

Son of Heaven and Dynastic Changes in Historical China

Compared to Biblical Standards^{*}

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The Israelite people began to have kings hundreds of years after the Mosaic Law was given to them from God, and with kings from David and then his family, they experienced no substantial dynastic changes in the southern kingdom of Judah. Later, the Israelites were ruled by kings or emperors of other nations until the State of Israel was restored in its historical land after World War Two. Without any written law comparable to the Mosaic Law, the earliest Zhou kings of China claimed to be Sons of Heaven and Heaven worship was inherited by later emperors. Heaven worship has features in common with the monotheistic religion of the Israelites, such as that a king should obey the will of God. With changes of dynasties, Heaven worship actually means that heaven could be renamed and the former Son of Heaven had no life-long priesthood in serving Heaven. After the redemptive work of Jesus Christ had fulfilled the Mosaic Law, Heaven worship had little relation with faith in God, the Creator.

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Normally, people have a general knowledge about the history of their own nation but know much less about that of others, especially nations which are geographically or culturally far away. A good example is that most Chinese people lack understanding of Israel, which has a longer recorded history. And Judaism is not officially recognized as a religion in China. The importance of the Israelite people comes from its covenant relationship with God, the Creator, while for the Chinese, the importance lies in the huge size of population and the land where the people, among whom the majority is Han (汉), are scattered. In approximately about three thousand years with a reliable record of history began in 841BC, there have been more than 10 dynastic changes in the land where people with Chinese as their written language have been living. In contrast, the State of Israel was reborn in its historical land in 1948, 2,500 years after the Kingdom of Judah conquered by invading Babylonians in 587BC. Historically, it was the Kingdom of Judah which kept the lineage of David (king, 1010-970BC, all following dates and verses according to *the NIV Study Bible*) who later in Jerusalem reigned over a united kingdom of all 12 tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 5:4-5). The holy language is Hebrew, the language of the Israelite, which recorded the revelation of God in the Old Testament. The Israelite people worshiped God who through Moses (1526-1406BC) revealed the Law and Moses was remembered as the man of God (Joshua 14:6); the people of the earliest dynasties in historical China worshiped Heaven (天, close to tian in English pronunciation) and the top ruler claimed to be the Son of Heaven (天子). Moses once built an

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altar to worship God before the Law was given (Exodus 17:15) and then the Law gave regulations on altar building (Exodus 20:24-26). Heaven worshiping ceremony also required an altar. Earlier, God made a covenant with Noah and his sons with rainbow in the clouds after Noah built an altar with burnt offerings (Genesis 9:12-15). It is worthwhile to study the meaning of Son of Heaven and related dynastic changes from Biblical standards and thus realize how much Heaven worship resembles and differs from faith in God, the Creator.

Israelite Kings

The Israelite nation had Saul (1 Samuel 10:1-8) as their first king (1050-1010BC) from the tribe of Benjamin, hundreds of years after they received the Mosaic Law and then settled in the promised land. Certainly, there were others nations who began to have kings much earlier in Egypt and the Near East, such as the Pharaoh whom Abraham (2166-1991BC), the first patriarch of the Israelites, cheated (Genesis 12:15-16), and Mechizedek, king of Salem in Canaan, who blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18). Before they were led by Moses out of Egypt, the land of slavery, the Israelites, whose males had circumcision as a physical identity of God's chosen people (Genesis 17:9-14), were ruled by Pharaohs. With the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) as its core, the Mosaic Law made the chosen people a holy nation with the highest moral standard in the ancient world, since many of its decrees were against the wicked customs of the Egyptians and the Canaanites (Leviticus 18:1-4). Although this law did not abolish slavery and polygamy, which were both common in the ancient world, it did mandate equality for everyone in keeping the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). During the patriarchal periods of Israel, people in Ur worshiped the moon god (Joshua 23:2) and some Egyptians worshiped the sun god (Genesis 41:45). Later, the people under the kings of Assyria worshiped many other different gods (2 Kings 17:29-33). Moses had no abstract reflection on time as Plato (428-348BC) later did in the Greek world (Plato, 1985, p. 19), but he defined time concretely with day, month, and year. With the Spirit of God, Moses passed his leadership to Joshua after he had been the leader for 40 years (Deuteronomy 34:9).

The Law does not forbid the Israelites to have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), but their true king is God, whom the king should revere. In those days Israel had no king, and everyone did as he saw fit (Judges 17:6, 21:25). Surrounded by powerful or belligerent neighbors, the Israelites felt that they needed a king to lead them in fighting for land and survival, since a king was more concrete to them than God who had held the nation's kingship. In its history, King Saul, chosen and then forsaken by God, died in a battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:1-4), and King Josiah of Judah who trusted God died in fighting the Egyptians (2 Kings 23:29). Therefore, Israel was unique by, first, as a nation, living in alien land, descended from Abraham, Isaac (2066-1886BC) and Jacob (2006-1859BC) to whom God promised, then by having three distinguishing characteristics. These three were: (1) a monotheistic religion with Mosaic Law, (2) Hebrew as their language, and (3) the promised land in Canaan where they had an economy and tribal society ruled by judges (Deuteronomy 16:18) and then kings anointed by priest according to the will of God. During the reign of King David, many Levites were made judges (1 Chronicles 23:3); later, King Jehoshaphat of Judah, appointed judges in each of the fortified cities (2 Chronicles 19:5). A king could not change the Mosaic Law, but there was no distinction between the judiciary and administration since the king headed both powers.

