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## The Term *min* 民 as a Political Concept in Western Zhou Thought\*

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This article analyzes the term *min* 民 as a political concept in Western Zhou texts. *Min*, the author argues, did not primarily serve to denote actual populations but referred first and foremost to a political idea, Zhou kingship. In the context of this idea, *min* constitutes a factor or a position within a structure of responsibility originating with Heaven as a transcendent ordering force that allowed the Zhou elites to conceive of their relation to non-Zhou populations in terms of universal kingship. As such, the concept *min* belongs to an imaginary order developed in Western Zhou political rhetoric. The present article sets out to analyze the conceptualization and the uses of the term *min* in contexts envisioning the idea of Zhou Kingship in texts from the *Documents* (*Shu* 書) and from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.

**Keywords:** *Min* 民, Zhou kingship, four cardinal regions, Mandate of Heaven, bronze inscriptions, the *Documents*

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## 1. Introduction

This article analyzes the Western Zhou (ca. 1050–771 BCE) concept of *min* 民 as part of the political ideology developed in the *Documents* (*Shu* 書, or *Shangshu* 尚書) and in a number of texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> My argument addresses a tendency in early China studies to interpret the term *min* as actual populations within the early Chinese socio-political landscape. It has been pointed out by several scholars that in texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and in the *Documents*, *min* often designates non-Zhou populations located on the fringes of the Zhou sphere of influence, especially within the newly acquired eastern territories formerly subject to Shang hegemony.<sup>2</sup> Although the context of many instances of *min* in these texts clearly corroborates this suggestion,<sup>3</sup> I would object that what *min*

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- 1 Apart from the epigraphic sources that can be dated with relative confidence to more or less approximate sections within the Western Zhou period (cf. Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], 106–55 for different criteria that can be applied to date Western Zhou bronze inscriptions), no single text from the transmitted versions of either the *Documents* or the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩) can be securely ascribed a Western Zhou date based on scientific evidence. Based on the scholarship available to him at the time, Herrlee Glessner Creel (1905–1994) identified twelve passages from the modern text *Documents of Zhou* (*Zhou Shu* 周書) section to be of possible Western Zhou origin. These include the five “gao” 誥 chapters, the “Zi cai” 梓材, “Duo shi” 多士, “Jun shi” 君奭, “Duo fang” 多方, “Gu ming” 顧命, “Wen Hou zhi Ming” 文侯之命 and “Bi shi” 費誓 chapters. See H. G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, vol. 1, *The Western Chou Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 447–63. Creel’s selection is still largely accepted and will be followed in this article as well. However, there are indicators suggesting that even these twelve passages might have been composed at a much later date. Cf. Kai Vogelsang, “Inscriptions and Proclamations: On the Authenticity of the ‘Gao’ Chapters in the *Book of Documents*,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002): 138–209.
  - 2 See Léon Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou La voie royale: recherches sur l’esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque*, vol. 2, *Structures politiques, les rites* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1980), 153–56; Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, “Kinbun tsūshaku” 金文通釋, *Hakutsuru bijutsukan shi* 白鶴美術館誌 48(1978): 174; Thomas Crone, “Der Begriff *min* 民 in Texten der Westlichen Zhōu-Dynastie (1050–771 v. Chr.),” *Orientierungen* 2 (2014): 33–53; and Toyota Hisashi 豊田久, *Shūdai shi no kenkyū: Higashi Ajia sekai ni okeru tayōsei no tōgō* 周代史の研究: 東アジア世界における多様性の統合 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2015), 325–32.
  - 3 See especially Crone, “Der Begriff *min* 民 in Texten der Westlichen Zhōu-Dynastie (1050–771 v. Chr.),” who presents ample evidence on this point. The traditional and still widely accepted opinion that *min* refers to “commoners” or “the people,” is discussed later in the second part of this paper.

actually denotes are not these populations per se, but their conceived affiliation to the Zhou ruling house. This point is important not just for our understanding of *min* but also for evaluating the significance of passages from texts wherein *min* appears.

The idea of *min* denoting autonomous, peripheral populations led some scholars to contextualize the term together with other terminologies that were used in military contexts to designate independent regions and populations.<sup>4</sup> We find that what might have constituted a shared context in historical reality was actually envisioned quite differently in literary contexts, wherein *min* occurs in the corpus outlined above. While military campaigns against rebellious polities and alien populations intruding on the Zhou are frequently depicted in texts from bronze inscriptions and in the *Odes*,<sup>5</sup> the targets of these operations are never denoted as *min*. Indeed, one hardly finds the term mentioned at all in military contexts. This does not mean populations implied by the term *min* in one context could not have been subject to military measures in another. Only then, literary sources would not refer to them as *min*, but in a different way as such and such polity (mostly a *guo* 國 in the east or south-east) or such and such peoples.<sup>6</sup> This has the rhetorical effect of demarcating military opponents from the Zhou community, whereas *min*, quite the contrary, always serves to emphasize the uniformity of potentially diverse populations in the aspect of their conceived affiliation to the Zhou realm. What then are the context and the function of *min* in our sources, and what does it address that accounts for the centrality of this term in the *Odes* and *Documents*?

Based on my reading of the relevant passages, including many of which that have received less attention in previous studies, I propose to read *min* as a political concept, as a symbol of order, rather than as a designation for actual populations. As my analysis will show, *min* overtly refers to a political idea that allowed the Zhou elites to affiliate with populations outside their own lineage alliances within an overarching authority structure, the design of which the sources ascribe to a transcendent ordering force, Heaven (*tian* 天)

4 Both Vandermeersch and Crone believe the populations implicitly referred to by *min* have occasionally constituted the subject of military conflict in the course of Western Zhou history.

5 Cf. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, 231–41.

6 These instances are treated under the topic “Barbarians,” in Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, 194–241. A most prominent example of hostile relations between the Zhou and a foreign population are the one with the Xianyun 獯鬻 people. See Li Feng 李峰, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou, 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141–92.

or Di 帝. *Min*, as it will be shown, never denotes non-Zhou populations per se, rather, it assigns them a position within the enhanced structures of a collective Zhou identity that we find articulated in literary sources.<sup>7</sup> What connected these populations to the Zhou, in the latter's political imagination, were neither kinship ties nor lineage alliances, nor militarily enforced tribute relations, but authority structures informed by a political idea, Zhou kingship.<sup>8</sup> For instance, it is no coincidence that we find the term being mentioned 65 times in the five "gao" chapters from the *Documents of Zhou* alone. These chapters claim to be originated from the time of King Wu and King Cheng (ca. 1045–1005 BCE), in the aftermath of the consolidation of Zhou power. Each depicts an announcement or an instruction spoken at the assumption or the transferral of ruling authority. On these occasions the protagonists expound on the Heaven-delegated order which places the Zhou elites in a position of authority and responsibility over the *min*. It is in such contexts, wherein *min* repeatedly appears in Western Zhou sources, that the term does not primarily denote population groups as such, but rather points to these groups' position within an authority structure. This in turn relates the term to an underlying political discourse that constitutes the context for the use of *min* in these texts.

