As a result, the riverine routes did not provide sufficient economic incentives and rewards for a strong merchant class to develop that was independent of the trade in luxury goods associated with the court and its dependents. Some of the copper ores that the Late Shang bronze casters used in North China may well have been shipped over considerable distances from the south,[39] but these ores were employed to cast the bronze vessels that the dynastic elites used to serve their ancestors. The lack of extensive, non-dynastic trading networks in early China may also be explained by the widespread distribution of resources needed for daily life. This contrasts with the situation in ancient Mesopotamia, for example, where metal ores (copper, tin), hard stone, and good timber were in short supply. At a very early date, therefore, an extensive network of trade routes was developed within Mesopotamia and with the rest of the Near East.[40] A society in which merchants play a significant role is likely to develop a culture different from that of a society in which they do not. Once again, this is not to say that the environment is all determining—as C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, commenting on the Algaze article cited in the previous note, has remarked: "Environments are filtered, transformed, and given their material reality by the beliefs and practices of a society."[41] But the environment certainly helps to shape the cultural choices available.

The archaeological evidence, in fact, has led a recent study to conclude that "the acquisition of vital resources" in early China

> *seems to have operated on the state level. The states were able to gain a monopoly on procuring and transporting these resources by moving populations into resource-rich regions, constructing outposts in major junctions along transportation routes in these regions, and managing craft production forces.*[42]

Rather than emphasizing the importance of trade—as indicated by the Mesopotamian model—the authors conclude that

> *the relationship between urban centers and peripheral regions in early states in China (from the Erlitou to Early Shang) may have been a one-way military and political domination operated by powerful royal lineages in the capital city. The interregional network, which operated the resource flow, may have been kin-based, rather than purely bureaucratic. The religious and political motivations—such as ancestral worship rituals, divinatory ceremonies, royal hunts, and elite feasting and drinking—were the underlying dynamics for the procurement of copper and the manufacture of bronze objects on a massive scale directly controlled by the state.*[43]

The dynasty's ability to provide abundant metal ores also appears to have encouraged the development of, as no doubt it was encouraged by, the large-scale dynastic bronze-casting operations of the Late Shang. As Robert Bagley has noted, the *Si Mu Wu fang ding* 司母戊方鼎), a square tripod that weighed 875 kilograms, the largest Shang ritual vessel yet found, reveals

> *that Shang workshops were organized on a scale exceedingly large by the standards of the rest of the ancient world. In Shang China there is no trace of the independent artisans who in the West might supply all the metal needs required by a typical Bronze Age community. The number of bronze vessels known from the Shang period implies production on an industrial scale, and the foundry which produced the* Si Mu Wu fang ding *must have been awesome.*[44]

Once again, one observes the cultural consequences of geography or, in this case, geology.

Finally, the geographic isolation of China presumably played a role in the genesis of early Chinese culture. No foreign invasions appear to have created major discontinuities in the development of the cultures of early China. In particular, the absence in early China of any experience analogous to that of the Dark Ages in pre-classical Greece is significant;[45] there was no break in cultural development, no rupture, no fresh start. There was, in short, no radical

challenge to culture, no "death" of culture, just as there was no flood that had destroyed mankind, no radical "death" of humanity in the theology and the mythology of the Zhou. That kind of major cultural hostility, with invasions striking to the heart, had generally been precluded by the geographical position of China.

CONCLUSIONS

I have no global conclusions to offer, save to urge the educational value of attempting to consider, if not answer, some of the questions above. I don't think we will ever fully know what made the Chinese Chinese. But by trying to understand the mechanisms, cross-fertilizations, and cultural and ecological embeddedness of the choices that the early inhabitants of China made, we will come closer to understanding the factors that would have been involved. The Chinese, after all, have probably fed more people, more successfully, than any other culture in world history. How they developed the social capital to do this is well worth our study. ■