Among the 12 tribes, the scattered Levites with a priesthood lived on a tithe (Numbers 18:21) from the people, teaching other tribes the Mosaic Law. Judges were less influential than kings in power, since they only ruled a certain town or tribe and received no tithe for an administrative machine or human resources like

servants and soldiers (1 Samuel 8:10-18). The king could never claim to be the son of God or a ruler above the Law, because the high priest had the most intimacy in the ceremonial worshiping of God (Leviticus 16:17) and prophets brought the direct messages from God. However, the legitimacy of the earliest kings came directly from God, as in the cases of Saul and then David. Although the Spirit of God departed from Saul, Saul did not abdicate his throne since he loved power and personal honor (1 Samuel 15:24-31). Even after being chosen by God and having been anointed by the high priest, David still respected Saul during his life and even after Saul's death in battle (2 Samuel 1:14-16), because he did not have enough tribal support to rule the whole nation.

God did not show partiality to a particular Israelite tribe. He even promised Jeroboam, a man from the tribe of Ephraim, that he would split the once united kingdom under David and Solomon (king, 970-930BC) to be the king of 10 northern tribes as a punishment for the idolatrous acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:20-39). Later, Jehu was anointed king of Israel by a prophet under Elisha (2 Kings 9:1-13) since there was no lawful priests for the northern tribes. In the southern kingdom of Judah, the crown was passed peacefully in most cases. But Joash was proclaimed king, given the crown and a copy of the Mosaic Law by Jehoiada, the priest, after the former prince survived the mass murder of his family and went into hiding for six years (2 Kings 11:12).

A king could sentence his subjects to death because the Mosaic Law permits death penalty, such as what was imposed on Adonijah (2 Kings 2:13-25) and Shimei (2 Kings 2:36-46) at the hands of Solomon. But fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own (Deuteronomy 24:16). For each verdict, the testimony of at least two or three witnesses is required (Deuteronomy 19:15). However, although a king could be murdered by rebels as in the case of Joash (2 Chronicles 24:25), no king was sentenced to death even if he himself committed sins that deserved it, such as David who was spared by the prophet Nathan sent by God (2 Samuel 12:13-15). Not only the king, but a crown prince could be absolved from the death penalty, as happened when David finally forgave Absalom who murdered his half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 14:31-33).

Before the Mosaic Law, patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob played the role of a priest who led his family or clan to worship their covenant God (Genesis 35:1-4). The priesthood began with the Mosaic Law and Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, anointed by Moses as the first high priest (Exodus 29:1-9), whereas Moses was directly called by God (Exodus 3:7-10). With kings ruling, the office of high priest was weakened to some extent. The Law requires that all offerings should be presented to God through priests, but both King David and King Solomon gave offerings to God directly (2 Samuel 6:13, 17-18; 1 Kings 3:15). For revenge, King Saul even ordered the massacre of priests and their families at Nob (1 Samuel 22:11-19), among whom only Ahimelech had helped David in exile.

According to the Law (Deuteronomy 28:1-68), the Israelites could feel the blessings or curses of God thorough their life experience. For Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274), this is actually a kind of natural theology (Aquinas, 1975, p. 63), which studies the revelation of God outside the written record of the Bible (Romans 1:18-20), since even people without the Mosaic Law could act according to the law of conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, which had Jerusalem as its capital and the Holy Temple, did not follow the advice of Jeremiah, the prophet (Jeremiah 38:14-28). This resulted in him being captured by invading Babylonians (2 Kings 25:1-7), a century after the northern kingdom of Israel with the land of 10 tribes was first conquered by Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1-6). Although the Israelites lost their historical land and were forced into exile, they could have blessing from the omnipresent God if they obeyed the Mosaic Law in a

foreign land.

All the failed kings of both Israel and Judah had one feature in common: doing evil in the eyes of God. Among the kings of Judah (1 Chronicles 3:10-16), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-5) led the list in doing what was right in the eyes of God, followed by Asa (1 Kings 15:11-15), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-44), Joash (2 Kings 12:1-2), Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1-14), Azariah (2 Kings 15:1-4), Jotham (2 Kings 15:32-35), and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-2). Although the chosen people had the Mosaic Law, they were not very obedient and prophets warned their countrymen about some sins other than just working on the Sabbath: leaders judging for a bribe and priests teaching for money (Micah 3:10); selling the righteous and the poor for silver; a father and son using the same girl (Amos 2:6-8); cheating with dishonest scales in business (Amos 8:5); cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery (Hosea 4:2); priests profaning the sanctuary (Zephaniah 3:4); and other evil actions.