In the following pages, I will first develop my assumptions concerning the import of *min* in comparison with existing interpretations of the term in pre-Qin contexts. Subsequently I will analyze the use and the appearance of *min* together with its conceptual surroundings in texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. Further investigations into instances of *min* in the *Documents* will provide a clearer understanding of the symbolic correlations between *min* and other ordering symbols that constituted the idea of Zhou kingship.

7 For the anthropological concept of enhanced structures of a collective identity, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999), 130–60. For kinship groups or lineages as the basic socio-political units in bronze-age China, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): the Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 2006), 19–28.

8 Numerous instances throughout the *Odes* and *Documents* explicitly equate Zhou kingship with the rulership over the *min*, including the poems "Huang yi" 皇矣 (Mao 241), "Jiong zhuo" 洞酌 (Mao 251), "Dang" 蕩 (Mao 255), "Yi" 抑 (Mao 256), "Zheng min" 烝民 (Mao 260) and "Si wen" 思文 (Mao 275) in the *Odes*, and the respective passages in the "Kang gao" 康誥, "Zi cai" 梓材, "Shao gao" 召誥, "Luo gao" 洛誥, "Duo shi" 多士 and "Duo fang" 多方的 *Documents*.

## 2. *Min* and the Problem of Reference

Before going into the textual analysis of the Western Zhou material, some explanations are needed in order to show how my argument relates to the general state of research on the topic of *min* in pre-imperial contexts.

Traditionally, the term *min* has been understood to denote subject populations in the Western Zhou and the ensuing polities that constituted the Spring and Autumn (770–454 BCE) and Warring States (453–221 BCE) multistate world. Disputes arose mainly over the question as to which groups within a polity's social hierarchy the term actually refers to in various contexts. While suggestions range between slaves or peasant bondsmen on the one hand and aristocracies of overthrown ruling-houses on the other,<sup>9</sup> it has been the scholarly consensus by and large to define *min* as “people” or “commoners” ruled by a sovereign or an elite group, which is often associated with the notion of *ren* 人.<sup>10</sup> Yet the use of *min* in the recently discovered late Western Zhou X Gong *xu* 夔公盨 inscription, and the still not fully published Tsinghua bamboo manuscript corpus (*Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡),<sup>11</sup> for instance, made scholars

9 Cf. the discussions in Wang Yuzhe 王玉哲, “Xi Zhou Chunqiu shidai de ‘min’ de shenfen wenti: jian lun Xi Zhou Chunqiu shi de shehui xingzhi” 西周春秋時代的「民」的身份問題——兼論西周春秋時的社會性質, *Nankai daxue xuebao (Zhaxue shehui kexue ban)* 南開大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), 1978.6; reprinted in idem., *Gushi jilin* 古史集林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2002), 94–113; Zhang Rongfang 張榮芳, “Liang Zhou de ‘min’ he ‘mang’ fei nuli shuo: Liang Zhou shengchanzhe shenfen yanjiu zhi yi” 兩周的「民」和「氓」非奴隸說——兩周生產者身分研究之一, *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University (Social Science Edition)* 中山大學學報 (社會科學版) 1979.3: 30–43; and Chou Feng-wu 周鳳五, “‘Nie’ zi xin tan – jian shi ‘xian min,’ ‘yi min,’ ‘ren li’” 「孽」字新探 兼釋「獻民」、「義民」、「人鬲」, *Bulletin of the Department of Chinese Literature, National Taiwan University* 臺大中文學報 51 (2015): 1–40.

10 See for example the handbook-like definition of *ren* and *min* in David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 138–46.

11 For the circumstances of the vessel's acquisition from the antique market in Hong Kong as well as preliminary attempts to contextualize both the vessel and its inscription, see the collected studies in *Journal of National Museum of Chinese History* 中國歷史文物 41 (2002): 4–45; *Huaxue* 華學 6 (2003): 1–49; and Xing Wen 邢文, ed., *The X Gong Xu 夔公盨: A Report and Papers from the Dartmouth Workshop* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 2003). For the Tsinghua manuscript corpus, see *Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin* 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心 ed., *Qinghua daxue cang zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡, 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhongxi shuju, 2010–2016). Based on an analysis of the manuscripts' Chu 楚-style script and a radiocarbon dating conducted on an un-inscribed bamboo slip, Li Xueqin 李學勤 suggests a date around 300 BCE for the production of the corpus. See idem., “Lun Qinghua jian ‘Baosun’ de ji ge wenti” 論清華簡 保訓 的幾個問題, *Cultural Relics* 文物 2009.6: 73–75.

constantly aware of the possibility that, depending on the context, *min* might indicate different status groups, ranging from unranked populations all the way to powerful lineages.<sup>12</sup> This then raises the legitimate question in which meaningful way *min* can be said to unitarily denote a subject population.

Robert H. Gassmann voiced a very thought-provoking proposal in this respect, suggesting one should approach the matter from the perspective of genealogical categories.<sup>13</sup> By accepting the notions of *ren* and *min* to form a complementary pair in Spring and Autumn and Warring States sources, he argues the distribution of the two designations depends on the genealogical perspective depicted, with *ren* always denoting the members of one's own lineage or clan and *min* referring to members from other kinship groups.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *min* would refer to a subject population from the perspective of a state's ruling clan.

Even though the sources do not attest to Gassmann's proposed genealogical parameters,<sup>15</sup> his initial assumption nevertheless raises an important point. The question, I think, is not so much whom *min* refers to in absolute terms, but in which context. Depending on the sort of text, one might even ask what socio-political role *min* denotes that can be applied to different actors in different constellations. Let us consider, for instance, the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 as a representative text from the late Spring and Autumn or early Warring States era in which *min* appears 436 times.<sup>16</sup> Throughout this text it is not *ren* and

12 See for instance, Chen Yingjie 陳英傑, *Xi Zhou jinwen zuo qi yongtu mingci yanjiu* 西周金文作器用途銘辭研究 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2008), 595; and Zi Ju 子居, "Qinghua jian 'Houfu' jixi" 清華簡 厚父 解析, *Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin*, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.ctwx.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/ctwrp/6842/20150428/77001430212544376.doc>.

13 Robert H. Gassmann, "Understanding Ancient Chinese Society: Approaches to *Rén* 人 and *Min* 民," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.3 (2000): 348–59, further elaborated in idem., *Verwandschaft und Gesellschaft im Alten China: Begriffe, Strukturen und Prozesse* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 283–337.

14 Gassmann, "Understanding Ancient Chinese Society," 352–53.

15 For a refutation of Gassmann's interpretation of *ren* as a genealogical term, see Newell Ann Van Auken, "Who is a *rén* 人? The Use of *rén* in 'Spring and Autumn' Records and Its Interpretation in the *Zuǒ, Gōngyáng*, and *Gūliáng* Commentaries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131.4 (2011): 555–90.

16 For the difficulties of dating the compilation of the *Zuozhuan*, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, CA: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 67–71. The count has been conducted using the character search function provided by the "Chinese Text Project" database, 2006–2017, <http://ctext.org>.

