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A New Model in the Study of Chinese Mythology

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Abstract

Chinese mythology [*shenhua* 神話] does not exist independently as a cultural medium like mythology does in the West but, rather, comprises ideological and narrative forms that emerge according to historical and cultural trends. Not only have myths withstood humanity's conquest of nature, but they have drawn and continue to draw on the mysteries of scientific development for new content. It is possible to identify three highpoints of creativity in the history of Chinese mythology, each corresponding to shifts in the function and nuance of myths. The first highpoint occurred very early on in China's ancient history, in the period of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors [*wudi sanwang* 五帝三王], when myths were a way to articulate history—that is, history as myth. The second highpoint occurred in the period from the Qin through Jin dynasties, when mythology mainly expounded on philosophy and theory—that is, philosophy as myth. The third highpoint occurred during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, when the narrative content of mythology turned toward the religious—that is, religion as myth.

Keywords

ancient Chinese history – *The Classic of the Mountains and Seas* – myth – mythology

Mythology is a Western concept. The study of Chinese mythology dates back only to the broad dissemination of Western learning in early twentieth century China and, for most of the past century, has employed concepts, theories, classifications, and research methods developed by Western scholars. Few studies attempt to build a theoretical framework of Chinese myths that stems from a native understanding. The strong influence of Western perspectives has led

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the majority of Chinese humanities scholars to approach Chinese mythology as a cultural product of ancient times. Mao Dun 茅盾 [pseud., Shen Dehong, 1896-1981], one of the founding fathers of the study of Chinese mythology, once defined mythology as "a popular story form in folk cultures of Chinese antiquity."[1] Lin Huixiang 林惠祥 [1901-1958], a seminal figure in the study of Chinese humanities, also believed that "mythology is an expression of primitive psychology."[2] Educational materials on the history of Chinese culture published in the past half-century all subscribe to Marx's idea that "[mythology] disappears . . . when real control over [natural] forces is established."[3] These tendencies have all treated mythology as a literature of distant ancestors and ancient times to be relegated to dusty tomes and primitive fantasy.

According to this dominant trend, the canon of Chinese mythology consists only of myths found in Han dynasty [202 BCE-220] sources, such as "Nüwa Mends the Sky [Nüwa butian 女媧補天]," "Nüwa Creates Mankind [Nüwa zaoren 女媧造人]," "Hou Yi Shoots down the Sun [Hou Yi sheri 后羿射日," "Gong Gong Destroys Mount Buzhou [Gong Gong chushan 共工觸山]," and "Pan Gu Creates Heaven and Earth [Pan Gu kaitian 盤古開天]." Myths that emerged after the Han dynasty, such as those in *In Search of the Supernatural* [*Sou shen ji* 搜神記] or *Investiture of the Gods* [*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義]—whose titles even include the character 神 [*shen*, spirits, deities] as in 神話 [*shenhua*, myth]—have been retroactively called *zhiguai* 志怪 [tales of the supernatural] and *shenmo* 神魔 [gods and demons fiction], thus erasing their status as myths. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the large volume of myths emerging in film and television programs featuring visitors from outer space, intergalactic warfare, premodern people traveling to the present, or modern people paying visits to the past are called "science fiction" and "time travel" [*chuanyue* 穿越] fiction. If one were to ask why these stories that are indistinguishable from myth are not referred to as such, the inevitable response would be that they were not produced in ancient times.

In 2008, during the Creation Myths International Conference on Comparative Studies held in Beijing, a scholar lamented how unfortunate it is that the practice of archiving creation myths in China did not begin earlier. What this

1 Mao Dun 茅盾, *Shenhua yanjiu* 神話研究 [*Research on Mythology*] (Tianjin: Baihua Literary Arts Publishing House, 1981), 3.

2 Lin Huixiang 林惠祥, *Wenhua renleixue* 文化人類學 [*Cultural Anthropology*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Literary Arts Publishing House, 1996), 267.

3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Makesi Engesi Xuanji* 馬克思恩格斯選集 [*Selected Works of Marx and Engels*] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1995), 29.

point fails to see, however, is that such a critique essentially uses Western concepts and methodological standards to label our ancestors' actions as "unorthodox." What we should do is shed these Western frameworks and, instead, rethink the very theoretical questions we pose about Chinese mythology by starting with the myths themselves.

Yuan Ke 袁珂 [1916-2001], a scholar who devoted his life to the study of Chinese mythology, over the course of his career gradually noticed the limiting effects of Western theory. In 1982, he began to espouse the idea of "broadening the sense of myth."[4] He believed that "just as old myths exist to this day, so, too, do new myths emerge from this moment."[5] Many of these ideas can be found in his seminal work, *History of Chinese Mythology* [*Zhongguo shenhua shi* 中國神話史]. It is a great misfortune that his work and ideas have been either overlooked by scholars or marginalized because of the position they take vis-à-vis Western theory.

This paper argues that Chinese mythology does not exist independently as a cultural form but, rather, comprises ideological and narrative forms that emerge according to historical and cultural trends. It defines Chinese myths as a form of expressive art that centers thinking on the unknown and explaining it, including works referred to more widely in other categories, such as *zhiguai, shenmo*, sci-fi, and time travel. To find proof that myths continue to be generated even in our high-tech world, one needs to look no further than the television programs produced today. Although they experience rises and falls throughout history, myths will never cease to exist completely. In China, mythology has peaked and redefined itself at three distinct points in history: the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors Period [ca. twenty-ninth-twenty-first c. BCE], the Qin through Jin dynasties [221 BCE-420], and the Yuan and Ming dynasties [1279-1644]. These three periods, in turn, each represent a shift in the context and content of myth creation.

4 See Yuan Ke 袁珂, "Cong xiayi de shenhua dao guangyi de shenhua 從狹義的神話到廣義的神話 [From a Narrow Definition of Myth to a Broader Definition of Myth]," *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 [*Social Science Front*], 2 (1982); "Zai lun guangyi shenhua 再論廣義神話 [Revisiting the Topic on Broadening the Sense of Myth]," *Minjian wenxue luntan* 民間文學論壇 [*Tribune of Folk Literature*], 3 (1984).

