

METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

ORACLE BONE DIVINATION

(East 1504 / 4504)

unit 1

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

- Anthropological approach
- Sociological approach
- Comparative studies

Anthropological approach

Clifford Geertz (“Religion as a Cultural System”, 1966): religion as

“symbolical system which establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”

Anthropological approach

- Symbol
- Symbolic system
- Powerful and pervasive moods and motivations
- Concept of a general order of existence
- Aura of factuality
- Realistic appearance of the moods and motivations

Symbol

- tangible formulation of an abstract concept (Cross, star, etc.)
- Symbol “ties up” some physical objects with the metaphysical meanings

Symbolic system



- Good example is the Tibetan mandala

Powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations

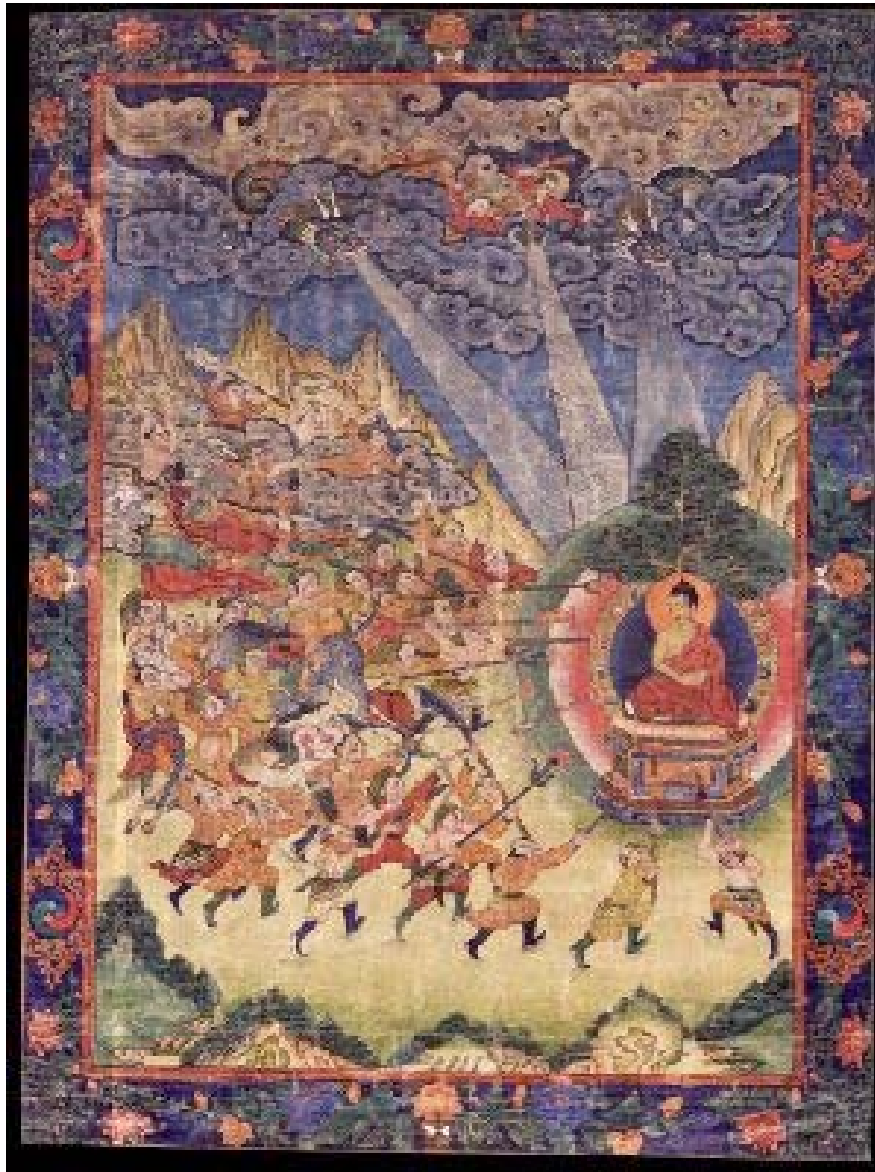
- Feeling of "duty"
- Passion and perseverance in religious practice
- Systematization of human activities
- Emotional states which are evoked (e.g. reverence, solemnity, mystical union, calmness)

Confucius' relationship to his disciples as inspiration for the manner of conduct



Concepts of general order of existence

- Emotional / psychological states connected to religious practice are placed into a cosmic framework, question after "meaning"
- Religion as ordering force
- Religion as system for the interpretation of phenomena, including incomprehensible situations such as death, dreams, etc.
- Explanations for the problem of human suffering, the problem of evil, etc.