*min* that form a conceptual pair, in the widest sense, but rather it is *min* and *jun* 君 (ruler, hegemon).<sup>17</sup> As for *jun*, the situation is very much indisputable. *Jun* describes a political category, implying all the attributes that define a ruler. By the same token we can assume *min* to describe a political category as well, at least when it is used in relation to *jun*. It is not surprising then to see *min* and *jun* appearing more or less exclusively in contexts elaborating on the principles of rulership and statehood in the *Zuozhuan*. Those might be short general statements such as the following passage:

A ruler is the one who guides the *min* into the right paths and the proper distinctions.

君，將納民於軌、物者也。<sup>18</sup>

Other passages employ *min* and *jun* in parables defining the reciprocal relations between rulers and subjects:

A good ruler will reward excellence and punish excesses. He will nurture the *min* like his own children, covering them like the sky and holding them like the earth. The *min* will hold up their ruler, love him like a parent, look up to him as the sun and the moon, revere him as the bright spirits, and hold him in awe as they do thunderbolts.

良君將賞善而刑淫，養民如子，蓋之如天，容之如地；民奉其君，愛之如父母，仰之如日月，敬之如神明，畏之如雷霆。<sup>19</sup>

In yet other passages, *min* and *jun* serve to define the relation between rulers and subjects in the context of a higher-level authority structure, here symbolized by the image of the altar of a state:

17 The designation *jun* is not consistently used. Sometimes we find *wang* 王 (king) or simply *shang* 上 (superior) at the position of *jun*. In many cases we also find the name of a ruler being mentioned in relation to *min*. Moreover *min* and *jun* is not an exclusive conceptual pair. *Jun* for instance constitutes another complementary pair with the term *chen* 臣 (servant, vassal).

18 *Zuo*, Yin 5.1. Here and in the following examples from the *Zuozhuan*, the Chinese text and punctuation are given according to the version in Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. and annot., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, rev. ed., 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990). The English translation follows, with slight amendments, the version in Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg, trans. and intr., *Zuo Tradition/Zuozhuan* 左傳: Commentary on "Spring and Autumn Annals" (Seattle, WA.: University of Washington Press, 2016).

19 *Zuo*, Xiang 14.6.

He who rules over the *min*, how can he use his position to encroach on the *min*? It is the altars of the domain that he should take as master. He who serves the ruler, how can he do it for the sake of material recompense? It is the altars of the domain that he should nurture.

君民者，豈以陵民？社稷是主。臣君者，豈為其口實，社稷是養。<sup>20</sup>

Even in contexts referring to specific rulers and their subject populations, *min* and *jun* always denote these actors in terms of their respective positions within a political structure of responsibilities. This is also the case with the usage of *min* in other texts from that period.<sup>21</sup> The attributions constituting the term in different corpora should be expected to show a certain degree of variation, nevertheless, *min* invariably functions as an ordering symbol interrelated to other symbols within a network of terms referring to socio-political realities in the context of a conceived socio-political order. It is thus the position of *min* within this order as well as the political attributes pertaining to this position that the term refers to in the first place.

Turning our focus now to the Western Zhou sources, we should expect *min* to behave in a manner similar to what we have stated above. In this context, the assumptions that *min*, from the perspective of the Zhou elites, might have referred to autonomous peripheral populations cited in the very beginning of this paper, become important. Léon Vandermeersch has pointed out more than thirty-five years ago that in Western Zhou sources the term *min* “explicitly conceptualizes population groups categorically excluded from the Zhou aristocratic community, which alone has been organised through ritual relations.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, based on the information found in the Western Zhou Da Yu *ding* 大盂鼎 (*Jicheng* 2837)<sup>23</sup> and Da Ke *ding* 大克鼎 (*Jicheng* 2836) inscriptions, he suggests

20 Zuo, Xiang 25.2.

21 This assumption is based on a selective comparison of passages from pre-Qin texts generated with the help of the character search function provided by the “Chinese Text Project” database. Although this random analysis has yielded no contrary evidence, a comprehensive study might come to different results in contexts unintentionally excluded in my search.

22 Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou La voie royale*, 2: 154. The translation from French is my own.

23 The numbers for Western Zhou bronze inscriptions follow the nomenclature used in Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所 ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成, rev. ed. 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), hereafter referred to as *Jicheng*. Numbers for inscriptions published after the compilation date of *Jicheng* are given according to the NA and NB nomenclatures used in the “Digital Archive of Bronze Images and Inscriptions” 殷周金文暨青銅器資料庫, compiled by the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica 中央研究院歷史語言研究所, 2012, <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~bronze/>, hereafter referred to as AS database.

*min* to refer predominantly to non-Zhou populations geopolitically associated with the four cardinal regions (*sifang* 四方).<sup>24</sup> In more recent studies on the import of *min* in Western Zhou sources, Thomas Crone and Toyota Hisashi 豊田久, without reference to Vandermeersch, come to similar conclusions.<sup>25</sup> If this is indeed the case, which I tentatively assume it is, then the political idea *min* would have provided the imaginary socio-political structures for the Zhou elites to define their relation to these populations within one common authority structure. In the following pages we shall analyze how this relation has been envisioned and in which contexts.

### 3. *Min* and the Notion of Zhou Kingship

There are two reasons that suggest we should begin our investigation by considering the material from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions first. In contrast to transmitted sources, texts from bronze inscriptions are free from later editorial alterations, — after all the text are at least approximately datable, and what is even more important is that they provide a more or less detailed context for the messages being articulated.

*Min* is attested merely 13 times in no more than nine texts from Western

24 Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou La voie royale*, 2: 154. Far from simply denoting a spatial dimension, the notion of the four cardinal regions symbolizes the concept of cosmological kingship in Shang and Western Zhou political thought. This topic will be discussed in greater detail below.

25 Toyota Hisashi, *Shūdai shi no kenkyū*, 325–32; Crone, “Der Begriff *min* 民 in Texten der Westlichen Zhōu-Dynastie (1050–771 v. Chr.),” 33–53. A different view currently finds support from the proponents of the so-called “people-oriented thought” (*minben sixiang* 民本思想). See for instance You Huanmin 游喚民, *Xian Qin minben sixiang* 先秦民本思想 (Changsha: Hunan shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991); and Wang Baoguo 王保國, *Liang Zhou minben sixiang yanjiu* 兩周民本思想研究 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2004). Proponents of this theory preponderantly assume the word *min* to stand for “commoners” or “the people,” which, however, strikes me as anachronistic in the context of the Western Zhou kinship society. Here it would make more sense to speak of unranked lineage segments nevertheless socio-politically bound within kinship communities, rather than assuming a lineage-transcending class of commoners to constitute a socio-political factor for the Zhou elites. However, the significance ascribed to unranked lineage segments (mostly peasants residing and working on lineage estates but not necessarily related to the lineage aristocracy by blood) in Western Zhou society, in a standard work such as in Zhu Fenghan’s 朱鳳瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族形態研究, rev. ed. (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004), 323–26, is in no way correspondent to the connotations the term *min* has in Western Zhou sources.