5 Yuan Ke, "Xu yan 序言 [Preface]," in *Zhongguo shenhua shi* 中國神話史 [*History of Chinese Mythology*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Literary Arts Publishing House, 1988), 2.

History as Myth during the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors Period

The first highpoint in Chinese mythology occurred during the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors period, which was also the height of religious authority and mysticism. This period receives the most attention from scholars of Chinese mythology because its myths most closely resemble what is understood as mythology in the West. Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors mythology is the subject of the chapter "Pre-Qin Myths [Shanggu shenhua 上古神話]," collected in *History of Chinese Literature* [*Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史], a volume edited by the preeminent scholar Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈.[6] In what follows, I discuss the characteristics and functions of the mythology of this period.

Current scholars of Chinese mythology agree with those in the Doubting Antiquity School [*Yi gu pai* 疑古派] of the early twentieth century that pre-Qin history is mythical history. According to them, the Five Emperors are fictional beings and the flood-taming folk hero Yu the Great [Da Yu 大禹] is the incarnation of a bug. The basis of these claims is theory and practice employed in the study of Western mythology. Unlike in China, the history of ancient mythology studies in the West is characterized by a dearth of historical sources. Subsequently, with no way to distinguish between historical and mythological materials of the same period, Western scholars had no choice but to rely on logic to formulate, classify, analyze, and explain myths. Their assessments depended more on this logical process than on material evidence. In China, by contrast, the great volume of historical sources and their continual discovery through archeological digging, have allowed researchers to approach mythology using multiple analytical lenses. Recent reflections on the current state of research reveal that, contrary to long-held notions influenced by Western mythology studies, it is not so much that pre-Qing history is mythical but, rather, that history was expressed through myth. At a time when the official records of history were not widely kept, mythology took on the function of passing down history. The historian Xu Xusheng 徐旭生 [1888-1976] once said, "Ancient legends all carry aspects of history or are, at heart, historical; they most certainly do not exist without basis."[7]

It is possible to explore the idea of "history as myth" in early China by taking a closer look at the story "Kua Fu Chases the Sun [Kua Fu zhuiri 夸父追日]."

6 Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, ed., *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 [*History of Chinese Literature*], 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Literary Arts Publishing House, 1988).

7 Xu Xusheng 徐旭生, *Zhongguo gushi de chuanshuo shidai* 中國古史的傳說時代 [*The Age of Legend in Ancient Chinese History*] (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2003), 24.

It is thus recorded in the "Classic of the Great Wilderness: North [Dahuangbei jing 大荒北經]," in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaijing* 山海經]:

> In the middle of the Great Wilderness, there is a mountain. Its name is Mount Success city-carries-the-sky. There is someone on this mountain. His ear ornaments are two yellow snakes, and he is holding two yellow snakes. His name is Kua Fu. Sovereign Earth [Hou Tu] gave birth to Faith [Xin]. Faith gave birth to Kua Fu. Kua Fu's strength knew no bounds. He longed to race against the light of the sun. He caught up with it at Ape Valley. He scooped some water from the great river to drink, but it wasn't enough. He ran toward Big Marsh, but just before he reached it, he died here by this mountain. Ying Long had already killed Chi You, and now he also killed Kua Fu. Then Ying Long left for the southern region and settled there. That is why there is so much rain in the southern region.[8]

This story is alternatively recounted in the "Classic of Regions Beyond the Seas: North [Hai wai bei jing 海外北經]," in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*:

> Kua Fu raced with the sun and ran with the setting sun. He became so parched that he longed to drink, and he drank from the Great River and the River Rapids. But the Great River and the River Rapids were not enough, so Kua Fu went north to drink from Big Marsh. Before he reached it, he fell parched on the way and died. He abandoned his stick there, and it changed into Climbton Forest.[9]

The tale of Kua Fu is a classic myth. The nature of Kua Fu's actions, whether his great ambition of chasing the sun or his superhuman ability to drink entire rivers dry, is far removed from reality. When analyzed from a historical perspective, however, the story reveals three key pieces of historical information.

The first of these is Kua Fu's identity. The character 夸 [*kua*] has been found on oracle-bone inscriptions containing the names of states as well as in markings on bronze drinking vessels and dagger-axes. It follows that Kua can be taken as a clan name. *Fu* 父 is glossed in the *Shuowen jiezi* [說文解字] as

8 Yuan Ke, *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 [*Notes and Commentary on the* Classic of Mountains and Seas] (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1980), 427; Anne Birrell, ed. and trans., *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (London: Penguin, 1999), 185-186.

9 Yuan, *Shanhaijing jiaozhu*, 238; Birrell, *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, 123.

"a family elder who is also a leader and disciplinarian,"[10] which can be understood simply to refer to the head of a clan. This reading of the characters in Kua Fu's name is supported as well by a detail in the myth that describes him having wielded a stick or staff. In primeval times, staffs signified power and would be used only by someone who was a leader. In short, Kua Fu's name refers to his position as the head of the Kua clan. The sentences "Sovereign Earth gave birth to Faith. Faith gave birth to Kua Fu" tell us that Kua Fu's clan was a branch of the Hou Tu clan, which, according to passages found elsewhere in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, is descended from the Flame Emperor [Yan Di 炎帝]. From this, we know that Kua Fu is descended from the same clan as Yan Di.