Shakyamuni Buddha in meditation, tempted by demons, which symbolize suffering and ignorance.

Buddha envisions a general order by which suffering can be overcome by religious practice

19th cent. painting

Aura of factuality

- Implication of an ultimate authority
- *Believe* is paramount
- Believe is reinforced through *ritual*
- Imagined world of the belief becomes alive and actual through ritual
- Ritual as experience of religious transformation (e.g. a shaman *becomes* the spirit)



Circumbulation around a pagoda in Korea



Performing the 108 bows
required by ritual in a Korean
Buddhist center

Realistic appearance of the moods and motivations

- participation in the rituals – does change the everyday/profane life of an individual radically: he/she is literally “born again”. For a religious person, the existence of spiritual/supernatural creatures is as real as his own. Idea of *sacrifice* (personal/collective) – proof of the reality of religious belief.
- Summary: **religion as a template**: it interprets and shapes the world simultaneously. But, besides its main overall function, it can have various sub-functions: social, political, etc. Also, process of inducement of moods and motivations by the symbolic system (religion) is *social*: religion implies also a social organization/institute, with hierarchical relationship of authority/subjugation. Religious organization as a prototype for state.

Sociological approach

- Emile Durkheim ("The elementary Forms of Religious lives"), "reductionist" approach: religion is being reduced to a function of regulation of the collective life; functionalist explanation of rituals.
- Karl Marx (religion as "tool of class oppression")
- Sigmund Freud (religion as "neurotic state of mind")
- Max Weber (1864-1920) "Sociology of the World Religions"
- Peter Berger ("The Social Reality of Religion", 1973), bifurcation of religion into "high-religion" (ruling class) and "popular religion" (dominated class)

Comparative approach

Mircea Eliade

- "Cosmos and History" (1959)
- "The Sacred and the Profane" (1959)
- "Myths, Dreams and Mysteries" (1960)
- "Images and Symbols" (1969)
- "Myths and Reality" (1963)

Popularity of symbols

- Depth psychology, psychoanalysis
- Abstract art, Surrealism
- Research into "primitive" societies (e.g. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl "Les Carnets", 1946)
- Research by philosophers, epistemologists, linguists into the symbolic character of language, function of myth for the human mind

Historian of religion

- Focuses on religious symbols which reflect religious experience and conception
- Empirical method through focus on the religio-historical facts
- Takes account of phenomenology and philosophy of religion (e.g. ontological, epistemological, soteriological systems)
- All formulation of religious experience is embedded in a historical context (a good example is Zen Buddhism !)
- Religious expressions become historical documents (e.g. scriptures, art, material culture, social and economic phenomena)

- Theology focuses often on monotheistic religions only
- Historian of religion tries to become familiar with many forms of religion; tries to integrate results from other specialists (e.g. sociologists, philologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians,...) into his research; tries to abstract the *structures* which underlie practices / rituals / symbols

- The approach in this class will be comparative, and we will try to analyze religious phenomena in their social and political context
- Emphasis will be given to the interaction and mutual influences between religious and philosophical systems, the changes which occur when one religion is transmitted to another cultural context (e.g. the introduction of Buddhism to China, its assimilation, the development of the "Sinitic" schools of Buddhism)