NOTES

1. A preliminary and far shorter version of this article originally appeared as "What Did Make the Chinese 'Chinese'?: Musings of a Would-be Geographical Determinist," in the newsletter, *Lotus Leaves* (Society for Asian Art, San Francisco) 3.2 (Summer 2000):1–3. I am grateful to the anonymous readers for *Education About Asia*, many of whose suggestions I have incorporated in this revised version.
2. See, in particular, David N. Keightley, "The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture," *History of Religions* 17 (1978):221–22; "Clean Hands and Shining Helmets: Heroic Action in Early Chinese and Greek Culture," in *Religion and Authority*, ed. Tobin Siebers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993):113–51; "Epistemology in Cultural Context: Disguise and Deception in Early China and Early Greece," in *Early China, Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons*, eds. Steven Shankman and Stephen Durrant (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001):119–53.
3. I take this list of cultural features, abbreviating it and omitting the illustrative examples given, from David N. Keightley, "Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How It Became Chinese," in *The Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Paul S. Ropp (University of California Press, 1990):50–51. As I remarked there, "It must be stressed that other scholars could well emphasize different features of the culture—such as the influence of millet and rice agriculture, the acceptance of a monistic cosmology, the influence of a logographic writing system, the nature of early historiography . . . , and Confucian conceptions of benevolence and good government."
4. I was struck, with all the hoopla about the release of the 1998 Dream Works movie, "The Prince of Egypt," that nobody, in the popular press at least, raised the question: were the Jews ever in Egypt? For the historiographical uncertainties involved, see, e.g., Nahum M. Sarna, "Israel in Egypt: The Egyptian Sojourn and the Exodus," in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, and Washington, DC: Prentice-Hall and Biblical Archeological Society, 1988):31–52; Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
5. On the legacies of Shang culture, see, e.g., Keightley, "Late Shang Divination: The Magico-Religious Legacy," in *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, Henry Rosemont, Jr., ed, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Studies* 50.2 (1984):11–34; "The Shang: China's First Historical Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*, eds. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999):289–91; *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 BC)* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2000):121–29.
6. I would put considerable stock in the view that the idea of Di as supreme deity or Power did not develop until the institution of Shang kingship, involving similar conceptions of centralized power and authority, had developed on earth. See, e.g., C. C. Shih, "A Study of Ancestor Worship in Ancient China," in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T. J. Meek*, ed. W. S. McCullough (Toronto: 1964), 184–85. There is much more scholarship on this issue.
7. David N. Keightley, "The Making of the Ancestors: Late Shang Religion and Its Legacy," in *Chinese Religion and Society: The Transformation of a Field. Vol. 1*, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong: École Française d'Extrême-orient and the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2004):3–63.
8. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970):14.
9. As William G. Boltz noted in his review of the conference volume, *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David N. Keightley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), "Consider how different the conference might have been if it had been called "Origins of Civilization in China," instead of "Origins of Chinese Civilization" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15.4 [1985]:763).
10. Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997):42; see, too, 195.
11. See, e.g., Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 102.
12. See, e.g., Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).
13. David N. Keightley, "Public Work in Ancient China: A Study of Forced Labor in the Shang and Western Chou" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1969):123–25, 134–38, 346–48. See too, Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*:93–100.
14. Dennis A. Etler, "Recent Developments in the Study of *Human Biology* in China: A Review," *Human Biology* 64.4 (August 1992):567–85. He discusses, in particular, the distribution of immunoglobulin GM and KM allotpyes, stature, and cranial and facial dimensions.
15. Zhejiang sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Yuhang shi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui, "Zhejiang Yuhang Huiguanshan Liangzhu wenhua jitan yu mudi fajue jianbao 浙江餘杭匯觀山良渚文化祭壇與墓地發掘簡報 *Wenwu* 文物 1997, 7:4–19.
16. Zhejiang sheng wenwu guanli weiyuanhui and Zhejiang sheng bouwuguan, "Hemudu yizhi diyiqi fajue baogao 河姆渡遺址第一期發掘報告," *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1978, 1:42 48, fig. 5.
17. For an introduction to and illustrations of these artifacts, see, e.g., *Mysteries of Ancient China: New Discoveries From the Early Dynasties*, ed. Jessica Rawson (London: British Museum Press, 1996):52–55.
18. Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979):130.
19. It has been suggested to me by Michael Depew that one reason we find the skeletons of "slave" victims in Shang burials are well preserved and the skeletons of the grave lords are generally not, is that the corpses of the grave lords at Anyang 安陽, the Late Shang cult center (circa 1200–1045 BCE), have vanished because of the delay between the time they died and the time, already in a state of decay, when they were put in the ground; by contrast, the skeletons of the victims and "slaves" were preserved because they went into the ground relatively quickly and thus "fresh." Whatever the reason, it does seem as if something changed in the treatment of certain elite corpses with the arrival of the Bronze Age. Sacrificial victims and prisoners were still given "Neolithic" treatment and their bones survived. But the "Bronze Age Mortuary Special" evidently led to the bones of the elites not surviving.
20. For the pigeonholing of the Late Shang ancestors by their temple names (based on the names of the ten days of the Shang week), so that each ancestor received rituals and offerings according to an unvarying schedule, see Keightley, "The Making of the Ancestors," 11–26. For the "optimistic rationality of Shang religion, its faith that there was a rule, a divination, a sacrifice, for every occasion," see Keightley, "The Religious Commitment," 216. For "the metaphysical and epistemological optimism that underlies much early Chinese philosophy," see Keightley, "Epistemology in Cultural Context," 199 and, espec., 126–37.
21. Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Death of Ur-nammu and His Descent to the Netherworld," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967):104–22.
22. David N. Keightley, "The Environment of Ancient China," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 32–33.
23. E.g., Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 25: "Mesopotamia constantly hovers between desert and swamp. This double threat and the uncertainty it creates as regards the future are believed to be at the root of the 'fundamental pessimism' which, for some authors, characterizes the philosophy of the ancient Mesopotamians." See too Roux, 104.
24. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 97.
25. See, e.g., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene

Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 2nd ed.):238, 347–49.
26. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 100.
27. Gary Pahl, "Bovines, Cups, and Miniatures. . . .," Archaeology Brown Bag Lecture, Archaeological Research Facility, University of California at Berkeley, 10 February 1999. Pahl also makes the point that the Neolithic inhabitants of the Yangzi-Han River towns may have built their "walls" (which were piled up, rather than built of rammed earth) as water management devices, rather than as defensive works.
28. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1997):205.
29. Hui-lin Li, "The Domestication of Plants in China: Ecogeographical Considerations," in *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. Keightley, 50.
30. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 331.
31. Li-jun Ji, Kaiping Peng, and Richard Nisbett ("Culture, Control, and Perception of Relationships in the Environment," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78.5 [2000]:953) have argued that "sedentary agricultural groups stress interpersonal orientation and conformity in child rearing, and they have a tight social structure in which group members need to accommodate each other and strive to regulate one another's behavior. Alan Cromer (*Uncommon Sense: The Heretical Nature of Science* [Oxford University Press, 1993]:74), in fact, has gone so far as to argue, referring to the *Odyssey*, that "The sea is freedom, adventure, wealth, and knowledge—all factors important to the development of science."
32. For these themes in Zhou political culture, see David N. Keightley, "Peasant Migration, Politics, and Philosophical Response in Chou and Ch'in China," Berkeley Regional Seminar in Confucian Studies, 11 November 1977.
33. Adam T. Smith (*The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003]:84) notes that for Aristotle, the perfection of the polis "depended on an ideal number of citizens distributed across a territory that allowed for self-sufficiency in production, preferably with access to the sea in order to allow for long-distance trade."
34. *The Ambitions of Curiosity: Understanding the World in Ancient Greece and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002):80.
35. Keightley, "Peasant Migration."
36. Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 134–39.
37. Gordon Willey, "Ancient Chinese—New World and Near Eastern Ideological Traditions: Some Observations," *Symbols* (Spring 1985):23. He was commenting on the views of K. C. Chang and on C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "The Near Eastern 'Breakout' and the Mesopotamian Social Contract," *Symbols* (Spring 1985):8–11, 23–24.
38. David W. Tandy, *Warriors into Traders: The Power of the Market in Early Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
39. Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, *State Formation in Early China* (London: Duckworth, 2003):37–44.
40. Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1980):30. For further discussion of this theme, see Marc Van der Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997):30–31, 40; Guillermo Algaze, "Initial Social Complexity in Southwestern Asia," *Current Anthropology* 42.2 (2001):199–233 (which includes the subsequent comment on his arguments); Smith, *The Political Landscape*, 279.
41. Current Anthropology 42.2 (2001):220.
42. Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, "Cities and Towns: The Control of Natural Resources in Early States, China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 73 (2001):40.
43. Liu and Chen, "Cities and Towns," 41.
44. Robert W. Bagley, *Shang Ritual Bronzes in the Arthur M. Sackler Collections* (Washington, DC: The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation and Museum; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987):18.
45. On the Greek Dark Age and its impact, see, e.g., M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978; 2nd ed. 1979); Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

DAVID N. KEIGHTLEY taught early Chinese history at Berkeley between 1969, the year he received his PhD from Columbia, and 1998. While at Berkeley he served as Chair of the Center for Chinese Studies, Chair of the History Department, and Interim Director of the East Asian Library. He is the author of *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (1978) and *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 BC)* (2000), and editor of *The Origins of Chinese Civilization* (1983). One of the founders of the journal, *Early China*, he was one of the first American scholars to visit the People's Republic of China in 1975, and served on various subcommittees of the Committee for Scholarly Communication with the PRC in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The author of numerous articles on Neolithic and Bronze-Age China, with particular attention to the Late Shang dynasty, Keightley is currently at work on a book called *Working for His Majesty: Labor Mobilization in Late Shang China*.

Mountains of Huangshan.
Photo source: http://geog.hku.hk/undergrad/geog2110/resources/photo/Huangshan.html