Jesus proclaimed his gospel when the historical land of the Israelites was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Jews were longing for the Messiah to come but most of them did not accept Jesus. Before he was called to be an apostle, Nathanael declared that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel (John 1:49). Because of his miraculous signs, people in Galilee once wanted to make Jesus king but he withdrew (John 6:15). When Jesus was betrayed and sentenced to death in Jerusalem, he was accused of being the king of Jews (John 19:21-22). For his human nature, Jesus descended from King David (Matthew 1:1); for his divine nature, he was God from God. For Christians, the resurrected Jesus is the eternal king (1 Timothy 1:17), the king of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). All saved Christians are Israelites by faith, spiritual descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:7), with a circumcision of the heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit. As the Savior of sinners, Jesus is a king of the spiritual kingdom.

Son of Heaven

The Zhou Dynasty (周, 1046-256BC) began when Saul was the first king and lasted even after King Zedekiah was captured. The people of the Zhou worshiped Heaven. Heaven is distinct from the heavens or the sky, which in the created world is the closest to the invisible Creator and seems personal in revealing meteorological changes with storm, thunder, lightning, and so on which can cause natural disasters for people living in land under it. We are unclear that Heaven worship was to be held in memory of God's covenant with Noah when rainbow appeared but we can conclude that the Zhou people were God-fearing. The opposite of heaven is earth or land (地, *dee* in English pronunciation) which is more visible and material. People held that the land was cube-shaped rather than spherical-shaped. Similarly to the Israelite people (Luke 15:21), heaven had fatherhood since ordinary people called him Father (天公, 老天爷, ruler of Heaven), while Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9) may be confused with Heaven itself. Heaven could be understood as a judge of truth and good. Naturally, Son of Heaven (天子) represented Heaven. Being ruled by Son of Heaven might be the best possible fate for people. For the Chinese, the land where crops grew had motherhood. Since the land is under feet, the title Son of Land would be an insult or shame for kings. Neither Heaven was the name of God, the Creator, nor God himself.

King Wen of Zhou (周文王, died in about 1051BC), the founder of the Zhou Dynasty, and King Wu of Zhou (周武王, died in about 1043BC), his son and successor who conquered the previous dynasty of Shang (商, ?-1046BC), have been held up as examples of good rulers in all the dynasties of ancient China. Being leader of a just war, King Wu fought his way from west to east to replace the Shang Dynasty, which was ruled by a morally depraved king. This happened only years after King Saul was anointed by Samuel. It was said that

a famous younger brother of King Wu first drafted the Zhou Rites (周礼) which had Heaven worship. The language used was Chinese which would undergo no radical changes. The education of King Wen was unknown. However, Chinese would not be a language of Heaven because of the Zhou Rites. We had no reliable proof that later kings of the Zhou had knowledge of the Mosaic Law but scripture records that kings of the world came to see Solomon for wisdom (1 Kings 10:23), such as Queen Sheba from Ethiopia. The world should be the known world for the author. Solomon worshiped God at his altar with offerings three times a year (1 Kings 9:25), just as the Law required for the men of Israel (Exodus 23:14-17). King David washed himself before he went to the house of the Lord for worship (2 Samuel 12:20). Similarly, a king should wash himself before he went to worship Heaven. Hence, the Zhou rituals could be partial copies of Solomonic ceremonial worship without the Levitical priesthood. In worshiping Heaven, there were burnt offerings with oxen and sheep, costly for ancient farming tribes, and so the ceremony could not be daily but on special days.

Following the word of Gad the prophet, King David once built an altar and presented offerings to God while the ark of God was stationed at somewhere else (2 Samuel 24:18-25). Later, after the Holy Temple was built for God, people other than Israelites could come to worship (2 Chronicles 6:32-33), which also indicates a universal desire or need to worship. The worshiping of Heaven hints that people felt sinful before God, but the Zhou people had no conceptions of Sabbath keeping and male circumcision, two prominent features in the Israelite way of life. Without the Mosaic Law, the Zhou people could not be so conscious of sin as the Israelites (Romans 3:20).

As viewed philosophically by Aristotle (384-322BC), both heaven and the earth in which the land is supported are included in the conception of space which works like an infinite container. Ordinary Greeks at that time worshiped the gods of myth. Interestingly, although the Good is the highest idea in the Platonic world which is beyond the sensible one that people of this life are experiencing (Plato, 1993, p. 230), the philosopher-king, who is most eligible to rule, is never labeled son of the Good. In fact, the Good, being a conception, serves better as a moral attribute of a reality like heaven or a source of being, than it does as a reality itself. Rationally, heaven as a conception is not innate but empirical. Without a glimpse of heaven, a man born blind can worship God in his heart since God is light (1 John 1:5). For example, the definition of God by Anselm (1033-1109), than which nothing greater can be conceived (Anselm, 1973, p. 244), describes a better object of worship than heaven. Compared with heaven, time is more abstract as a concept although time can be assumed as a cause of change.

