**Shared Reading Shang Religion**

Shang religion was incredibly important, and it extended into the **politica**l and **economic** parts of ancient life. The Shang religion and state power were closely connected. Also, by the end of the Shang dynasty, the king was the only one who could **interpret** the **oracle bones**, thereby making him the **head shaman**.

The Shang religion had two parts: a combination of **animism**, the idea that everything has a soul and  **shamanism**, the belief in shamans who have the ability to communicate with the spiritual world. This included **ancestor worship**. Different gods represented **natural** and **mythologica**l symbols, such as the moon, the sun, the wind, the rain, the dragon, and the phoenix. **Peasants** prayed to these gods for **bountiful harvests**. Festivals to celebrate gods were also common.

In particular, the **Shang kings**, who considered themselves **divine** rulers, consulted the great god Shangdi—the **Supreme Being** who ruled over **humanity and nature—for advice and wisdom**. The Shang believed that the ancestors could also bring good fortune; the Shang would consult ancestors through oracle bones in order to seek approval for any major decision, and to learn about future success in harvesting, hunting, or battle.

It appears that there was belief in the afterlife during the Shang dynasty. Archaeologists have found Shang tombs surrounded by the skulls and bodies of human sacrifices. Some of these contain **jade**, which was thought to protect against decay and grant immortality. Archaeologists believe that Shang tombs were very similar to those found in the Egyptian pyramids in that they buried servants with them. Chinese archaeologists believe that the Shang, like the ancient Egyptians, believed their servants would continue to serve them in the afterlife. Because of this belief, aristocrats' servants would be killed and buried with them when they died.

One elaborate tomb which has been unearthed was that of Lady Hao, a consort of a Shang king who reigned around 1200 BCE. The artefacts found in her tomb indicate that she had a high social status and a great deal of power in Shang society, which makes historians **speculate** about the role of women in the Shang dynasty. Based on the artefacts found in Lady Hao’s tomb, it seems that she had her own wealth and political influence, and it is possible that she also had a prominent role in the military, as many bronze weapons were found buried with her.