



Astrology and Cosmology in Early China

By David W. Pankenier



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The ancient Chinese were profoundly influenced by the Sun, Moon and stars, making persistent efforts to mirror astral phenomena in shaping their civilization. In this pioneering text, David W. Pankenier introduces readers to a seriously understudied field, illustrating how astronomy shaped the culture of China from the very beginning and how it influenced areas as disparate as art, architecture, calendrical science, myth, technology, and political and military decision-making. As elsewhere in the ancient world, there was no positive distinction between astronomy and astrology in ancient China, and so astrology, or more precisely, astral omenology, is a principal focus of the book. Drawing on a broad range of sources, including archaeological discoveries, classical texts, inscriptions and paleography, this thought-provoking book documents the role of astronomical phenomena in the development of the 'Celestial Empire' from the late Neolithic through the late imperial period.

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Editorial Review

Review

'David Pankenier's examination of traditional cosmology and astrology in China is the authoritative work in the area. It draws on the latest evidence and most recent scholarship to make a compelling case for the central role of the sky in Chinese religion, philosophy, political thought and social organisation. This book makes a significant contribution both to our understanding of Chinese history and culture, and to the wider history of ideas.' Nicholas Campion, Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

'Professor Pankenier has made many important discoveries about the sky in Early China ... This is a series of admirably ingenious probes into not only the darkness of the sky above, but also that of the ancient mind. Hardly any other book has disclosed nearly as many secrets about early human history as does [this] volume, which the specialists will find deeply educating, even entertaining, and everyone else will find exciting.' Li Feng, Columbia University, New York

'Astrology and Cosmology in Early China is a unique and profoundly learned contribution to early Chinese intellectual history, religion, and science - nothing like it exists in any Western language. The comprehensive sum of the author's deep research over three decades, the book offers a magisterial cultural history of what the astral order meant to the ancient Chinese, how they explored it, and how they interpreted it in political and religious terms. With his broad comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives, authoritative command of the ancient sources, and bold and imaginative interpretations, Pankenier has given us a true intellectual thrill, and one of far-reaching consequences for an entire range of fields both within and beyond the study of China.' Martin Kern, Princeton University, New Jersey

'Using an enormous wealth of archaeological discoveries, inscriptions, linguistic evidence, religious rites and historical sources, the author has succeeded in recovering ancient Chinese astronomical concepts and practices of paramount importance for our understanding of the formation of the Chinese civilization. A brilliant achievement!' Göran Malmqvist, Professor Emeritus, Stockholm University, and Member, Swedish Academy

'A tremendously exciting book that powerfully demonstrates the extraordinary importance of astronomy in early China. David Pankenier argues that significant aspects of early Chinese civilization - including highly influential notions such as the Mandate of Heaven - were based upon astronomical views. The work also helps to bring early Chinese astronomy into the larger comparative study of archaeoastronomy.' Michael Puett, Harvard University, Massachusetts

'Professor David Pankenier is a renowned sinologist who is very well known to Chinese academics. For many years his research has focused on texts and artifacts connected with ancient Chinese astronomy, yielding outstanding achievements and many profound insights ... From Pankenier's book the reader can acquire a full appreciation of the special characteristics of ancient Chinese ways of thinking. He ingeniously combines in-depth analysis, discussion, and interpretation of ancient astronomy, in particular the nature and significance of astrology, to explore and integrate intellectual history and astronomy with political and military history, research from which scholars of many disciplines will derive benefit.' Li Xueqin, Director, Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, and Director, Institute of Sinology, Tsinghua University

About the Author

David W. Pankenier is Professor of Chinese at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania. His current research interests range from the history of ideas in early China, to archaeoastronomy and cultural astronomy. He is particularly interested in the connection between rare astronomical phenomena and epoch-making political and military events in ancient China.

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