Heaven is God's throne, while the earth is his footstool (Matthew 5:34-35). However, only the Word of God is God (John 1:1-2). The promised land, where the 12 tribes of Israel lived and where King David expanded his territory, was the center of the ancient world with the Holy Temple in Jerusalem as a symbol of God's presence with his chosen people. According to the teaching of Jesus (John 4:24), worshiping Heaven is not worshiping God. Even in the Chinese context, heaven is not a spirit (灵). Since the seat is used as a simile, worshiping heaven is expecting a kind of possible presence of God who is omniscient, not simply idolatry or abusing the name of God, because God once led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night when they came out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21).

Each king of the Zhou claimed to be a Son of Heaven (天子); they descended from its founder who overthrew the Shang Dynasty, which was against the will of god. Similar to the Israelite monarchy, the successor to the throne was usually the crown prince. Actually, the Son of Heaven as a title was also used by the last king of the Shang. Compared to Biblical terms, all Sons of Heaven were from a chosen family of

Heaven. However, the chosen family had no physical sign for its male members and its self-imposed covenant with Heaven was temporary. Was the land under Heaven a promised land to any actual or potential Son of Heaven by Heaven? Heaven would have another chosen family for rulers of the next dynasty if the top ruler of the first one lost favour. Paradoxically, all people could call Heaven Father but Heaven had only one living man awarded the title Son of Heaven. Ordinary people were made to believe that their rights were given by the Son of Heaven and they should be thankful to him. Heaven treated people partially. All the earliest history was compiled by SiMa Qian (司马迁, born in 145 or 135BC) according to former records.

With a calling from Heaven, King Wu with his army began to attack the Shang king. In representing Heaven, the Zhou kings should rule the people legitimately; and later emperors of different dynasties followed the rituals more or less. In its origin context, the title Son of Heaven did not fully deify the ruler as an incarnation of Heaven or an immortal, but rather it was a self-validating prophecy of the king which raised him to a status between Abraham and Moses, the former with whom God made a covenant, the latter a genuine receiver of Law from God and the man of God (Deuteronomy 33:1). Being the Son of Heaven, the king had a superior identity added to his kingship. Before there was the first king, no one dared to claim to be Son of Heaven. Unlike the Israelites, the Zhou people had no conceptions of angels (Hebrew 1:14), and a Son of Heaven was not an angel of Heaven. For the Israelites, a king should be like an angel of God in discerning good and evil (2 Samuel 14:17).

Hence, Heaven is not the Creator in the Hebrew sense. The emperor became the top ruler under heaven in the dynasty of Qin (秦, 221-207BC). Nevertheless, unlike the priest-king Mechizedec or King David who was anointed by high priest, the Chinese emperor acted like a high priest himself before Heaven. In worshipping Heaven, the emperor was witnessed openly by his ministers and officials as a humble representative of Heaven. And he behaved as having a personal covenant relationship with Heaven, although in reality the worship was more like the self-worshipping and self-comfort of the emperor himself. We had no knowledge whether God spoke to any king or emperor during Heaven worship ceremonies. Exceptionally, God once moved the heart of Cyrus King of Persia, since there were Israelites in exile there (Ezra 1:1).

Having no idols, Heaven worship still left no evidence of its holiness like the stone tablets in the ark and later in the most holy place of the Temple in Jerusalem. The title, Son of Heaven, could be passed on or inherited, and in this lineage, the Son of Heaven does not mean the one and only Son of Heaven; it just stood for a ruler, not a savior or a morally perfect man. Every emperor could claim to rule for the will of Heaven and one of his ambitious subjects could become the next emperor through rebellion or usurpation. If an emperor were Heaven-centered, he should have a law from Heaven revealed and recorded as the Mosaic Law. We can conclude that the Zhou people and other later people who inherited the rituals and thoughts held a weak form of natural theology in worshipping Heaven, an object that never spoke to anyone in a covenant relation like God had done with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Israelites.

Since Heaven was the most awesome, untouchable, and unsearchable, people needed a special place for worship. The rituals in Heaven worshipping can still be imagined at the Temple of Heaven (天坛) outside the Forbidden City in Beijing, where the emperors of the Ming (明, 1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911), the last two dynasties in China, worshiped annually with offerings of cattle and grain. There were no daily offerings; however, ordinary people could not approach to worship Heaven. The shape of the terraced bases where the temple and a separate altar mound stood is round because the ancient Chinese believed that Heaven was spherical-shaped. Although the colour of the sky is light blue or azure, the imperial colour was yellow rather

blue in the Chinese court. Heaven worship was held in the morning when the sky without stars seemed to be more representative of Heaven. The ark and later the Holy Temple in Jerusalem were symbols of God's presence with the Israelites. What was the symbol of Heaven's presence with the Chinese emperors? The Temple of Heaven bore no such symbol, but, even to the Israelites, a symbol was just a pointer and not the reality itself. The ark was once captured by the Philistines when the Israelite had no king who led them in fighting (1 Samuel 4:10-11), and later the Holy Temple was ruined and burned by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:8-9).