Zhou bronze inscriptions,<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, these few instances prove instructive in better understanding the Western Zhou notion of *min*. Not only does *min* always appear in connection with the four cardinal regions, with the notable exception of the late Western Zhou *Mu gui* 牧簋 (*Jicheng* 4343) and *Da Ke ding* 大克鼎 (*Jicheng* 2836) inscriptions, all epigraphic instances of *min* also appear in contexts related to the Heavenly Mandate (Di's 帝 *yi de* 懿德 in one case) and the idea of Zhou kingship. Most prominent among these instances are two very similar passages from the *Da Yu ding* 大盂鼎 (*Jicheng* 2837) and the *Shi Qiang pan* 史牆盤 (*Jicheng* 10175) inscriptions. After indicating the date and location of a royal appointment, the text of the *Da Yu ding* inscription continues with these words:

The King approvingly spoke: “Yu! Greatly manifest King Wen received Heaven’s support and the Great Charge. By the time he succeeded King Wen, King Wu created the [Zhou] polity, expelled all evils and came into the possession of the four cardinal regions. Trust-winningly he set the *min* in order.<sup>27</sup> [...]”

王若曰：「盂，不（丕）顯玟（文）王受天有（佑）大令。在（武）王嗣玟（文）乍（作）邦，闕（關）畢（厥）匿（慝），匍（敷）有四方，（允）正畢（厥）民。[.....]」<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the *Shi Qiang pan* inscription begins with the following words:

It is said that in antiquity, when King Wen first brought stability and

26 I exclude from my investigation the recently excavated *Zeng Bo Qi yue* 曾伯陟鉞 (NA 1203) inscription listed by the AS database as either late Western Zhou or early Spring and Autumn, on the grounds that it clearly refers to a Spring and Autumn context. The word *min* appears two times in this short inscription.

27 All translations of the following Chinese sources are my own unless otherwise noted. Where applicable, the English translations for the epigraphic sources provided in Constance A. Cook and Paul R. Goldin, eds., *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 2016)(hereafter given as *Source Book*) have been consulted. The rendering of *yun* 允 for the graph 允 follows an assumption voiced by Chen Zhi 陳致 which has been raised earlier by Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 as well. See Chen Zhi, “Yun, ‘yun,’ ‘jun’ shi shi” 「允」、 「允」、 「峻」試釋, *Bulletin of Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology* 饒宗頤國學院院刊 1 (2014): 135–59.

28 The transcription of texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions largely follows the versions in the AS database, with significant exceptions explained.

harmony into the affairs of his government,<sup>29</sup> Di above sent down his exclusive *de*<sup>30</sup> and great protection. [It was thus that King Wen] came into possession of all above and below, convening and receiving the many lineage polities.<sup>31</sup> Resolute and firm,<sup>32</sup> King Wu set the four cardinal regions in order,<sup>33</sup> replacing the Yin and gaining the trust of the *min*.

曰古文王，初敎（戾）龢（和）于政，上帝降懿德大粵（屏）。匍（敷）有上下，迨（會）受萬邦。韜（維 = 疆）圉武王，適征（正）四方，達殷峻（允）民。<sup>34</sup>

Both of these passages explicitly relate the *min* to the idea of Zhou kingship. Governing the *min* within the four cardinal regions, after taking over the Shang King's position by force, is described as the ultimate subject of the Heavenly Mandate or Di's *yi de*-bond with King Wen. The four cardinal directions and

29 The interpretation of this passage follows Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, "Shi Qiang pan ming jieshi" 史牆盤銘解釋, in *Qiu Xigui xueshu wenji* 裘錫圭學術文集, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2012), 9.

30 Vassili Kryukov remarks here: "The innovation of the Shi Qiang pan lies in its substitution of 'Heaven's mandate' by 'perfect virtue' [懿德]. Thus, there is a functional correspondence between *de* and *ming* 命." See Kryukov, "Symbols of Power and Communication in Pre-Confucian China (on the Anthropology of *de*): Preliminary Assumptions," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 58.2 (1995): 321.

31 I take these polities to stand for the allied lineages of the Zhou who eventually assisted the latter in overthrowing the Shang.

32 My interpretation of the graphs 韜圉 follows Wang Ning 王寧, "Shi Shi Qiang pan ming de 'qiang yu'" 釋史牆盤銘的「強圉」, Wuhan Daxue jianbo yanjiu zhongxin 武漢大學簡帛研究中心, accessed March 29, 2017, [http://www.bsm.org.cn/show\\_article.php?id=2047](http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=2047).

33 While most scholars understand the graph 征 to write the word *zheng*, "to campaign," "to attack," Lian Shaoming 連劭名 and Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 have pointed out that 征 might well be a loan graph used to write the word *zheng* 正, "to set in order," "to regulate." Both scholars show that whereas the four cardinal regions are never mentioned as the subject of military campaigns in either the excavated or transmitted literature from the Western Zhou, there are numerous examples where the Zhou king is said to set the four cardinal regions in order. See Lian Shaoming "Shi Qiang pan mingwen yanjiu" 史牆盤銘文研究, in *Xi Zhou Wei shi jiazou qingtong qiqun yanjiu* 西周微氏家族青銅器群研究, eds. Yin Shengping 尹盛平等 et al. (Beijing: Wenwu, 1992), 362–63; and Ma Chengyuan et al., *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan* 商周青銅器銘文選, 4 vols. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987–90), 3.222. For further discussion of the military understanding of the graph 征 see also "Kinbun tsūshaku," *Hakutsuru bijutsukan shi* 50 (1979): 338.

34 The rendering of *yun* 允 for 允 follows Chen Zhi, "'Yun,' 'yun,' 'jun' shi shi" as noted above. See also Qiu Xigui, "Shi Qiang pan ming jieshi", 9–10, who reads *jun* 峻 as *quan* 俊, to change for the better.

the *min* appear as complementary ordering symbols.

What is important for understanding the significance of these passages in the context of the inscriptions however, is the fact that the receipt of the Mandate as well as the affiliation with the *min* are placed within a normative past as indicated by the phrase *yue gu* 曰古, “it is said in antiquity.”<sup>35</sup> The actual circumstances the inscriptions commemorate are the appointment of the vessel donor of the Da Yu *ding* to a royal task, and the receipt of a royal bestowal in the Shi Qiang *pan* respectively. Both these events describe the creation of a mutual obligation between the donor and Zhou King. The reference to the initial bond between the Zhou founding Kings and Heaven or Di thus serves to contextualize these two events. It provides a shared idea or meaning on grounds of which the vessel donors and the King define their relation through the commitment to a common task. This becomes even more clear in the late Western Zhou Shi Xun *gui* 師甸簋 (*Jicheng* 4342) inscription:

The King approvingly spoke: “Commander Hong! Brilliant Wen and Wu broadly received the Heavenly Mandate. Your sage forbears were able to assist the former Kings, acting as their arms and legs, assisting their ruler to establish the Great Mandate, bringing stability and harmony to governance. Thus was august Di in no way dissatisfied, watching over and protecting our Zhou. Throughout the four cardinal regions, nowhere were the *min* not content and tranquil.”

