HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 9: Birth of Thought

- The first philosophical doctrine, a doctrine of political theory: 天 *tian*[nature:sky] 命 *ming*[identity/role] - 'The Mandate of Heaven'
- Theory of political legitimacy
- Western supernatural counterpart: Hammurabi code - and ancient set of laws
- Doctrine comes from Duke of Zhou
- Duke's doctrine contrasts human-like appointment with the power of nature
- 德*dé*[virtuosity]
- Used as part of a theory of political legitimacy
- If the Zhou are replacing the Shang, where did the Shang legitimacy come from?
    - We find an account in the Oracle Bones
    - 上帝 *shàng-dì* [above emperor] at the apex of an afterlife social hierarchy
    - Based on a familial hierarchy on earth?
    - Sometimes thought of as the greatest common ancestor of us all
    - *Family authority* as the basis for political legitimacy
    - Ancestor worship/veneration
    - Could be the oldest continuous religious form in history
- We learn about the Shang period from the Oracle Bones
    - Used as normative tools to find your way
    - You write on the bones, heat them over the fire, then 'read' the cracks to find your 道 *dao*[path] path - the bones tell you what to do

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- In Hong Kong we still venerate our ancestors
  - It's the responsibility of the young to take care of the elders
  - This responsibility also extends to our dead ancestors
  - We "send" them food, cars, money
  - Hungry Ghosts festival - for those with no family left to take care of them

- James Legge (1815-1897) - Scottish sinologist
  - Legge is protestant and a religious translator
  - Legge translates 上帝 *Shàng-dì*[above emperor] as 'God': "I dare not rest in the favour of God"
  - Catholics translate as 天主 *tian zhu*[God] as God
- 天 *tian*[nature:sky] is NOT God
  - 天 *tian*[nature:sky] is the power of nature
  - Contrast between an affiliation hierarchy (bound by respect, veneration and the learned patterns of 道 *dao*[path]) and the forces of nature
  - Duke of Zhou appealing to forces of nature