For any Son of Heaven, his genealogy had no trace from heaven; the term in Chinese itself was of human imagination and invention since only Hebrew was the holy language in the Old Testament times. Ancient Chinese began to adopt family names rather early, one of the first being Ji (姬), the family name of the Zhou kings. Different family names individualized families inside a clan, mainly of farming origin. Within a family tree, its genealogy records descendants under a patriarch by order of generation and seniority in which only the male could carry the family name, a practice more strict than the genealogies for the Israelites in the Old Testament. For example, Confucius (孔丘, 551-479BC) had Kong (孔) as his family name, and his direct descendants down to the 80th generation can be identified. Once a new dynasty began, with a Son of Heaven as its top authoritarian ruler, the personal Heaven had a new family name: that of the ruler. In this way, Heaven could be named by rulers and its faithfulness could be redefined if its covenant with the former dynasty was not abused. The reign by every new emperor marked a new era in that years counted by his reign title plus a number, more complex than the Biblical method (1 Kings 6:1).

Once a year, on Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27), only the high priest could enter the most holy place to present sin offerings before God. Similarly, the annual ritual of Heaven worshiping was usually held at winter solstice, presided over by the emperor. Mirroring this exclusiveness, apart from the emperor, people were neither Sons of Heaven nor chosen people of Heaven. However, worshiping Heaven was more religious than worshiping the king or emperor. Although Heaven was partial, worshiping privately was still meaningful for ordinary people, who usually could not decide their own fate, way of death, or span of life. If Heaven worship means a faith in Heaven, that object of faith is not the ultimate, since faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of we do not see (Hebrew 11:1). Therefore, Heaven worship cannot bring one righteousness before God.

The land under Heaven was not a promised land from Heaven to either King Wen or King Wu. However, the founding father and his early successors of the Zhou Dynasty distributed lands of the known world under Heaven to their sons, brothers, or meritorious subjects. Unlike first as dukes of vassal states, the descendants of these land owners would later evolve to become ambitious kings of warring kingdoms, and thus the Son of Heaven lost control in an originally unified state. For example, not being a descendant of the royal Zhou family, the ruler in the land of Qin (秦) claimed to be first king of Qin kingdom in 325BC.

The Biblical prophet Jeremiah did not kill himself or lose faith in God (Lamentations 3:22-23) when his nation state was destroyed, although he mourned for the massacre inflicted by the invading Babylonians on his countrymen in Jerusalem (Lamentations 2:20-21). Consider, in contrast, a famous Chinese figure. Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278BC), once wrote an influential poem, "Asking Heaven" (天问), in which he was skeptical of many ancient myths or legends. Being a descendant of the former King of the Chu (楚), he drowned himself in a river after he heard the Qin (秦) army had captured the Chu capital. (The Chu king fled, although later the Chu kingdom survived for another 50 years.) However, his suicidal death was not a self sacrifice to Heaven or

asking Heaven to save the Chu. Neither kings of the Chu nor the Qin could represent Heaven. Later, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month each year was set aside as the Dragon Boat Festival in memory of Qu Yuan's death. Interestingly, as a Son of Heaven, the last king of the Zhou Dynasty was dethroned also by the Qin in 256BC when there were at least seven warring kingdoms under the disgraced Zhou, actually the Eastern Zhou (东周, 770-256BC) with Luoyang (洛阳) as its capital, since the earlier half of the Zhou was also termed the Western Zhou (西周, 1046-771BC) with Chang'an (长安) as its ruling seat. Therefore, Qu Yuan was loyal to the king of Chu rather than the Son of Heaven. There would be no Son of Heaven for more than 30 years before the King of Qin finally unified the land under Heaven and built a centralized feudal dynasty in 221BC. It was not decided by election but through brutal wars that the most ruthless king conquered others to establish orthodoxy to represent Heaven. Nor was it a just war to restore the Zhou Dynasty. People were not more rational or less superstitious when there was no Son of Heaven. In 219BC, three years after he unified the land under Heaven, the First Emperor of Qin (秦始皇, 259-210BC) even travelled a long distance to Mount Tai (泰山), located in his conquered Qi (齐) kingdom, to worship Heaven and proclaim his legitimacy to rule. He used the title emperor as the top ruler under Heaven since he had captured or killed all the kings of other states.

Hence, we see that Heaven could be interpreted in various ways and even changed by man and thus not immutable. In fact, there was no agreement in understanding Heaven in that Xunzi (荀况, 298-238BC), a later member of the Confucian school, took Heaven just as an impersonal sky. Then Heaven is not holy. But for Zheng Xuan (郑玄, 127-200), a famous interpreter of Confucianism in the Eastern Han Dynasty (东汉, 25-220), Heaven was the name of God. Being a name, Heaven cannot be compared to "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) in expressing eternity. The traditional Chinese lunar calendar began to be adopted in the Western Han Dynasty (西汉, 202BC-8AD), so the date for Heaven worship in Zhou might not be the same as that of emperors in later dynasties.