The King said: “Commander Hong, alas! In these days Heaven arouses awe and sends down destruction, the initial *de* cannot be [...], thus there was no one to succeed the former Kings’ legacy. In the past, out of your integer concern for the Zhou polity, you placed me, the young heir, upon the throne and carried out your duties, firmly protecting the person of the King. Now I extend your charge and order you to preserve our polity’s objectives great and small, and to broadly bring order to our polity.”

王若曰：「師甸，不（丕）顯文武，雁（膺）受天令。亦則於女（汝）乃聖且（祖）考克左右先王，乍（作）畢（厥）左（肱）受（股）。用夾鬻（召）畢（厥）辟，奠大令，鑿（鑿）厠（龠）（=戾和）雩（于）政。肆皇帝亡昊（斨），臨保我畢（有）周，雩四方民亡不康靜。」  
王曰：「師甸。哀才（哉）！今日天疾畏（威）降喪，首德不克婁，古（故）亡丞于先王。鄉（嚮）女（汝）徂屯（純）卹周邦，受（綏）

35 I take *gu* 古 here to stand for a normative past. Cf. Kai Vogelsang, *Geschichte als Problem: Entstehung, Formen und Funktionen von Geschichtsschreibung im Alten China* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 143–46.

立余小子，夙(惇)乃事，佳(唯)王身厚<sub>施</sub>。今余佳(唯)黼(申) 稟乃令，令女(汝)重<sub>離</sub>我邦小大猷。邦佑漢。[.....]」

Here the relation between the donor's forebears and the Zhou royal house is depicted as a share of the Zhou Kings' obligation, becoming his "arms and legs." In other words it is the shared responsibility towards the subject of the Heavenly Charge that defines the royal house and the donor's lineage as one community of purpose. Yet while at the time of the inscription the initial bond and its political achievements belong to a "bygone past" that cannot be retrieved, the *min* and the cardinal regions, as tokens and subjects of this initial obligation, outlast historical as well as generational change, and continue to define and to give meaning to the perpetuation of the Zhou lineage alliance. So, for instance, in the second half of the Da Yu *ding* inscription where the Zhou King is depicted to charge Yu with a governmental task, it says:

The King spoke: "Yu, assist me in taking over the supervision of warfare and attentively [...].<sup>36</sup> From dawn to dusk assist me, the One Man, to head the four cardinal regions, so I may follow [my forebears] in inspecting the *min* and the territories with which the former kings have been entrusted." 王曰：「盍， 豐(紹)夾死(尸)司戎，敏諫罰訟，夙(夙)夕豐(召) 我一人登(烝)四方，事我其適省先王受民受疆(疆)土。」

The modification of *min* and territories (here synonymous with the four cardinal regions) by the verb *shou* 受, "to receive" or "to be entrusted with,"<sup>37</sup> makes it very clear that the King is referring to them as symbols of an obligation. A similar usage of these terms can be found also in the transmitted *Documents*, as with *min* in the following passage from the "Luo gao" 洛誥 for instance:

(22) The Duke of Zhou bowed prostrate saying: "Your majesty ordered me to succeed in order to protect the Mandate and the *min* with which

36 For the interpretations of the graphs 死(尸)司 as meaning "to take on responsibilities," see the explanations by Constance A. Cook in the *Source Book*, 33n6.

37 In texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, the verb *shou* 受 mainly denotes the receipt of royal favours, which always entails the obligation to return these favours in the form of loyal service to the King. In another sense, it denotes the receipt of a mandate from the King or the former Kings' receipt of the Mandate of Heaven. In the latter case it directly denotes the assumption of an obligation.

your cultured ancestors have been entrusted.<sup>38</sup>

周公拜手稽首曰：「王命予來承保乃文祖受命民 [.....]。」<sup>39</sup>

According to Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), the *min* were thought to have been entrusted to the former kings as part of the Heavenly Mandate.<sup>40</sup> Which specific geo- and socio-political realities the terms *si fang and min* denote might have differed from context to context. What remains constant, however, is the responsibility structure these symbols entail. In this sense, *min* could also be used to refer to the Zhou alliance's common obligation in a negative or admonitory way, as is the case in the Mu *gui* 牧簋 (*Jicheng* 4343) inscription:

The King approvingly spoke: “Mu! Earlier, the former King ordered you to fulfil the post of supervisor of land. Now I revise this charge and order you to head the many officials’ affairs. [There are] many complaints that they do not take the former Kings as their model and often maltreat the numerous *min*.”

王若曰：「牧，昔先王既令女（汝）乍（作）嗣（司）土。今余唯或廢改，令女（汝）辟百寮有同（司）事，包多鬻（辭），不用先王乍（作）井（型），亦多虐庶民。」

To model oneself on the former Kings or on one's ancestors who stood in the service of the former Kings, implies the assumption of the obligations entailed by the idea of Zhou kingship. Thus maltreating the numerous *min* stands here symbolically or *pars pro toto* for the violations of these responsibilities which Mu is charged to prevent.

To conclude this part of my analysis, it can be said that although *min* obviously indicates populations other than the Zhou elites and their allied lineages, it becomes equally apparent that it does so by translating socio-political realities

38 For the reader's convenience, the line numbers given in the English text of passages translated from the *Documents* follow the numeration used in Bernhard Karlgren, trans., *The Book of Documents* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950). My own translation however varies considerably from Karlgren's.

39 The Chinese text and punctuation of passages cited from the *Documents* follow the text in Chū Wan-li 屈萬里, *Shangshu jishi* 尚書集釋 (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1983).

40 Wang Guowei 王國維, “‘Luo Gao' jie” 洛誥解, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林 (Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1975), 37. Jiang Kunwu 姜昆武, treating the term *shoumin* 受民 as an idiomatic expression, voices a similar argument, noting the non-military nature of the Zhou's receipt of the *min*. See her *Shi Shu chengci kaoshi* 詩書成詞考釋 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1989), 147.

into a political idea. At least in the above examples, to which one could further add the text from the He *zun* 鬲尊 (*Jicheng* 6014) inscription, *min* first and foremost functions as a symbol of an imagined political order to which both the Zhou elites and their allies equally commit themselves. We must not forget that the Western Zhou “state” was not a unitary whole but a lineage alliance that relied largely on personal ties.<sup>41</sup> In order to perpetuate such personal bonds across generations, the former needs to be substantiated by a political idea that can provide a common source of authority and obligation for the members of each proceeding generation. This idea is expressed in the notion of Zhou kingship.<sup>42</sup>

*Min*, however, is only one part of this topos, another major factor being the four cardinal regions which, as we have seen, appear mostly in connection with *min* in texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. In fact there are seven more texts from altogether twenty Western Zhou vessels that employ the image of the four cardinal regions in a way similar to the examples above, without mentioning the term *min*.<sup>43</sup> Given the often *pars pro toto* nature of such images as they are used in texts from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, we might reasonably assume *min* to be nevertheless implied in these images as well. What is more important however, just as *min* does not primarily denote actual populations, neither do the four cardinal regions, being a part of the topos Zhou kingship, function as a geographical designation. The four cardinal regions are first and foremost an ordering symbol the Zhou inherited from the Shang, just like many other cultural features, including the casting of inscribed

41 Cf. Xu Zhuoyun 許倬雲, *Xi Zhou shi* 西周史, rev. ed. (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1990), 107–38; Zhu Fenghan, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu*, 338–405. For the importance of personal contacts and obligations in the creation of the Western Zhou administrative authority structures, see especially Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, 317–87.

