HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 13: Analysis of 天命 Tian Ming metaphors

- 天 *tiān*[nature:sky]
- 地 *di*[earth]
- Compound: 天地 *tiāndì* combines the two to refer to the *cosmos*
    - Bowl and saucer metaphor (natural sunrise, sunset)
- 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] is where there are constant *daos* (paths)
    - Widely observed predictable and cyclical celestial paths
    - The paths/constancy can be used for *guidance*
- Another important *link* - 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] translated as *God*
    - 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] is the ultimate source of legitimacy/guidance
    - However, no indication that 天 *tiān*[nature:sky] has the role of making or enforcing laws or bestows that authority on the 王 *wáng*[ruler]
- Duke of Zhou's doctrine deals with the relation of天 *tiān*[nature:sky] and 天下*tian xia,* the region *under* the bowl
    - 天下*tiānxià* is below the sky (on earth)
    - Often translated as *empire* but this is an anachronism
    - We can see it as the world of living things
- 天 *Tiān*[nature:sky] rules the social world
    - We must stay in harmony with 天 *tiān*[nature:sky]
- The second concept to consider is that of 命 *mìng*[destiny]

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- 命 *mìng*[destiny] and 名*míng*[names] - life and fate/destiny and luck - are closely related in sound and meaning (6.02)
    - 王*wáng*[king:ruler] - be careful of the translation
    - Chinese name: three horizontal stroke 王*wáng*[king] which indicates the role attached to the title
        - Role is harmonizing, *not* passing laws
- Our roles, names, status are linked to our lives
    - Think of our lives as a series of names/roles
    - Younger brother, older brother, graduate, husband, father, professor…
    - All becomes part of my identity (even my self-identification - how I introduce myself)
    - A natural process led me through these roles - same for the 王*wáng*[king]
    - That is destiny, fate
- Confucius' complaint in the Analects that he had no 名*míng*[name]
    - His complaint was about lack of appointment to official role, an official title, not literally lacking of a name
    - Confucius invented his role as an educator
    - In a famous passage from the Analects he sets himself on learning
    - Confucius is saying "At 50 I knew 天 *tian*[natural] 命 *ming*[identity/role], I knew what nature intended for me as a role'