Dynastic Changes

Among past dynasties, the Yuan (元, 1271-1368) and Qing were established through military conquering by people with a language distinct from Han Chinese. Geographically, the Mongolians and the Mandarins were northern neighbors of the Han people and the Mandarins were better learners of Chinese language and classics. Such invaders did not fear to offend the Chinese Heaven and Son of Heaven. Comparable to the Israelite people who lost their country, the Han Chinese would be ruled by a culturally inferior race. Although some moved southward into mountainous areas, most of them did not leave their ancestral land. Luckily, being ruled by the Mongolians and the Mandarins, the Chinese had not lost their written language and customs. The atrocities that the Chinese once suffered from these horse riding invaders were long forgotten or forgiven since the Mongolians, Mandarins, and Chinese would be in one big family under Heaven.

Still, there were also peaceful dynastic changes, such as the well-known one from the Eastern Han (东汉, 25-220) to Wei (魏, 220-266). In such a case, a puppet-like emperor of the dying dynasty was forced to cede his throne and imperial jade seal, becoming a subject in a formal ritual in which the founding emperor of a new dynasty claimed his legitimacy to rule under the will of Heaven. The Wei was at first one of three competing powers and it held the last emperor of the Eastern Han as hostage from Luoyang (洛阳), the former capital, to Xuchang (许昌). Consider Cao Pi (曹丕, 187-226). His great father Cao Cao (曹操, 155-220) had seized power and become the premier of the Eastern Han and then the King of Wei. After Cao Cao died, Cao Pi inherited the kingship but felt unfulfilled. His subjects politely required the Emperor Xian of Han (汉献帝, 181-234) to

abdicate the throne. The helpless emperor was actually the brother-in-law of Cao Pi. A terraced altar outside Xuchang for the crown hand-over ceremony was built. The ritual was presided over by officials who, like prophets in the Old Testament, interpreted the mandate of Heaven (天意) in astronomical phenomena and etymological reflection, a Chinese folk theory of natural theology. As the inaugural emperor, Cao Pi thanked Heaven in worship and changed the year with his reign title.

But the Son of Heaven would die tragically when his family dynasty was over. Zhao Bing (赵昺, 1272-1279), a child emperor and the last ruler of the Southern Song, was carried into sea by his remaining Prime Minister, causing their deaths after they lost in a decisive naval warfare to the Mongolians in coastal Guangdong. The most tragic end was that of Emperor Chongzhen (崇禎帝, 1610-1644), the last ruler of the Ming, who did not surrender but rather hanged himself on a tree outside the Forbidden City when rebels poured into Beijing. Nevertheless, they did not die for a just war or righteous dynasty. Such Sons of Heaven are not remembered for their faith in Heaven.

Israel was corrupted through Solomon's squandering of resources on building palaces and the worshipping of other gods. This can be seen by considering David as a model king who obeyed the prophets of God and confessed his sins before God (2 Kings 12:13, 24:10-14). Among top rulers under Heaven, only one was an empress who dethroned her son and interrupted the Tang Dynasty (唐, 618-907) for 15 years (690-705). With an identity of Heaven, Sons of Heaven should be Platonic and have spiritual or philosophical reflection on self since Heaven is above this world. But no one can be compared philosophically to Marcus Aurelius (121-180), the Roman emperor. Being a Stoic, he had his own understanding on repentance (Eliot Charles, 1909, p. 258). By the standards of the Mosaic Law, every dynasty in historical China was corrupt both materially and spiritually. Usually, beside one or two queens, an emperor had dozens of royal concubines. Unsurprisingly, he could die of debauchery before his crown prince came of age. He was above the law which others had to obey and as a totalitarian ruler he could sentence his subjects to death mercilessly. And he would begin to search an auspicious location and then build a huge tomb there for himself shortly after he came to the throne. He had no conception of resurrection and the final judgement. Once he died, a great amount of treasure would be stored in the underground palace with his body. If the Son of Heaven had a life of Heaven, he did not need such a resting place for his mortal body.

Socrates (469-399BC), Plato, and Aristotle lived between the periods of Confucius and his greatest follower Mencius (孟子, 372-289BC). Mencius held that people were born not sinful but good. In his time, the Athenians hotly debated and disagreed with each other about what would be the best kind of government in a city state. Aristotle listed such forms as monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, aristocracy, and constitutional government (Aristotle, 1991b, p. 83). Plato argued for the one under a philosopher-king. But for the ancient Chinese, there were no such original ideas even though there were warring states competing for elites of different schools and strategies to unify all people under Heaven in place of the weakening Zhou. As for both Confucius and Mencius, they never travelled to pay personal respect to any King of the Zhou, the living Son of Heaven, who had gradually devolved into an inferior ruler on a territory smaller in size than many of the warring states.

