

GENESIS
AND THE
MYSTERY
CONFUCIUS
COULDN'T
SOLVE

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Ethel R. Nelson / Richard E. Broadberry

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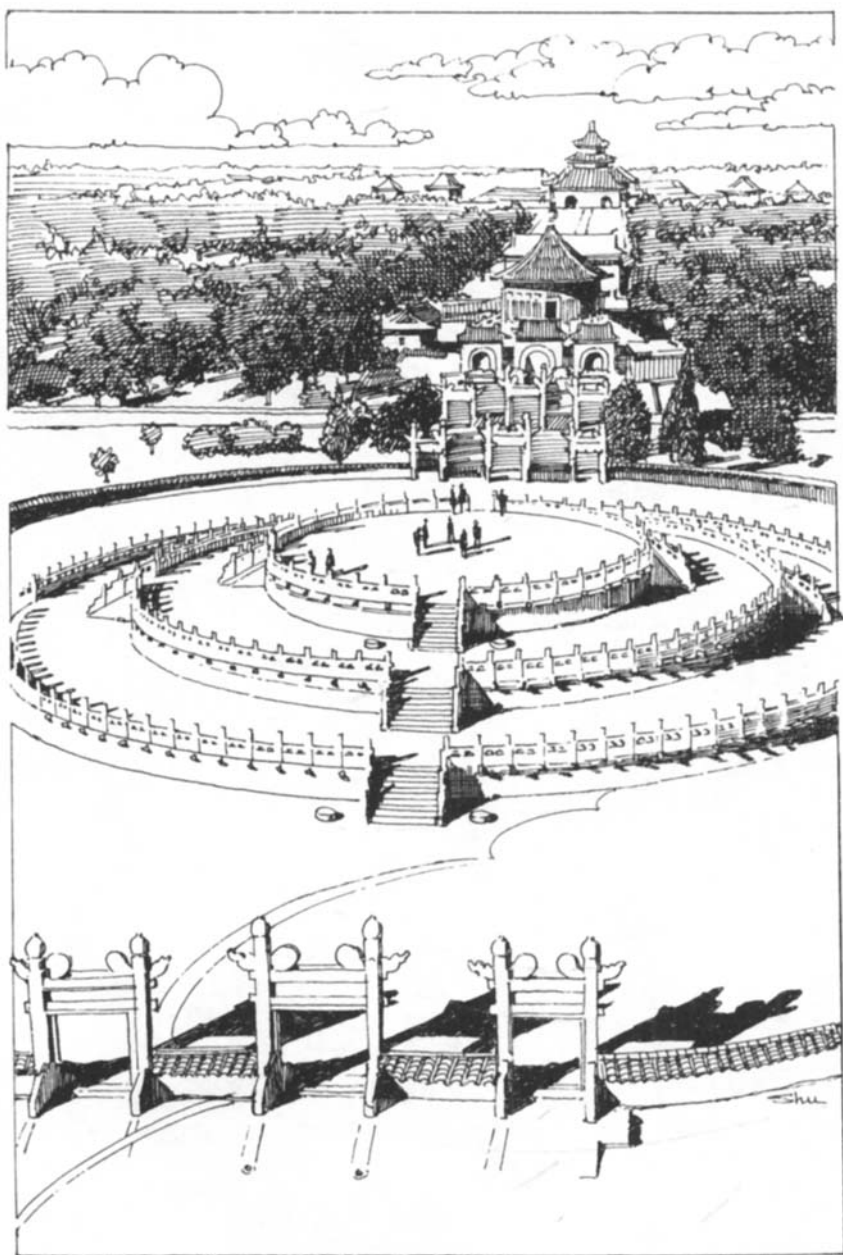
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Altar of Heaven, Beijing, with Temple of Heaven in immediate background



The Riddle

He who understands the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth . . . would find the government of a kingdom as easy as to look into his palm!

Confucius, *The Doctrine of The Mean*, xix, 6

For 40 centuries the reigning emperors of China had traveled annually to the border of the country or imperial city. There, on an outdoor altar, they sacrificed and burned young unblemished bullocks to *ShangTi* (上帝), the *Heavenly Ruler*. The Border Sacrifice, as it came to be called, was a ceremony conducted in unbroken sequence from the legendary period of Chinese history, before the first dynastic rule which began in 2205 B.C. (see Appendix, p. 143). After a continual observance of more than 4,000 years, this rite ended only in 1911 of our own century. This imperial sacrifice had become closely identified with the rulership of China, for the emperor himself was the chief participant in the ceremony. Consequently, when the Manchus were deposed in 1911, not only the dynastic

reign ended forever, but also China's longest celebrated and most colorful sacrifice: the Border Sacrifice.

So important to the mind of the sage Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was this Great Sacrifice that he compared a comprehension of the ritual to the efficient ruling of the Chinese empire. Yet he himself could find no reason for the sacrifice to ShangTi, which remained an unsolved riddle. Why did Confucius attach so much significance to this mysterious Border Sacrifice?

Even the origins of the sacrifices to heaven and earth are enigmatic. One of the earliest accounts is found in the *Shu Ching* (*Book of History*, compiled by Confucius), where it is recorded of Emperor Shun (c. 2230 B.C.) that "he sacrificed to ShangTi."¹ This emphasizes mystery number two: Who is ShangTi?