Second, this tale reports on the battle between the Yellow Emperor [Huang Di 黃帝] and Chi You 蚩尤. The passages from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* reveal that Kua Fu failed in his rebellion against the Yellow Emperor. The sentence "Ying Long had already killed Chi You, and now he also killed Kua Fu," tells us that Kua Fu, along with Chi You, was a hero who opposed the Yellow Emperor and was killed by a member of the Yellow Emperor's faction. In legends passed down in the Miao tribe, Chi You is said to have had a general named Kua Fo 夸佛, who is likely the same person as Kua Fu. According to Miao lore, after Chi You was defeated and killed by the Yellow Emperor, it was his general Kua Fo who led the Miao people south. Kua Fu was shot to death by the Yellow Emperor's general, Ying Long, during this journey. Valiant men were selected from among those who accompanied Kua Fo to release the souls of the dead from purgatory and sing songs in praise of Chi You's and Kua Fo's accomplishments.[11] Miao lore, whose origins reach beyond antiquity, give us insights into the great war between the Flame Emperor and the Yellow Emperor. Their accounts are consistent with those recorded in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*.

Finally, the story of Kua Fu recounts the worsening of weather conditions in pre-Qin China. The sentence "he drank from the Great River and the River Rapids, but the Great River and the River Rapids were not enough" can be seen as a mythical way of referring to a historical event in which the Yellow and Wei Rivers nearly dried up because of a great drought. In sources that touch on the reign of the Yellow Emperor, a few weather-related accounts bear mentioning in this context. The first is in the chapter "Letting Be and Exercising Forbearance [Zai you 在宥]" in the *Zhuangzi*:

10 Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 [*Commentary on the* Shuowen jiezi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1963), 64.

11 Pan Dingheng 潘定衡 and Yang Chaowen 楊朝文, *Chiyou de chuanshuo* 蚩尤的傳說 [*The Legend of Chiyou*] (Guiyang: Guizhou Minzu Publishing House, 1989), 99.

> Huang-Di [the Yellow Emperor] had been on the throne for nineteen years, and his ordinances were in operation all through the kingdom, when he heard that Guang Chengzi was living on the summit of Kong-tong, and went to see him. "I have heard," he said, "that you, Sir, are well acquainted with the perfect Dao. I venture to ask you what is the essential thing in it. I wish to take the subtlest influences of heaven and earth, and assist them with the (growth of the) five cereals for the (better) nourishment of the people. I also wish to direct the (operation of the) Yin and Yang, so as to secure the comfort of all living beings. How shall I proceed to accomplish those objects?" Kong Tong-zi replied, "What you wish to ask about is the original substance of all things; what you wish to have the direction of is that substance as it was shattered and divided. According to your government of the world, the vapours of the clouds, before they were collected, would descend in rain; the herbs and trees would shed their leaves before they became yellow; and the light of the sun and moon would hasten to extinction. Your mind is that of a flatterer with his plausible words—it is not fit that I should tell you the perfect Dao."[12]

While it is not possible to take a single word of the *Zhuangzi* at face value, each and every one can be said to derive from ancient legends. This passage suggests that weather during the reign of the Yellow Emperor was rife with anomalies and strange phenomena. Although the language is a bit exaggerated, one cannot discount its basis in reports of natural disasters at the time.

A similar weather-related account can be found in lore relating to Han Ba 旱魃 [referred to below as Droughtghoul], who is thus described in the "Classic of the Great Wilderness: The North" in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*:

> There is someone on this mountain wearing green clothes. Her name is Droughtghoul, daughter of the great god Yellow [the Yellow Emperor]. The god Chi You invented weapons. He attacked the great god Yellow. The great god Yellow then ordered Ying Long to do battle with Chi You in the Wilderness of Hope island. Ying Long hoarded up all the water. But the god Chi You asked the Lord of the Winds and the Leader of the Rains to let loose strong winds and heavy rain. So the great god Yellow sent down his sky daughter called Droughtghoul and the rain stopped. Then

12 Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [*Collected Interpretations of the* Zhuangzi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1961), 379-380; English translation in James Legge, trans., *The Sacred Book of China: The Texts of Taoism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 297-298.

> she killed Chi You. Droughtghoul could not get back up to the sky. The place where she lives on earth never has rain.[13]

Add to these Kua Fu's story, and there are three accounts providing evidence of a drought during the reign of the Yellow Emperor. It would certainly provide a convincing explanation of how Kua Fu dies of thirst.

This interpretation of Kua Fu's death finds resonance in lore passed down in Lingbao County, Henan. Henan University professor Zhang Zhenli's investigations into the myth surrounding Mount Kua Fu in Lingbao tell us that, during the war between the Flame Emperor and the Yellow Emperor, the Flame Emperor fled to Shaanxi after being defeated. The Yellow Emperor sent his general Ying Long after him, forcing him to turn west, where he found himself in an area between Shaanxi and Henan. At this time, Kua Fu, a distant clansman of the Flame Emperor, was passing through Lingbao just as the area was suffering the heat of a ten-year drought. Kua Fu reached the northern foot of the Qinling Mountains, located 25 *li* south of Lingbao, where he died of thirst. The place where he was buried came to be known as Kua Fu Valley and the nearby peak, Mount Kua Fu.[14] The historical roots of this received account are convincing; those who share it do so with apparent respect and reverence for the memory of Kua Fu.

Elements from this tale that corroborate those found in other accounts include the shared clan lineage between Kua Fu and the Flame Emperor, the fact that Kua Fu headed west after his defeat, and that Kua Fu died during his westward retreat, though not by Ying Long's arrow but because of drought. Although the mysteries of any myth can never be fully unraveled, Zhang addresses this discrepancy by hypothesizing that the descendants of Kua Fu, unable to bear hearing how Kua Fu was killed by the Yellow Emperor, spun this tale about his dying of thirst while retreating.[15] Even so, I believe that the tale of Kua Fu has a strong historical basis. For instance, whether he died of thirst or was killed by the Yellow Emperor, this story places the war between the Flame Emperor and the Yellow Emperor in the same period as a severe climatic event, which is also consistent with descriptions of weather in the quoted passages from the *Zhuangzi* and the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Evidence of a great

13 Yuan, *Shanhaijing jiaozhu*, 430.

14 Zhang Zhenli 張振犁, "Kua Fu shenhua tanyuan 夸父神話探原 [Seeking the Origins of the Kua Fu Myth]," in *Minsu diaocha yu yanjiu* 民俗調查與研究 [*Research and Investigations into Folk Customs*], ed. Zhang Zichen 張紫晨 (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1988), 435.