Aristotle presumed the existence of aether for bodies in heaven, besides water, air, fire, and earth, the four basic elements that Greek naturalists held (Aristotle, 1991a, p. 7). Both ancient China and Israel had no such a great figure in rational thinking like Aristotle. Unfortunately, modern science and chemistry has proved the Greek naturalists wrong. Normally, air is the most abstract and has the most connection with heaven, since the

heaven at least has air in the sky and thus is not purely spiritual. Rain comes from the sky so, in this sense, there is also water in heaven. Standing on a mountain peak, one seems to be closer to heaven. Besides the First Emperor of the Qin, few emperors of later dynasties went to Mount Tai to worship Heaven.

The Temple of Heaven, however, was not built on such a peak. Normally, it would be easier to build it on plain ground and also for emperors to come to worship. Regarding the site where Heaven was worshiped, emperors of the Ming and then the Qing dynasty did not differ after the capital was moved from Nanjing (南京) to Beijing during the Ming in 1421. Earlier dynasties had capitals elsewhere, the most famous of which were Chang'an for the Western Han, and Tang, Luoyang for the Eastern Zhou (东周, 770-256BC), Eastern Han, Jin (晋, 266-420), and Sui (隋, 581-618), Kaifeng (开封) for the Northern Song (北宋, 960-1127), and Hangzhou (杭州) for the Southern Song. In the suburb of Xi'an (西安), where Chang'an was, there are also ruins of a Temple of Heaven.

Being the first centralized feudal dynasty with emperors, the Qin Dynasty was short-lived, and soon overthrown by rebellious groups who could not tolerate its tyranny. Born as a civilian and originally a grass root official of the Qin, Liu Bang (刘邦, 256-195BC), joined the rebellion, gradually gained leadership, and finally became the founding emperor of the Western Han Dynasty. During the prime years of the Western Han Dynasty, Confucian classics was raised to the official status by Emperor Wu (汉武帝, 156-87BC). A vanity education began; all people were praised with a good human nature. If all were born good without sin, all Sons of Heaven should have a human nature perfect, like that of Adam before he broke the command of God in the Garden of Eden. The Western Han was not a restoration of the Zhou Dynasty. And it was not won through class struggle, a Marxist method which had been dominant in explaining history in China's academics. However, revolution was a recent and imported concept for the Chinese, although it also involves violence and blood shedding, commonly known when dynastic changes occurred under Heaven.

The Republic of China was founded in 1912 through revolution, nominally led by Sun Zhongshan (孙中山, 1866-1925), a Christian with weak faith but influenced by American democracy. The winter solstice when former emperors worshiped Heaven annually was not recognized as a festival or a date of ceremonial importance by the Republic. After winning the northern expedition, Jiang Jieshi (蒋介石, 1888-1975), who succeeded Sun as the leader of the Nationalist Party, had Nanjing as its capital in 1928. Civil wars continued for another 20 years in which a full scale Japanese invasion once united the Nationalists and the Communists for eight years (1937-1945). For many elderly in the mainland of China, the Jiang Dynasty (or the Party-state labeled the Republic of China since 1927) was over when Jiang Jieshi lost in his last civil war with the Communists and then fled to Taiwan in 1949. On October 1 of the same year, Mao Zedong (毛泽东, 1893-1976) declared the founding of the People's Republic of China. The ceremony was held in Tiananmen Square, south of the Forbidden City where emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties ruled. An official conclusion is that the Communists established its new central government through a victorious revolution, ending a century long humiliating history of China under imperialist, feudal, and bureaucratic capitalist rule since the Opium War (1843) when the Qing Empire began to sign unequal treaties with Western countries, Russia and Japan. Does it mean that an isolated empire under Son of Heaven would leave a glorious history in the origin and an inevitable development of science, technology, and democracy? Definitely not. Modern China imported all the above from the West.

By common sense, the land under Heaven for the ancient Chinese was actually a far eastern part of the

Asian continent. It had never been the center of the world. Since China (中国) as term means central state, many Han Chinese emotionally have no distinction between land and state, so most people living in their fatherland would not fight to die for a passing regime. Not only did the Qing Empire gradually lose control on its former vassal states like Vietnam and Korea, but it also ceded territories to expanding Russia and Japan. As for Mao Zedong, he himself had experienced the rule of the last two emperors of the Qing and one dynasty change when Emperor Xuantong (宣统, 1906-1907) was dethroned in 1911.

Conclusion

The land under Heaven had been ruled by more than 10 dynasties and the country under each regime actually had a national identity of its own although the people did not care seriously about this identify. Historically, the Han Dynasty included what later historians labeled the Western Han and the Eastern Han, between which a short dynasty called the Xin (新, 8-23) existed. Liu Xiu (刘秀, 5BC-57), the founding emperor of the Eastern Han, was a descendant of the royal family of the Western Han, but was far away from being the natural successor to the throne. The Han Dynasty, in fact the Western Han, played a role of shaping the nation in that people with Chinese as their native language are called Han Chinese, although Chinese as a language appeared much earlier than the dynasty itself. This means that the Han Dynasty was the only one restored by its royal descendant, a member of the former chosen family of Heaven.