In the 15th century A.D., the service was moved to the southern part of Beijing, where an extensive park came to quarter three main sacred edifices. In 1420, a great Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests was completed. This northernmost temple is mounted on a triple-tiered, white marble terrace with surrounding balustrades 11 meters (36 feet) high. Fifty thousand blue, glazed tiles (representing the sky) cover a cone-shaped roof, also three-tiered. No nails were used in the construction of the circular wall, which is supported by 28 wooden columns hewn from single trees. In the center are four great pillars, which together with the outer framework support the roof without the use of ceiling joists. The entire interior is painted in multicolor designs.

To the south is a second, smaller Temple of Heaven, the Imperial Vault. Its plan follows the same architecture, except

the blue-tiled roof is a single cone. Inside this edifice resides no idol, but a tablet on the north wall is inscribed with the characters 皇天上帝 (*Heavenly Sovereign ShangTi*).

In a straight line, yet farther south, is the altar of sacrifice itself. This great, triple-tiered, white marble Altar of Heaven, 75 meters (250 feet) in diameter, again surrounded on each level by balustrades, has the appearance of a gigantic wedding cake. The uppermost level can be reached by series of steps on each of four sides. A monumental undertaking, construction of it was completed in 1539.

Transport yourself back in time to observe firsthand the events surrounding ancient China's most sacred site and rite. As the winter solstice (about Dec. 22) approaches, the supporting cast readies itself for the glorious ritual. Singers prepare their colorful silken robes; musicians dust off their racks of suspended bronze bells, varying-sized drums, cymbals, flutes, and stringed instruments, dedicated exclusively for use in this annual event.

On the morning before the winter solstice, the emperor, the "Son of Heaven," in gorgeous array passes through the front gate of the Imperial Palace (the Forbidden City) and makes his way in a procession to the Temple of Heaven park. An impressive retinue of princes and high officials follows. The streets of Beijing are silent, as all residents are required to remain hidden behind shuttered windows.

By reviewing the litany of prayers and praises, one may begin to understand the Chinese attitude toward ShangTi. After arriving at the Temple of Heaven, the emperor first meditates in the Imperial Vault, while the costumed singers, accompanied by the musicians, sing the recitation:



The Rib Story

As the sixth glorious day of creation was drawing to a close and the sun was beginning to sink toward the western horizon, Adam expressed his wonder that God had not provided a companion for him. Each of the animals, which he had just spent the day naming, had a mate by its side.

Recall the character 𐤀 (B) (𐤀), *vessel*, illustrating Adam's creation (p. 37). Another ancient artistic depiction of this symbol is 𐤀 (B)¹ showing the glorious *flame of fire* (p. 33). Let us now examine a similar "flasklike" figure: the radical *west* 𐤁 (B)² (𐤁), which portrays God, a *Being* 𐤀 , this time enclosing *two* = *persons* | .



vessel

$$\text{𐤀} (\text{𐤀}) + = + | (\text{𐤁}) = \text{𐤁}$$

God (a Being) two person(s) west









west

It was evidently as the sun was setting in the west that God brought forth the second person. The details of God's plan are most interesting. We learn from the Hebrew record that God said,





“I will make a suitable companion to help him.”...

Then the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him.³








to marry,
dusk

A second character which confirms the time and method of creating Adam's mate is  (0)⁴ (昏), meaning both *dusk* and *to marry*. In  we find the great *Being* (God)  bending over the *glorified person* , Adam. Having these two widely divergent meanings—*dusk* and *to marry*—it can only be interpreted as God () performing the first operation in which He removes a rib from the sleeping Adam (, p. 33), and from it forms a beautiful wife for him. Again, it emphasizes the time of day, *dusk*, when Adam's mate was created and the first *marriage* performed by God Himself.


dusk,
evening

To further confirm that it was at dusk when Eve was created, let's look at a second character meaning *evening*, *dusk*:  (0)⁵ (晏). In this we find God's hands  “operating” on the sunlike Adam , from whom a *woman*  (0)⁶ (女) emerges.


woman

We can even see this very operation in today's radical form *flesh* 肉, where  is *entered*  to take out a *person* 人. But it is even more clear in the ancient form from which today's radical was possibly transcribed:  (U)⁷ (肉). Here,  (人) represents a *man*, Adam, while we find  (0)⁸ (子) attached to him, meaning not only a *son*, *offspring*, but also a *bride* or *wife*! Note God's *hand*  (B)⁹ (爪)

Character Summary

Pagination cited is for the first appearance of each character in the text. All characters follow dictionary English definitions except for an occasional definition, placed in quotes, assigned by the authors.

Character	English Equivalent	Page
上帝 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	ShangTi, God, Heavenly Ruler	13, 30, 130, 131
帝 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	Emperor	16, 30, 130, 131
上	above	16
𠄎	produce, bring forth, create	29
𠄎	"God"	19, 34, 37, 44
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	ground, dust, earth	29, 32-33
𠄎		
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	mouth, person	30
𠄎 𠄎		
𠄎	speak, tell	29
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	Shen, God	31, 44-45, 65
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	God radical	31, 45, 48
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎	hand(s)	31-32, 42, 60
𠄎 𠄎 𠄎		82, 56, 85