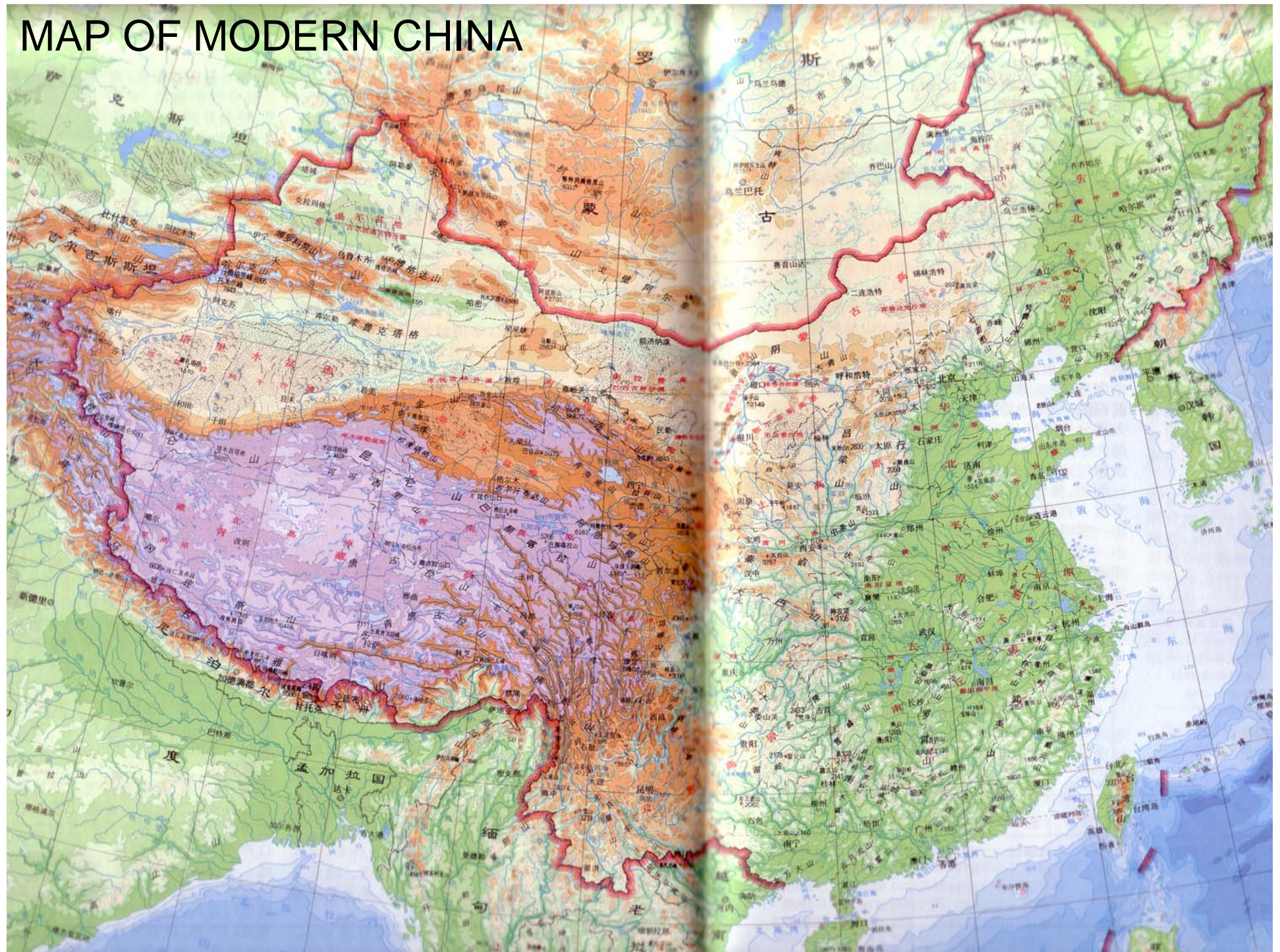
TOPICS

- Ancestor worship / oracle divination
- Confucian tradition
- Reactions and alternatives to Confucian doctrines: Mohism, Legalism
- Han syncretism and the formation of a state ideology
- Daoism - sophisticated philosophical system and popular religion
- The introduction of Buddhism into China and the formation of early Chinese Buddhist Schools

TOPICS (cont.)