Linguistically, the link between China, a term for the land, and Chinese, a term for the people, cannot be compared with that between Israel and the Israelites. As a chosen nation, the Israelite nation had its history with a convincing covenant relationship with the faithful God. Israel, the patriarch named by God (Genesis 32:28-30), was a patriarch of the Israelite nation within the land of Israel; this set of relationships can be seen as a pattern for individual Chinese to understand their relation to land and nation.

Being the Son of God, Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law as a sin offering for all who believe in him (John 3:16). By the Chinese history table, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened when the founding emperor of the Eastern Han ruled. Since the earliest followers of Jesus were people of the Jewish tradition, there was a time when the Jewish Christians still sent offerings for their sins at the Temple in Jerusalem just as the Jews did according to the Mosaic Law. Such saved sinners were persuaded to believe Jesus Christ as the Son of God by an author who had never seen Jesus Christ but was saved by his gospel (Hebrews 2:3). The author of the book of Hebrews gave a list of men of faith in God from Israelite history, among which David was the only king mentioned (Hebrews 11:32-34). After the Romans destroyed the Holy Temple in 70, the Jews could no longer worship God there according to the Mosaic Law, but Heaven worship continued in the Eastern Han and the following dynasties. No Son of Heaven could be the closest to God in worshiping Heaven because only through the gospel sinners have eternal lives. The gospel of Jesus Christ began to spread in the Chinese-speaking world in large scale after the Opium War and the initial word was mainly done by missionaries from English-speaking countries. Officially adopted with the founding of the Republic in 1912, the Gregorian Calendar has been used in China although the lunar calendar which decides the dates of traditional festivals still has great influence on rural agriculture and customs, etc.

There have been hundreds of Sons of Heaven. All of them had no life from Heaven. They did not descend from Heaven but were born from human parents. The first emperor in historical China once wanted to seek ways to live forever but he died at 50 when his huge tomb was still being built. When the Chinese talk about their ancient kings and emperors, they have no list of great men with faith in Heaven. Among the Ten

Commandments, only the one honoring one's parents (Exodus 20:12) was kept. Ironically, a founding emperor would usually rebuild a grand tomb for his buried parents and even grandparents although he himself claimed to be a Son of Heaven. Great rulers held bigger share of territory under Heaven than usual but none of them was so far-sighted to explore the known world where people did not know or fear the Son of Heaven. Among the sites where past Sons of Heaven worshiped Heaven, only two remain. The site where Heaven worship was performed in Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty is now a place of sightseeing, although not so famous as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing; both of them cause no emotional memory for the Chinese as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem does for the Jews. Only through the Old Testament and later the history of the Christian church and the Jews, we can understand the true covenant relationship between God and his chosen people. Unsurprisingly, the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ is more difficult than the present Israel for the cultural Chinese to imagine although Israel is a democracy without a king. Chinese people like to say that they love their fatherland or motherland (祖国) instead of PR China, but truth and justice is seldom mentioned. Most of them do not make a conscious distinction between their nation and the land under Heaven, as dynasties or regimes changed. What they love is actually a land formerly under Heaven where their ancestors had survived dynastic changes, whether violent or peaceful. Now there is no Son of Heaven. Does it mean that all people have been rejected by Heaven? Certainly not. Heaven cannot reject people and people cannot be cheated by the misleading title any more. The Chinese conception of Heaven is not God who reveals himself in the Bible, although it gives people sympathetic meditation on how far Sons of Heaven lagged behind King David who with a repentant heart had great faith in God before they could be reached by the Mosaic Law and then the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The official atheist teaching in China denies the existence of God, the Creator, but in Chinese context and tradition it cannot reject the existence of heaven (天). Interestingly, 天 later began to stand for a basic unit of time more often than 日 (day, the sun) such as in expressions 明天 (tomorrow) and 夏天 (summer). God created time and is above time (Genesis 1:1). Similar to the Israelites, ancient Chinese lacked a philosophical understanding on time as Plato and then Augustine (354-430) had in the West. Nevertheless, 天 can be a link between people living in time and the eternal God as Son of Heaven (天子) literally did for ancient top rulers to be habitually hegemonic. If there is no 天, many terms with heaven like 天才 (genius), 天性 (born nature), 天良 (conscience), and 天气 (weather) become meaningless and the Chinese mind would collapse. Since the conception of 天 has meaning related to God, the atheist doctrine is actually agnostic or theistic in practice, similar to Confucianism which cares human relationships more than a personal relationship with God. In fact, the Chinese and the Israelite people have no difference in human nature. No one was born superior but all were born sinful. All can be accepted by God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Interestingly, the Catholic Christians who translated the Bible into Chinese used the term 天主, meaning the Lord of Heaven, for God. This translation reserves Heaven worship to some extent although the Lord of Heaven is superior to any Son of Heaven. Since 天 in Chinese has several homonyms, such as 添 (to add), 姪 (girl's name), and 黠 (a kind of deer), 天主 as an expression has less authority by pronunciation and simplicity in standing for God than 神 (shen) (Pu, 2018, pp. 430-440).

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