15 Ibid., 436.

drought can also explain differing accounts of the cause of Kua Fu's death. That Kua Fu and his clansmen fled from east to west might also explain how the legend of his chasing the sun came about.

From this, one can see that the myth of Kua Fu is actually the mythologization of Kua Fu's history. In the words of Xu Xusheng, it was a time where "it was difficult to think outside the framework of mythology."[16] Accordingly, historical accounts carried a strong mythmaking sensibility. In fact, mythical figures such as the Yellow Emperor, the Flame Emperor, Chi You, Hou Yi, and Da Yu are all historical figures who contributed to the development of human civilization. It is fair to say that the function of mythology during the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors period was to record history. Although the figures who appear in these records might expound on nature, society, and life, history remains the primary theme of this period's mythology.

Philosophy as Myth from the Qin through Jin Dynasties

The second rise of Chinese mythology took place from the Qin through the Jin dynasties. Rational thought reached its height in the Warring States period, but, by the end of this era, it had begun to decline to the point of near extinction. In its place, mysticism emerged as the dominant ideological trend, particularly concerning the quest for immortality. This trend was widespread in both ordinary society and the imperial court. The first emperor, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 [259-210 BCE] was known for ordering multiple expeditions to sea in search of the elixir of life. Such actions may appear to be a gullible response to the words of an alchemist. However, they were driven just as much by the larger ideological trends taking hold at the time, signaling a new return to mysticism. As is well known, the word *di* 帝 originally referred to a deity. Its eventual use to refer to a human monarch not only implied that such a monarch was simultaneously human and divine but also signaled the expanding influence of mystical thought at the time. *Di* had fallen out of use as a term for rulers for over a thousand years before reemerging at the end of the Warring States period. In 288 BCE, the rulers of the Qin and Qi kingdoms reclaimed *di* as a title, referring to themselves respectively as Emperor of the West [Xi Di 西帝] and Emperor of the East [Dong Di 東帝].

The spread of mysticism during the Qin-Han period has attracted the attention of many modern and contemporary scholars. The Qin-Han chapter of the *General History of Chinese Thought* [*Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史],

16 Xu, *Zhongguo gushi de chuanshuo shidai*, 24.

edited by Hou Wailu 候外盧 [1903-1987] and others, lists numerous articles on theology in medieval China through the lens of orthodoxy, form, thought, theory, and politics. Jin Chunfeng's 金春峰 *Han Period Thought* [*Handai sixiang shi* 漢代思想史] also includes chapters dealing with such topics as the relationship between heaven and man, the quest for immortality, divination, mysticism, and Han theology. Lin Jianming 林劍鳴 is a contributing editor to *Society and Civilization of the Qin-Han Period* [*Qin Han shehui wenming* 秦漢社會文明], a book that claims to focus on the topic of "highly superstitious spiritual orientations."

Although mythology receded into the background during the Warring States period, it flourished with the rise of mysticism during the Qin-Han era. During the latter, mysticism was so prevalent that even the grand historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 [ca. 145-86 BCE] could not escape its influence. A passage from the first of his biographies, "Biography of Emperor Gaozu [Gaozu ben ji 高祖本記]," reads: "It was recorded in later texts that before Liu Bang [Gaozu] rose in rebellion, he had killed a white snake. At that, an older woman had begun to cry, expressing her disbelief that her child, the son of the White Emperor, had been slain by a son of the Red Emperor."[17] This would be hard to imagine without understanding the intellectual trends influencing Sima Qian.

Mysticism persisted into the Wei-Jin period, particularly in poetry, in which gods and immortals became a recurring image. Cao Cao's 曹操 [155-220] "The Song of Qiu Hu [Qiu Hu xing 秋湖行]" expresses his wish to "climb Mount Hua" and "wander leisurely among gods and deities." Similarly, in "Poems of the Wandering Transcendents [You xian shi 遊仙詩]," Ji Kang 稽康 [ca. 223-263] writes that he would like to "wander through eternal gardens without a care" and "have occasion to meet with the Yellow Emperor and Laozi." In "Singing My Feelings [Yong huai shi 咏懷詩]," Ruan Ji 阮籍 [210-263] writes, "I wander in the wilderness with an easy heart, and bid farewell to the Queen Mother of the West." These poems demonstrate that the lives of gods and immortals had an effect of mystical seduction for poets in this period. As Liu Xie 劉勰 [ca. 465-522] wrote in the chapter "Elucidating Poetry [Ming shi 明詩]" in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍], "During the Zhengshi reign period [240-249], the Daoist idea of detachment from worldly affairs was quite popular; thus, this idea also seeped into poetry."[18] In fact, this trend extends beyond the Zhengshi reign period; it appears in

17 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1996), 341.

18 Fan Wenlan 范文瀾, *Wenxin diaolong zhu* 文心雕龍注 [*Annotations on* The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons] (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2014), 67.

works such as the *In Search of the Supernatural* and *Research into Lost Records* [*Shi yi ji* 拾遺記] during the Jin dynasty, when the highpoint of mysticism comes to an end.

