



***The History of
Heavenly Sacrifice
from Yin and Yang
By Frank Fiedeler***

SAMPLE

THE MYTH OF FUXI OPENS UP TO US THE ENTRANCE TO a schematic description of the early development of the heavenly sacrifice transmitted in the sacred Book of Rites (Liji).

With the sacrifice on the altar before the city (that is to say, with the annual sacrifice to heaven), heaven was thanked in a grand manner - requited, complied, answered. The main theme in this was, how the sun finds its antithesis in the moon. The royal family of the Xia sacrificed to its shadowside. The Yin (Shang) people sacrificed to its light side. The people of Zhou sacrificed to the sun, as it touches the shadowside in the morning.

***Translated by
Gabriel Weiss***

This quote formulates in the most succinct form the cosmological model of the cultural history of Chinese antiquity from the beginnings of the legendary Xia dynasty at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E up to and including the Zhou Dynasty, which officially ruled until 222 B.C.E. Each of the three developmental steps meant the ritual definition of a world perspective that founded a specific type of culture. We will want to look at this quotation more precisely in the following paragraphs.

The character used for 'sacrifice' (*ji*), contrary to an understanding of the concept's etymological meaning, is not associated with the transitive procedure of conveying the offering, but rather the sound of the word generally means (with graphic modification): connection, relationship, intercourse. Thus it primarily denotes the

creation of a connection with the heavens, a symbolic correspondence.

The first sentences in the quote signify that the ritual reproduction of heaven as such is in turn modeled after a heavenly phenomenon; that of the moon, which in the night sky appears as the counterpart or reflection of the sun, just as the ritual on the earth symbolically models the heavens. The second sentence is also able to be interpreted in the concrete sense, that in the sacrificial ceremony on the altar of heaven the soul tablets of the sun and the moon were placed across from one another.

The rest of the quote describes the development of the cult as consisting of three steps, the three steps of which were associated with the three archaic dynasties of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou. These three steps were the cosmic paradigm of creation of the symbols, according to which the nodding Moon-god

Fuxi created the symbolic form of the entire world in the model of the eight trigrams. As we shall see in an examination of the *Yijing* in the next chapter, the structure of the three steps in binary form is described quite accurately through the developmental model of the eight trigrams.

Thus the three steps of the ritual form signified the creation of a symbolic world order, namely that of classical Chinese culture. Its cosmic prototype was the way in which the moon, through the antithesis of its shadowside (Xia) and its lightside (Shang), formulated the relationship of day and night, which in the final analysis defined the sun's mode of appearance (Zhou). The celestial image for this definition was the conjunction of the moon with the sun, whereby the symbol (the moon) completely merges in that which it signifies (the sun and, respectively, the alternation between day and