42 The palpable side of these authority structures became manifest of course in the process of bureaucratization, which led to the constitution of the Western Zhou state in its administrative structures as described in Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). However, as Carl Schmitt has pointed out “No political system based purely on the technical skills of the exercise of power can outlast one single generation. The political is inextricably linked to the idea, for there are no politics without authority and no authority without the ethics of conviction.” Cited in Jan Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000), 36. The translation from German is my own.

43 Cf. the Nangong hu *zhong* 南宮乎鐘 (*Jicheng* 181); the Xing *zhong* 夔鐘 (*Jicheng* 251); the Wu si Hu *zhong* 五祀卣鐘 (*Jicheng* 358); the Lu bo Dong *gui gai* 魯伯夔簋蓋 (*Jicheng* 4302); the Shi Ke *xu/gai* 師克盥 / 蓋 (*Jicheng* 4467 & 4468); the other Shi Ke *xu gai* (NA 1907); the twelve Qiu *ding* 逯鼎 (NA 0745–0756) and the Qiu *pan* 逯盤 (NA 0757) inscriptions.

bronze vessels. In Shang oracle bone inscriptions, the four cardinal regions appear as a cosmological ordering symbol that defines the Great Settlement Shang (*Da Yi Shang* 大邑商) as its centre in political, cosmological and ritual terms.<sup>44</sup> This sense is still reflected in idealized images of the Great Settlement Shang produced in later time, such as in the “Yin wu” 殷武 (Mao 305) Hymn from the *Mao Odes*:

|                    |                                       |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 商邑翼翼               | Magnificent was the settlement Shang, |
| 四方之極 <sup>45</sup> | Pole of the four cardinal regions.    |

It becomes a geographical, or more precisely, geopolitical designation only from the perspective of the Zhou ancestral lands in the Wei river valley in modern day Shaanxi around the capitals Feng 豐 and Hao 鎬.<sup>46</sup> Supposedly during the time of King Cheng (1042–1006 BCE), after the suppression of the Wu Geng Rebellion (*Wu Geng zhi luan* 武庚之亂) initiated by a former Shang prince,<sup>47</sup> the Zhou ventured to establish a second permanent administrative centre after Feng and Hao at a site near modern-day Luoyang 洛陽, east of the Zhou heartland. This episode is associated in the “gao” chapters of the *Documents* with the regency of the Duke of Zhou, as recorded in the following passage from the “Luo gao” 洛誥, in which he is depicted to offer his services to the still immature King Cheng:

(1) The Duke of Zhou bowed prostrate saying: “I report to you, my bright sovereign, (2) should your majesty not dare to assume the obligation of the Heavenly Mandate secured by the former Kings, I will continue to act

44 Cf. Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, *Yinxu buci zongshu* 殷虛卜辭綜述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 319–21; Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 74–101; David N. Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.)* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 55–96; and Aihe Wang 王愛和, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23–74.

45 The Chinese text of the *Mao Odes* follows the version in Chü Wan-li, *Shijing quanshi* 詩經詮釋 (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1983).

46 See Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 27–62 for the geographical identification of the Western Zhou realm.

47 Cf. Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China — from the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 310–13.

as protector [of the Mandate] and grandly inspect the eastern territories, so that you shall be the manifest ruler of the *min*.

周公拜手稽首曰：「朕復子明辟。王如弗敢及天基命定命，予乃胤保大相東土，其基作民明辟。」

In contrast to the young King Cheng who resided in the Zhou heartlands in the Wei river valley, the territories received by the Zhou founding Kings are designated as eastern territories. This perspective changes, however, when it comes to the topic and substance of kingship:

(22) The Duke of Zhou bowed prostrate saying: “Your majesty ordered me to succeed protecting the Mandate and the *min* with which your cultured ancestors have been entrusted. [...] (23) [Yet] you, my son, should [frequently] come to inspect the site. You shall grandly control the former Shang elites (?) and become the new ruler of the four cardinal regions. [...] I say, you shall govern from this centre, and then the myriad states will all enjoy blessings, and you, my King, will have achievements.

周公拜手稽首曰：「王命予來承保乃文祖受命民 [.....]。孺子來相宅，其大惇典殷獻民，亂為四方新辟 [.....]。曰其自時中乂，萬邦咸休，惟王有成績。」

In this passage, the Duke of Zhou urges the King to frequently take residence in the eastern territories to assume his position as a ruler at the very centre of the four cardinal regions. This suggests that the physical centre corresponding to the image of the royal centre in Western Zhou political theology was different from the Zhou ancestral lands. The already mentioned He *zun* 鬲尊 (*Jicheng* 6014) may serve to corroborate this view. Its text employs a similar rhetoric of motives that we saw in the Da Yu *ding* and Shi Qiang *pan* inscriptions above:

When the king first moved his residence to Chengzhou, he resumed the rites of King Wu and poured out the libation from (the altar of) Heaven. In the fourth month, on the *bing-xu* day, the King addressed the junior members of [our] lineage congregated in the Great Hall of the Jing palace, saying: “Formerly, your late father had been capable to assist King Wen, so it came that King Wen received [the Great Charge]. After King Wu subdued the Great (or Heavenly?) Settlement Shang, he solemnly reported to Heaven in these words: ‘I shall reside in this central enclosure and from here bring order to the *min*.’ [...]”

佳王初嚮宅于成周，復禹（武）王豐（禮），裸自天。才（在）四

月丙戌，王彝（誥）宗小子于京室，曰：「昔才（在）爾考公氏克遷（弼）玟（文）王，肆（肆）玟（文）王受茲〔大令〕。佳（唯）（武）王既克大（天？）邑商，則廷告于天，曰：『余其宅茲中或（國），自之辭（乂）民。[……]』」

What we know from the literary sources is that for the Zhou, the defeat of the Shang people means replacing them in their politico-religious role as mediators between the transcendent realm of the gods and the human world. Thus in actual terms, the establishment of Chengzhou 成周 or Luoyi 洛邑<sup>48</sup> might have been not much more than the fortification of an administrative outpost amid the newly conquered eastern territories, brought under control by the establishment of semi-autonomous regional states ruled by Zhou princes and other allied lineages. However, in terms of the political theology associated with the Mandate of Heaven, the site must be understood to be the replacement of Anyang, or the Great Settlement Shang, as the new centre of the political, *and* cosmological orders that were shared by both the Shang and the Zhou. Especially the Shang cosmological order was central to the worldview of the Zhou, who interpreted their own rise to power within this context. Thus what is termed *dong tu* 東土, or the eastern territories, from a geopolitical perspective becomes *zhong tu* 中土, or the central regions, from a cosmological perspective. The “Shao gao” 召誥 chapter from the *Documents* is perhaps the most important source to corroborate this view:

(9) The [Duke of Shao] spoke: “Alas! August Heaven, Di on High has changed its principal son and the Charge of the Grand Enclosure of Yin. Now your majesty has been entrusted with the Mandate, endless indeed are its blessings, but endless are also the anxieties it bears. [...]