- The sinification of Buddhism during the Tang period
- Pure Land traditions in East Asia
- Chan / Zen / Son traditions in East Asia
- Confucianism's reaction to Buddhism: Neo-Confucianism
- Western thought in China
- The formation of nationalist ideologies in Asia
- New religions in Asia

MAP OF MODERN CHINA





The State of Zhou
as cultural nucleus
of China

Through interaction
with surrounding states
Zhou culture spread to
other parts of China

Zhou 周 dynasty 11th cent. - 221 BC

Western Zhou 11th cent. - 770 BC

Eastern Zhou 770 - 221 BC

Spring and Autumn period 722 - 481 BC

Warring States period 403 - 221 BC

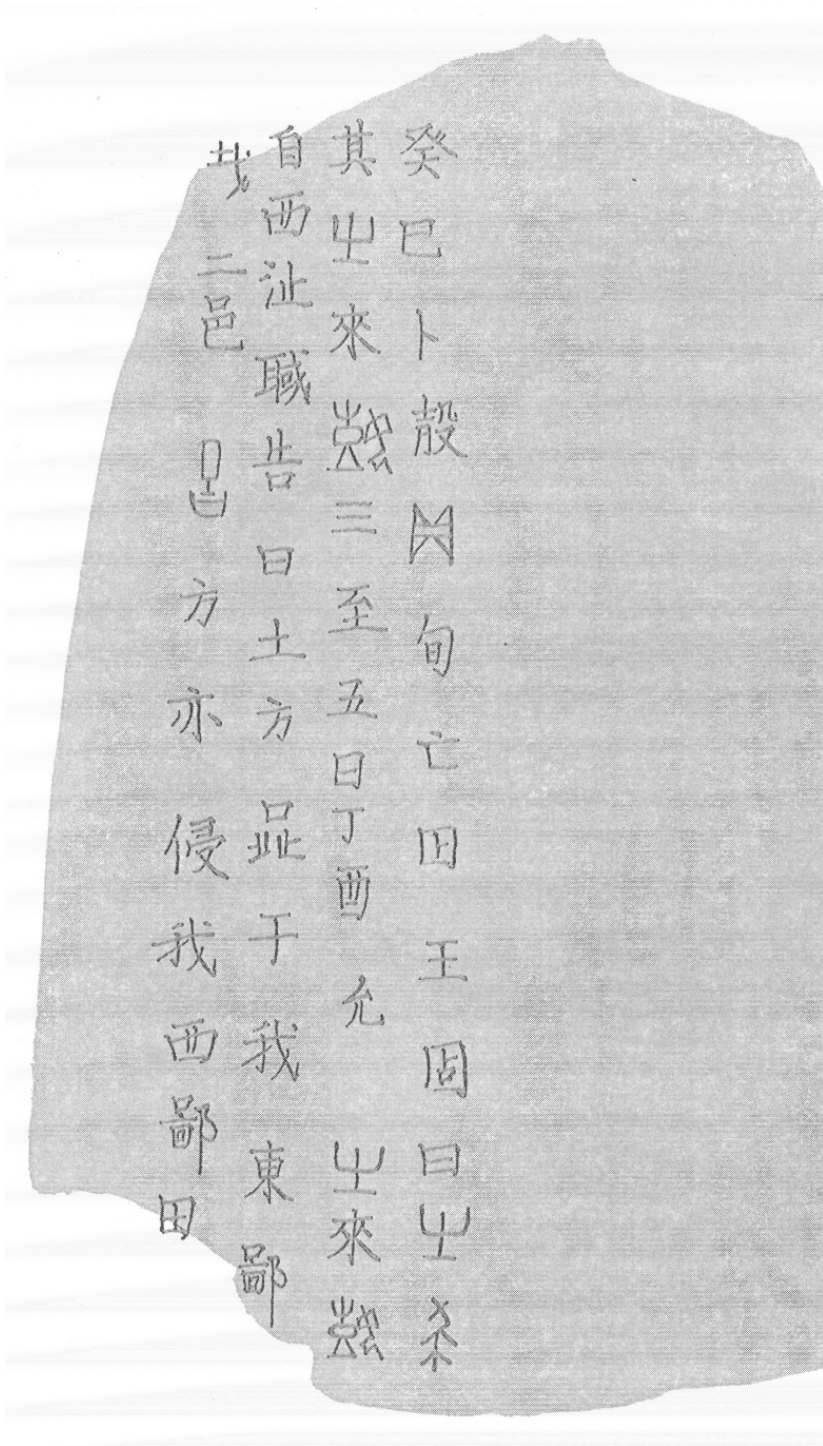
ANCESTOR WORSHIP

- Rituals related to Oracle Bone prophecies and the casting of ceremonial vessels is closely related to ancestor worship. The Shang king functioned also as high-priest, assisted by other priests / ritual specialists / shamans / scribes. The offerings were directed to a certain ancestor (who maybe was angry and caused trouble for the living!) or to the "Supreme Ancestor" or "God on High", (shang)di 上帝



Oracle Bone Inscriptions (OBI)





癸巳卜 殷 旬亡田 王固曰 出 來 爨
其中來 爨 三至五日 丁酉 允 出 來 爨
自西 沚 職 告曰 土方 屺于我 東 鄙
我 二邑 邑 方 亦 侵我 西 鄙 田

Topics in the OBI inscriptions:

- There are ca. 150,000 oracle-bone remains, many of them dating from the period of Wu Ding (1200 - 1181 BC)
- Topics include for example sacrifices, military campaigns, agriculture (harvest), childbirth, natural disasters (e.g. rain), toothache, settlements, hunting expeditions

Bronze inscriptions (BI)

BI have their origin during the Shang but were especially characteristic for the early Zhou dynasty

Many different kinds of vessels, e.g.:

taotie 饕餮 vessel with tiger (?) motive

gui 簋

you 缶 kind of bucket

zun 尊 kind of vase

ding 鼎 vessel

zhong 鐘 bells

Topics include the offerings by the Zhou king, vessels were cast on the occasion of tribute payments from dependent states, special historical events, etc. The vessel inscriptions often include time and place, proper names, and occasion.

taotie

號食
殄食



Inscription on a *zun* vessel