If, as argued in the previous section, mythology functioned as historical writing in the pre-Qin period, then from the Qin through Jin dynasties, mythology was a way to express philosophy. Because those living during the Warring States period were in a constant state of existential crisis, they favored a rational approach to thought, taking the principles of yin-yang and the five elements [*yin yang wu xing* 陰陽五行] as key to understanding the universe. People in the Qin-Han dynasty broadened the application of these principles by reinterpreting them through myths; thus, mythology during this period has a philosophical nuance. For instance, based on the principle that "the shifting relationship between yin and yang is what constitutes the Way,"[19] people in the Qin-Han period began to approach heretofore single gods as part of a marital unit. They coupled Nüwa with Fuxi, Hou Yi with Chang'e, and Queen Mother of the West with King Lord of the East. "The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid [Niulang zhinü 牛郎織女]" and "Married to a Heavenly Immortal [Tian xian pei 天仙配]" are two widely known myths passed down from the Han dynasty that also illustrate this application of yin-yang theory to myth and marriage. In other words, the cosmic duality of yin and yang were treated by people in the Han dynasty as a formal element: if yang represents "heaven" and "man" and yin, "earth" and "woman," then the interaction between the two forces is what supports the structure of all things. Aside from this application of cosmic duality, deification of certain philosophical concepts that emerged in the pre-Qin also occurred in this period. For instance, the concept of *tai yi* 太一, which is understood from the chapter "All under Heaven [Tian xia 天下]," in the *Zhuangzi* to mean Great Unity, referred to the original form of all things in the universe. During the Han period, however, *tai yi* became an alternative way of referring to the Heavenly Sovereign, whose authority dwarfed even that of the Five Emperors.[20]

Now let us turn our attention to two myths that have been treated as canonical in Chinese literary history: "Nüwa Mends the Sky" and "Hou Yi Shoots down

19 "Zhou Yi zheng yi 周易正義 [Commentary on the *Book of Changes*]," in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [*Commentary on the Thirteen Classics*], ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2011), 161.

20 See "Dong huang tai yi 東黃太一 [The Sovereign of the East: The One]," one of the "nine songs [*jiu ge* 九歌]" in the *Chu ci* 楚辭 [*Lyrics of Chu*]. *Tai yi* is treated here as a title for a deity. Some scholars suspect that this was added on later during the Han. Their doubt is not unfounded.

the Sun." Both can be found in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 along with textual interpretations of the two stories. The work offers the following reading of "Nüwa Mends the Sky": "When there is obstruction to the flow of yin and yang, flush it out to reestablish the link. When disruptive energy hurts material objects and the ability of the people to accumulate material wealth, stop and abolish it."[21] Regarding "Hou Yi Shoots down the Sun," the work explains:

> To aid those who live impoverished lives and help those who have material needs is a way to foster one's reputation; take action to benefit the people by ridding society of its ills, suppress the chaos of rebellions, and put a stop to violence—this is the way to have accomplishments.[22]

Both passages expound on philosophy in the context of narrating a myth, demonstrating the philosophical preoccupation of mythology in this era.

Another prominent phenomenon in this period is the use of myth to interpret philosophical questions that were left unanswered during the pre-Qin. For instance, Qu Yuan 屈原 [ca. 340-278 BCE] writes in "Heavenly Questions [Tian wen 天問]":

> Who passed down the story of the far-off, ancient beginning of things? How can we be sure what it was like before the sky above and the earth below had taken shape? Since none could penetrate that murk when darkness and light were yet undivided, how do we know about the chaos of insubstantial forms?[23]

It is recorded in the chapter "The Revolution of Heaven [Tian yun 天運]" in the *Zhuangzi*:

> How (ceaselessly) heaven revolves! How (constantly) earth abides at rest! And do the sun and moon contend about their (respective) places? Who presides over and directs these (things)? Who binds and connects them

21 Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 [*Commentary on the* Huainanzi] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1997), 678.

22 Ibid., 828.

23 Huang Linggeng 黃靈庚, *Chuci zhangju shuzheng* 楚辭章句疏證 [*Annotations and Commentary on* Chu Ci] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007), 999; David Hawkes, trans., "Heavenly Questions," in *Classical Chinese Literature: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, ed. John Minford and Joseph S.M. Lau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 39.

> together? Who is it that, without trouble or exertion on his part, causes and maintains them? Is it, perhaps, that there is some secret spring, in consequence of which they cannot be but as they are? Or is it, perhaps, that they move and turn as they do, and cannot stop of themselves?[24]

These passages show us that people in the Warring States era were deeply invested in postulating on the beginning of existence; yet, at the same time, no creation myths have been discovered from this period. In other words, they raised questions but did not provide answers. Creation myths did, however, begin to appear during the Han period and tend to have a pervasive quality of philosophical explication.

Take, for instance, this passage from the book "On the Essential Spirit [Jing shen xun 精神訓]" in the *Huainanzi*:

> In ancient times, when heaven and earth were not yet formed, when the things were unclear and forms vague, it was a state of dark chaos and murky depths, where it was impossible to tell left from right. Then two deities emerged, and, together, they established and made the world. This occurrence was vast without end, broad without bounds. It was at this time that Heaven, Earth, yin, and yang became distinct, scattering to form the four directions and eight extremities, the forces of yin and yang thus worked in tandem to give material form to the myriad things.[25]

The "two deities" mentioned here refer to the deification of yin and yang, once again referencing the Han fixation with cosmic duality and anthropomorphism.

During the Three Kingdoms period [220-280] Xu Zheng 徐整 wrote in the *Historical Records of the Three Sovereign Divinities and the Five Gods* [*San wu li ji* 三五歷紀]:

> Before the beginning of time, Heaven and Earth were a mass of chaos resembling an egg. It was within this chaos that Pan Gu was born. After 18,000 years, this mass split into Heaven and Earth. The energy of yang rose light and clear to form the sky, whilst the energy of yin sunk muddy and dense to form the earth. Pan Gu, living between Heaven and Earth, went through many changes each day. His wisdom stretched beyond the sky and his abilities possessed more strength than the earth. With each passing day, the sky rose by many measures, the earth thickened by many

24 Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 493; Legge, *Sacred Books of China*, 345.