(14) “May your majesty come to assist Di on High, and commit yourself to the centre of the land [in order to comply with Di’s design]. [Zhou Gong] Dan said, ‘ Now that this great settlement has been built, the King shall from here become the counterpart to August Heaven, and reverently sacrifice to [the spirits] above and below; from this central [position] he shall govern. The King will then have accomplished his Charge to govern the *min*.’”

（召公）曰：「[……] 嗚呼！皇天上帝，改厥元子 大國殷之命。惟王受命，無疆惟休，亦無疆惟恤。[……]

王來紹上帝，自服于土中。旦曰：『其作大邑，其自時配皇天，毖祀

48 For the debate on the identity of Chengzhou and Luoyi, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 65–66.

于上下，其自時中乂；王厥有成命治民。』』

In this passage it becomes very clear that the Zhou deemed the region they have chosen to build their eastern capital or settlement in as a civilizational centre from where the king was supposed to match his political order with the cosmological order designed by Heaven or Di. This kind of cosmological symbolization is known from other ancient cultures as well.<sup>49</sup> The new eastern settlement, according to the above sources, was thus not only the place where the Zhou first affiliated with the *min*, but the Zhou King's residence (*zhai* 宅) in the new settlement also marked the beginning of him acting as the counterpart of Heaven, or indeed, as the Son of Heaven (*Tianzi* 天子), emanating the Heavenly order into the four cardinal regions.

Now we can come full circle on the problem of whom or what *min* designates in Western Zhou literary sources. Just as the four cardinal regions define the centre of the perceived world from cosmological and geographical perspectives, so does *min* define the King as universal ruler over an ecumene.<sup>50</sup> From the perspective of the Zhou in their Shaanxi homeland, the populations indicated by *min* were of course peripheral, non-Zhou populations. Yet, as we have seen, the term *min* does not belong into this context. *Min* symbolizes a factor in a political order bound to a cosmological worldview. It is in this capacity that *min* developed into the political term we find in later texts such as the *Zuozhuan* and the Warring States Masters Literature.

One last point has to be made regarding the conceived relation between the Zhou King and the *min*. Eric Voegelin has pointed out that in ancient Middle Eastern cultures, the people occupying the *omphalos* or the civilizational centre, had a special obligation to implement the order they've received from a transcendental authority.<sup>51</sup> This factor plays a role in the conception of Zhou kingship as well, especially in view of the role of the *min*. The idea of the King's responsibility for the *min* is addressed very clearly in

49 Eric Voegelin refers to such cosmologically defined civilizational centres in the ancient Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures by its Greek name *omphalos*. See Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1, *Israel and Revelation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 66–69.

50 Following a definition proposed by Peter Weber-Schäfer, I understand the concept of the ecumene as an ordering symbol which mirrors the attempt to represent the unity of humanity in the institutional medium of universal kingship. See Weber-Schäfer, *Oikumene und Imperium: Studien zur Ziviltheologie des chinesischen Kaiserreichs* (Munich: Peter Lang, 1968), 11–20.

51 Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 68.

the following passage from the “Shao gao” chapter, recording the direct speech of the Duke of Shao as in the above example:

(10) “Now that Heaven pities the *min* within the four cardinal regions, may [your majesty] pay attention to the Mandate and be industrious in its implementation. Your majesty shall be quick to honour his *de*-commitment [towards fulfilling the Mandate]. [...] (22) If the King positions himself at the origin of this *de*-commitment, the lesser *min* will imitate him throughout the *Tianxia*-ecumene, and the King will thus become manifest. Let above and below labour with a mutual sympathy, saying: ‘ We have received the Mandate of Heaven.’”

「天亦哀于四方民，其眷命用懋，王其疾敬德。[.....] 其惟王位在德元，小民乃惟刑用于天下，越王顯。上下勤恤，其曰我受天命。」

In this context we will have to consider the significance of the term *de* 德, which one finds inextricably linked to *min* in many of our sources. In a kinship-based society such as the Western Zhou lineage alliance,<sup>52</sup> political responsibilities were more or less synonymous with kinship responsibilities. Thus, in order to define responsibilities across kinship boundaries within the context of a shared political idea, the Zhou had to devise enhanced concepts of obligation to inform the workings of their socio-political network. This is where I see the import of *de*, which in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions is overtly referred to in statements committing the speaker to the political idea represented by Zhou kingship. My basic understanding of the term follows Donald J. Munro who has suggested that *de* should be defined as a “consistent attitude toward the norms” in Western Zhou sources.<sup>53</sup> Given the contexts in which *de* is used, I further understand that the term not only denotes a “consistent attitude,” but the obligation or commitment towards implementing these “norms.”<sup>54</sup> *De*, in other words,

52 Cf. Zhu Fenghan, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu*, 229–405.

53 See Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 96–112; 185–97. Munro’s suggestion is convincing as far as it takes into consideration the precise context in which *de* is used in Western Zhou sources, namely in statements where social actors articulate their commitment towards the symbolic order represented by Zhou kingship.

54 This point is reflected also by the direct association between the terms *de* and *ming* 命 (charge, mandate) in certain Western Zhou contexts. Cf. Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎, “Tenmei to toku” 天命と徳, *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 (*Journal of Oriental Studies*) 64 (1992): 1–59; and idem., *Kodai Chūgoku tenmei to seidōki* 古代中 天命と青銅器 (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku Gakujutsu Shuppankai, 2006), 201–26.

describes the King's commitment to apply the ideal order envisioned in terms of Zhou kingship to the socio-political realities and, by doing so, attract other socio-political actors to contribute to and comply with this order. It is indeed the message, for instance, of the “Zi zai” 梓材 chapter from the *Documents*:

(5) Now your majesty should say: “The former kings toiled hard to make their *de*-commitment bright in order to attract [the many *bang* polities and principedoms] to join them in alliance. Thus the many *bang* polities began to send offerings and the principedoms came [to pay their respect]. [Therefore your majesty] should also make bright your *de*-commitment so the regional rulers will congregate and the many *bang* polities will respectfully bring offerings. (6) Now that August Heaven has committed<sup>55</sup> the *min* and the territories of the central region to the former Kings, (7) your majesty should devote yourself to your *de*-commitment, aligning the deluded *min* and rendering them to comply in fulfilling the charge that the former Kings received.”

今王惟曰：「先王既勤用明德，懷為夾；庶邦享作，兄弟方來。亦既用明德，后式典集，庶邦丕享。皇天既付中國民越厥疆土于先王，肆王惟德用，和懌先後迷民，用懌先王受命。」

It is the King's obligation to render the *min* compliant so they would follow the Heavenly order, a task which can only be achieved if the King acts as a model in committing himself to the implementation of the Heavenly Charge.

