HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 10: Introduction to 天命 Tian Ming

- Understanding Duke of Zhou's political role of 天 *tian*[natural] 命 *ming*[identity/role] The Mandate of Heaven
    - Contrast between human-based and natural-based source of authority
    - Zhou is appealing to a rival, natural account of political legitimacy
    - Zhou's theory undermines an appeal to human authority and replaces it with a natural source of legitimacy
- Parallels often drawn between Mandate of Heaven and 'Divine Right of Kings' in medieval Europe
    - Based on idea that 天*tian* means God
    - Western *divinity* is a person who is eternal and unchanging, promissory authority
- Contrastingly, The Duke of Zhou emphasizes the instability of the natural situation
- The real role of Zhou's doctrine is to justify a rebellion against the Shang
    - The Shang lost the mandate to rule
    - We will one day also lose the mandate; it is inevitable
    - We can only try hard to keep our ruling 德*dé*[virtuosity] and preserve the mandate
- Duke of Zhou is implicitly predicting the dynastic cycle
    - Idea that 德*dé*[virtuosity] arises in a ruling family, declines over generations and is then lost
    - The Duke of Zhou contrasts the authority of a person with unpredictable, awesome power of nature