25 Zhang, *Huainanzi jiaoshi*, 719.

> measures, and so, too, did Pan Gu grow in size. Thus another 18,000 years passed. By this time, the sky had reached extreme heights and the earth had grown to extreme depths, and Pan Gu's size and height were also extremely great. It was after the formation of Heaven and Earth that the Three Sovereigns of the human world appeared.[26]

A Chronicle of the Five Cycles of Time [*Wu yun li nianji* 五運歷年記] offers a different account of creation that nonetheless has a strong mythological flavor:

> It is from hazy obscurity, a great mass of boundless energy, that all sprouted its first buds of life and that Heaven and Earth emerged distinct. That which was essentially yang became air, rising up and up to form the sky. That which was essentially yin solidified and became the earth. The forces of yin and yang continued to stir, differentiate, and transform, eventually giving birth to fair-minded and peaceful people. Pan Gu, who was the first living thing to emerge from the chaos, underwent a great transformation just before death. The air he expelled became the wind and clouds of the sky; his four limbs and five extremities became four pillars to hold up the sky and five great mountains; his blood became the water of rivers and lakes; his veins became roads and mountain ranges; his muscles and skin became fields and soil; his hair and whiskers became the stars in the sky; his fur became grass and trees; his bones and teeth became mineral, rock, and metal; his essence and marrow become pearls and precious jade; the sweat dripping from his skin became the dew that moistens all things; even the parasites on his body, catalyzed by the wind, became the hordes of common people living in the world.[27]

This passage is an illustration of the Daoist principle, found in chapter 42 in the *Laozi*, that "The *Dao* 道 begat one; one begat two; two begat three; three begat all things." Its philosophical implications far surpass its mythical ones. This conjunction of philosophy and myth is precisely the main characteristic of Qin-Jin era mythology.

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26 Li Fang 李昉 et al., ed., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985), 8.

27 Ma Su 馬驌, *Yi shi* 繹史 [*Continuous History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2002), 2.

Religion as Myth during the Yuan-Ming Period

A resurgence of fixation on the mysterious and supernatural, particularly through the rising trend of "god-making" [*zao shen* 造神] took place in the Yuan-Ming period. Although both tales and the ritual worship of god-spirits persisted in folk culture before this period, some even documented in sources on rituals, during the Yuan-Ming period, people built on this foundation to create new gods and spiritual icons in even greater volume. A higher number of the 365 proper gods recognized by Jiang Ziya 姜子牙 [ca. 1156-1017] in *Investiture of the Gods* do not appear in any source material dated prior to this period.[28] For example, whereas a general Lei Shen 雷神 [God of Lightning] was mentioned in earlier sources, Jiang's catalog lists twenty-four names of deities under the heading *lei* 雷 [lightning]. Many previously undocumented deities are also mentioned in the novel *Journey to the West* [*Xi you ji* 西遊記]. It is written in the book "On Rituals [Li zhi 禮志]" in the *History of the Ming* [*Ming shi* 明史]: "In ancient times, there was no practice of making sacrifices to Jupiter or the positions of the moon; this began during the Ming dynasty. Having a cloud deity after the wind deity was also a practice that began during the Ming dynasty."[29] This reflects the intensification of god-making during the Yuan-Ming period.

A noteworthy work that appeared in this period, the *Great Compendium on the Origins and Development of the Three Teachings and Search for the Sacred* [*Sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* 三教源流搜神大全], compiles entries on over 180 deities from the three teachings: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Each entry includes the deity's name, designation, rank and domain, posthumous titles, and mythical deeds. The majority also have accompanying images of the deity. Some notable entries are those of the Great Jade Emperor [Yu huang shang di], Houtu Goddess of the Earth [Houtu huang di qi], the Immortal Donghua [Dong hua di shen], and the Divine Queen Mother of the West [Xi ling wang mu]. Despite the Confucian tradition of not discussing gods and supernatural forces, this compilation also includes names of Confucian figures. Rather than academic intent, the work reflects fascination with the numinous that draws on the praxis of religious and theological studies.

28 Xu Zhonglin 徐仲琳, *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 [*Investiture of the Gods*] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1992).

29 Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., *Mingshi* 明史 [*History of the Ming*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1974), 1282.

If we take a closer look at the process of god-making in this period, we can sense a whimsical tone in the narration that is akin to a primeval wonderment at nature. One example is the following excerpt from the *Yong chuang xiaopin* [涌幢小品]:

> The Great Golden Dragon King was named Xie Xu. He resided hidden in Jinlongshan. He heard that the army of the Yuan had entered Lin'an, fell into the lake, and drowned, and that the stiff corpses did not rot. Zhu Yuanzhang raised an army in response. The Great Golden Dragon King aided him in his dreams, resulting in their swift victory. Thereafter, he opened a canal at Lülianghong. Those who prayed as they passed through on boat would have their wishes granted, so a temple was built. While Pan Xiuxun [潘秀馴; 1521-1595] tamed the Yellow River, the many prayers he expressed there were all answered and thus the people grew even more devout in making him offerings.[30]

See also this excerpt from *Gu sheng* [觚剩]:

> After the first Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang, secured all under Heaven, he granted titles and land to officers with great achievements. Once, he dreamed of holding an audience at court with tens of thousands of soldiers bowing before him, saying, "We died on the battlefield; please grant compensation to our grieving families." To this he replied, "There are too many of you. I cannot possibly investigate each of your names. However, if you were to group yourselves into units of five, I could distribute your offerings by locale." Thus, he commanded the people in the Jiangnan region to build small temples for the offerings. These temples were commonly known as "five holy shrines [*wu sheng ci* 五聖祠]."[31]

Finally, it is written in the "Four Yanzhou Drafts [Yanzhou sibu gao 弇州四部稿]," by Wang Shizhen 王世真 [1526-1590]:

> The Ming emperor Zhu Di dreamed of two deities who informed him that they were on the shores of the southern seas and would go to help him govern the country. The next day, the official in charge of rituals

30 Yao Zhiyin 姚之駰, "Yuan Ming shi lei chao 元明事類鈔 [Collected Anecdotes from the Yuan and Ming]," in *Wen yuan ge siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 884:326.