Based on what we have worked out so far, I would like to apply my own understanding of *min*, using one last example, on the interpretation of a rather difficult passage from the Western Zhou Ban *gui* 班簋 inscription (*Jicheng* 4341). Here, the usage of *min* is somewhat unusual, as the text refers to the term in the context of a military conflict. The vessel donor recounts his father, Elder Mao (Mao bo 毛伯), being charged by the King with a military campaign against foreign tribes residing not in the nearer, defined eastern polities, but rather in the eastern enclosures (*dong guo* 東國):

55 Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166) reads *fu* 付 as *fu* 附 (to attach), see Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, *Shangshu jin gu wen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 389. Chū Wan-li reads *fu* as *yu* 與 (to give). See his, *Shijing quanshi*, 170. Based on these two interpretations I understand the term in the sense of “to entrust,” or “to commit.” Compare also the similar expression “(34) August Heaven [...] entrusted the four cardinal regions (to King Wen and King Wu)” 「皇天 [.....] 付畀四方」, transmitted in the “Gu ming” 顧命 chapter (“Kang Wang zhi gao” 康王之誥 in the corrupted *Ancient Text Documents* [*Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書]).

It was in the eighth month, beginning auspiciousness, [when the King] was at Ancestral Zhou. On *jia-xu* day, the King ordered Elder Mao to succeed Duke Cheng of Guo in office, to protect the King's position and make him the standard for the four cardinal regions. (Mao) received the order to handle the affairs of the polities of Fan, Shu and Chao. The King bestowed on him a harness hung with bells. When this had been completed, the King charged the Duke of Mao to lead the rulers of the *bang* polities, the charioteers, halberdiers and the *X-ren*<sup>56</sup> to attack the *X-rong* tribe in the eastern enclosures. [...]

Within three years the eastern enclosures were pacified. There were none who did not submit to the awe of Heaven.<sup>57</sup> [...]

Duke [Mao] reported the affair to the King: "Alas, the *min* are not established.<sup>58</sup> They have been blind to the charge of Heaven all this time, and thus have no trust [in the King's rule]. If the manifest [King] honours his *de* (i.e. his commitment towards the Heavenly Mandate), there will be no opposition."

佳（唯）八月初吉才（在）宗周，甲戌，王令毛白（伯）更虢（城）公服，鬻（屏）王立（位），乍（作）四方亟（極）。秉、蜀、巢令，易（賜）鈴鑿（勒）。咸，王令毛公呂（以）邦冢君、士（徒）馭、戰人伐東或（國）戎。[.....]

三年靜東或（國），亡不咸懾天畏（威）。[.....]

公告畢（厥）事于上：「佳（唯）民亡徼（造）才（哉）。彝恣（哇）天令，故亡允才（哉）。顯佳（唯）苟（敬）德，亡適（攸）違。[.....]」

The description of the campaign against the non-compliant populations or tribes within the nominal Zhou territories in the east is not very difficult to understand. The question, however, is how to read the following announcement of the Duke. Thomas Crone, for instance, believes the passage comments

56 Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966) reads 戰人 as commoners (*shuren* 庶人) or some kind of foot-soldiers (*tu* 徒) by referring to the expression “戰徒四千” found in the Eastern Zhou Shu Shi *bo* 叔尸鑄 inscription. See Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* 西周銅器斷代 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 26.

57 The transcription and interpretation of this passage follows closely to Chen (2004), 25–26.

58 Chen Jian 陳劍 suggests that *zao* 造 is used here in a similar manner as in the Mao ode “Si Zhai” 思齊 (Mao 240): “Thus if grown men have *de*, young people could have accomplishments” (肆成人有德，小子有造), see Chen Jian, “Shi ‘zao’” 釋造 in idem., *Jiagu jinwen kaoshi lunji* 甲骨金文考釋論集 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2007), 175. Interestingly, this line reads like a complementary statement to the one in the Ban *gui*.

on the military success of the campaign with *min* collectively denoting the rebellious populations mentioned earlier in the text:

The *min* were blind and foolish! They ignored the orders of Heaven and thus had to perish. Ah, what brilliance! Now they respect the *de* and no one resists.<sup>59</sup>

Although such an interpretation might be valid well within the possibilities of the textual material, it goes against both the usage of *min* and of *de* in Western Zhou sources. The *min* are never subject to military defeat and the term *jing de* 敬德 always refers to the actions of the king or his allied elites. Therefore, I suggest the statement in question should instead be understood as a commentary on, or an interpretation of the actual situation. Although the campaign has been successful, the very fact that these populations revolted, according to the Zhou political theory, points to a lack in the King's ability to make these populations aware of the Heavenly Mandate. Thus, the Duke's announcement can be understood as a remonstrance that juxtaposes a political idea to an actual situation. It is because of this discursive shift from a report on actual events to a theoretical statement couched in politico-religious rhetoric that these populations are mentioned by name in the former context and are indirectly referred to as *min*, in its abstract sense, in the latter.

Interesting in this respect is Léon Vandermeersch's reconsideration of Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 (1892–1978) famous interpretation of the archaic graph 矇 as an eye blinded by a pointy object. Yet contrary to Guo, who understood the image of physical blinding as a form of corporal punishment, Vandermeersch states that:

Blindness, in the sense it occurs in ancient literatures, denotes a moral blindness, never a physical condition.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, it is the King who has insight into the Heavenly design of order. It lies in his responsibility to attract and integrate those who lack the means of perceiving the Heavenly design into his socio-political order.

<sup>59</sup> Crone (2014), 40. The translation from the German is my own.

<sup>60</sup> Vandermeersch, *Wangdao ou La voie royale*, 2: 156.

## 4. Conclusion

As shown in the preceding pages, the term *min*, as it appears in Western Zhou sources, belongs to a set of symbols referring to an ideal political order envisioned in the idea of Zhou kinship. Where *min* is used to refer to actual populations, it does so by contextualizing the latter within this political idea. In other words, *min*, from its earliest appearances in Western Zhou sources, should be understood as an abstract term owing its existence to the need to express politico-religious perceptions, providing meaning to the institution of early Chinese Kingship.

What has been left unanswered in this article is the question how the Zhou perceived of their relation to the *min* in terms of extended kinship ties, hinted at in later texts by the phrase *min zhi fumu* 民之父母, “father and mother of the min.” This topic, which necessitates further analysis of texts from the Odes and the X Gong *xu* inscription, is part of my forthcoming PhD dissertation.

# 試論「民」字在西周思想體系中的政治意涵

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本文將探究西周文獻中「民」一字的政治涵義。筆者認為「民」字最初主要不是指稱實在的民眾，查考今文《尚書》與青銅器銘文中，「民」字所指的反而是一種抽象的政治概念，即「王業」。鑑於天子「受命於天」，治理「四方民」也就成了周王的責任。在這個脈絡下「民」成了一種因素或立場，讓周朝統治者藉以構想四裔之民與周王的理想政治關係。本文將以此為出發點，通過《尚書》和西周金文等文獻，探討「民」字對在西周王權的概念中所扮演的角色，以及與「四方」、「天命」等王權象徵的關聯。

關鍵詞：民 王業 四方 天命 金文 《尚書》