- "It was when the king first moved (his) residence to Chengzhou and again received King Wu's abundant blessings from heaven. In the fourth month, *bingxu* (day 23), the king addressed the ancestral young princes in the Capital Chamber, saying: Formerly, with your deceased-fathers, the elders were capable of assisting King Wen. And so King Wen received this great mandate. It was after King Wu conquered the great city Shang, then (he) respectfully reported to Heaven, saying: 'I shall inhabit this central state (and) from it govern the people.' *Wuhu!* Although you are but young princes without experience, look upon the elders' merit with respect to Heaven, and carry out the commands and reverently make offerings! Help the king make firm his virtue so that Heaven may look favorably upon our indolence. The king completed his address. He was awarded cowries, thirty strands, and herewith makes for Duke Mo (this) treasured sacrificial vessel. It is the king's fifth ritual cycle." [*He* vessel (*zun*), tr. in Edward Shaughnessy: *Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions*. Shaughnessy 1997: 58-84]

Bronze inscriptions during the Eastern Zhou

- "Thus it would seem that during the Eastern Zhou few felt particularly compelled to explain the reasons for casting a bronze; they now simply did so at will and apparently no longer viewed casting as an especially sacred act. This trend may have resulted from wider availability of metals as time went by, which in turn rendered the casting of bronzes more commonplace." [Gilbert L. Mattos: *Eastern Zhou Bronze Inscriptions*. Shaughnessy 1997: 88]
- From 770 onwards, with the decline of the Zhou central power, ancestor worships lost some of its influence; many vessels were also cast in other states often became a symbol of power rather than a symbol for the connection with the ancestors. However, the role of the ancestors continued to play an important role and were crucial for the development of Confucian doctrines (the relationship to the ancestor became a model for other hierarchically organized relationships, e.g. Ruler - subject, elder brother - younger brother, father - son)