31 Ibid.

> spoke of the deeds of two immortal saviors, Xu Zhi'e and Xu Zhizheng, in Fujian. The emperor then sent two envoys with boxes of incense as offerings to invite back the deities. Thus, likenesses of the two were placed in the southeastern part of the palace, where a temple was built for them so that they could be worshiped.[32]

To create a god based on a dream is an act that requires a context in which belief in the supernatural is the norm. Interestingly, the name of the Ming dynasty itself comes from a reference to a religious sect. One can sense the mystical religiosity that pervaded the Ming from this practice of naming.

It is within the context of this mysticism that the third highpoint of mythology emerged. During this era countless mythical works of fiction appeared, including *Journey to the West, Investiture of the Gods, Zheng He's Expedition to the Western Ocean* [*Sanbao taijian xiyang ji*], *Suppressing Demons* [*Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳], *Biographies of 24 Arhats* [*Ershisi zun de dao luohan zhuan* 二十四尊的道羅漢傳], and *The Legend of the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid* [*Niulang zhinü zhuan* 牛郎織女傳]. According to the *Guben xijian xiaoshuo huikao* [古本稀見小說匯考] and *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* [中國通俗小說書目]—which span over thirty genres.[33] Dramatic works of the Yuan-Ming period with mythical elements also number over a hundred, quite an impressive number for the genre.

Fictional works generally are not considered mythology, but works from this period nonetheless contain mythical elements—such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義], one of the four great classic novels of Chinese literature. The following passage is in the opening chapter:

> On the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the second year of the reign Established Calm (*jian ning*), the Emperor arrived at the Great Hall of Benign Virtue for the full-moon ancestral rites. As he was about to seat himself, a strong wind began issuing out of the corner of the hall. From the same direction a green serpent appeared, slid down off a beam, and coiled itself on the throne. The Emperor fainted and was rushed to his private chambers. The assembled officials fled. The next moment the

32 Wang Shizhen 王世真, "Yanzhou sibu gao 弇州四部稿," in *Wen yuan ge siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書, 884:750.

33 See Tan Zhengbi 譚正璧 and Tan Xun 譚尋, *Guben xijian xiaoshuo huikao* 古本稀見小說匯考 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2012); Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2012).

> serpent vanished, and a sudden thunderstorm broke. Rain laced with hailstones pelted down for half the night, wrecking countless buildings.
>
> In the second month of the fourth year of Established Calm an earthquake struck Luoyang, the capital, and tidal waves swept coastal dwellers out to sea. In the first year of Radiant Harmony (Guang He) hens were transformed into roosters. And on the first day of the sixth month a murky cloud more than one hundred spans in length floated into the Great Hall of Benign Virtue.[34]

Chapter 1 of the Ming dynasty novel *The Water Margin* [*Shui hu zhuan* 水滸傳] is titled "Zhang the Divine Teacher Prays to Dispel a Plague/Marshall Hong Releases Demons by Mistake." The opening passages describe how, on the day "Tai Zu, the Emperor of Military Virtue" was born, "a red glow suffused the sky when this sage came into the world, and fragrance still filled the air the following morning. He was in fact the God of Thunder descended to earth."[35] Even *The Plum in the Golden Vase* [*Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅], famous for its explicit treatment of relationships between men and women, opens with a poem purportedly written by an immortal.[36] These examples attest to the reemergence of mythology as a trend.

Further, this third highpoint of mythmaking draws on many religious elements and concerns. In chapter 90 of *The Water Margin*, an abbot says, "May the country be peaceful and the people serene for years to come, the five grains abundant, the three religions glorious, with calm on all four sides, and everything exactly as wished."[37] In chapter 47 of *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong says, "I hope that you can return the three teachings to their original unity, that you may be respectful to the monks as well as the Taoists, and nurture talent amongst the people. If you do so, I guarantee your lands will forever be secure."[38] In chapter 28 of *Zheng He's Expedition to the Western Sea*, the elder Jin Bifeng says, "It was best said in the olden times: 'the three teachings all

34 Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1997), 1; Moss Roberts, trans., *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

35 Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, *Shuihuzhuan* 水滸傳 [*The Water Margin*] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1997), 1; Sidney Shapiro, trans., Shi Nai'an, *The Water Margin* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2001), 7-8.

36 Lanlingxiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生 and Wang Rumei 王汝梅, ed., *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 [*The Plum in the Golden Vase*] (Jinan: Qilu Book Company, 1987), 2.

37 Shi, *Shuihuzhuan*, 675; Shapiro, *Water Margin*, 892.

38 Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩, *Xiyouji* 西遊記 [*Journey to the West*] (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1992), 605.

originate from the same house.'"[39] The opening of *Zheng He's Expedition to the Western Sea* likewise discusses the origins of the three teachings. *Investiture of the Gods* tells the story of conflict between two religious sects; *Journey to the West* is a story of retrieving religious scriptures—both describe spiritual powers in their depictions of exorcising demons. In these cases, interest in religious concepts converges with the reemergence of myths as a new way to reflect on spiritual themes and figures.

Many works in Ming dynasty drama demonstrate additional effects of this convergence. *Lü Dongbin taoliu shengxian meng* [呂洞賓桃柳昇仙夢] tells the story of a man, Lü Dongbin, who attains immortality after expiating two tree spirits from sin. In *Guang Chengzi zhuhe qi tian shou* [廣成子祝賀齊天壽], the character Guang Chengzi bustles about preparing to celebrate the longevity of the Heavenly Son. *Qing fengnian wu gui nao Zhong Kui* [慶豐年五鬼鬧鍾馗] features the demon queller, Zhong Kui, who takes on the role of an official. *Shi Jia fo shuang lin zuohua* [釋迦佛雙林坐化] relates how Shi Jia sits meditating in a forest until he meets his death. These works extol the capaciousness of Buddhist principles and the immortal youth of gods and spirits. They depict the process of becoming immortal through self-cultivation and celebrate the longevity of immortal figures. The themes of these plays blend a strong religious aura with aspects of Yuan-Ming material culture. This reflects a change in consciousness not present in earlier periods.

Concluding Thoughts

We can see from these three shifts in the history of Chinese mythology that myths do not disappear; rather, their function and characteristics evolve along with the ideology of any given period. The myths of antiquity attached themselves to history, the myths of the Qin through the Jin period attached themselves to philosophy, and the myths of the Yuan-Ming period attached themselves to religious spirituality.

In the end, mythology is rooted in the spirit of pondering the mysterious and unknown and tirelessly keeping stride with the narrative themes that ever change and develop over time. In China today, where society is led by such slogans as "Innovate with science and technology," mythmaking shifts to science fiction themes in order to express people's hopes and fears regarding the role

39 Luo Maodeng 羅懋登, Lu Shulun 陸樹崙 et al., ed., *Sanbao taijian xiyangji* 三寶太監西洋記 [*Zheng He's Expedition to the Western Sea*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1985), 361.

of technology in the present and the future. In this way, historical shifts feed, rather than threaten, mythology's core fixation with the unknown. Through this essay, I hope to bring attention to the problem of treating mythology as a singular cultural form that only references primeval times. In order to rectify this tendency, studies on mythology must reconsider the longer history of thought that informs its theory.

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The Jishi Outburst Flood of 1920 BCE and the Great Flood Legend in Ancient China: Preliminary Reflections

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Abstract

On August 5, 2015, *Science* published an article by Wu Qinglong and a team of distinguished archaeologists that reported on the discovery of evidence for a massive outburst flood in the upper reaches of the Yellow River c. 1920 BCE. The archaeologists identified this flood with the one brought under control by Yu 禹, who was traditionally regarded as the founder of the Xia dynasty. They further argue that since Erlitou culture originated around 1900 BCE, the coincidence of date serves to confirm the identification of Xia and Erlitou culture. This article argues against the historical interpretation of this evidence for an ancient flood. In the early texts, Yu did not control a flood along the Yellow River; he dug all the riverbeds throughout the world so that the waters could flow into the sea. Moreover, the story of Yu controlling the waters and the foundation of the Xia dynasty were not linked in the earliest accounts. This story originated as part of a cosmogonic myth in which the world was made habitable and conducive to agriculture. Thus, it cannot be identified with any particular flood or used to date the foundation of the Xia. Finally, it argues that a great flood was more likely to have caused social disruption than the development of a new level of state power. However, this flood may have caused people from the Qijia culture, which was centered in the region of the flood and already had primitive bronze-casting technology, to flee to other regions including that dominated by Erlitou culture. This cultural interaction introduced metallurgy which was further developed in the context of Erlitou culture, thus spurring its development as a state-level society.

Keywords

ancient history – Erlitou – great flood – Xia dynasty – Yu

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On August 5, 2015, *Science* published an article by Wu Qinglong 吳慶龍 and a team of distinguished archaeologists that reported on the discovery of evidence for a massive flood in the upper reaches of the Yellow River in 1920 BCE. The archaeologists identify this flood with the one brought under control by Yu 禹, who was traditionally regarded as the founder of the Xia dynasty. The Xia dynasty is often identified with early Bronze-Age culture centered on Erlitou 二里頭 culture [c. 1900-1550 BCE] in Yanshixian 偃師縣, Henan Province, but this identification remains contentious. In the article, the authors argue that the flood provides evidence for both the historicity of the Xia and its identity with Erlitou culture. This is a significant archaeological discovery, and the archaeologists should be congratulated on the ingenious detective work that allowed them to determine the cause, nature, and date of this flood.[1] I have previously written about Yu and the Xia dynasty as mythological constructs. I look forward to the publication of a fuller archaeological report and to further considering the issues I raise herein. In the meantime, I thank the editors of the *Journal of Chinese Humanities* for the opportunity to offer a preliminary reaction to this important discovery and its implications.[2]

To summarize the article: A great lake was formed after an earthquake caused a landslide in the upper reaches of the Yellow River. The eventual breach of the barrier resulted in a flood originating at Jishi 積石 Gorge in present-day Qinghai Province, in about 1920 BCE. This flood breached the natural levees of the Yellow River causing rare, extensive flooding, possibly even an avulsion in the lower reaches of the river. The flood was so catastrophic that it was preserved in the collective memory and became the basis of the accounts of a great flood controlled by Yu mentioned in early texts, such as the *Book of Documents* [*Shujing* 書經] and *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記]. Since Yu was also the founder of the Xia dynasty, the date of the flood provides evidence for the beginning of that dynasty. Yu and his father (Gun 鯀) are said to have labored to control the flood for twenty-two years, so the beginning of the Xia dynasty would be about 1900 BCE. This date corresponds to the beginning of Erlitou culture and the transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age in the Yellow River valley. Thus, they argue, their discovery and analysis

1 Qinglong Wu, Zhijun Zhao, Li Liu, Darryl E. Granger, Hui Wang, David J. Cohen, Xiaohong Wu, Maolin Ye, Ofer Bar-Yosef, Bin Lu, Jin Zhang, Peizhen Zhang, Daoyang Yuan, Wuyun Qi, Linhai Cai, and Shibiao Bai, "Outburst Flood at 1920 BCE Supports Historicity of China's Great Flood and the Xia Dynasty," *Science Magazine* 353, no. 6299 (August 5, 2016).

2 Sarah Allan, "The Myth of the Xia Dynasty," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1984; idem, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art and Cosmos in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 57-74.

support the identification of Erlitou culture with the Xia, though they date its foundation somewhat later than the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology project.

My arguments concerning Yu and the Xia dynasty as mythological constructs were made within the context of a larger attempt to reconstruct an early system of mythical thought that, I argued, originated in the Shang dynasty [c. 1600-1046 BCE] and was later historicized. According to this argument, the idea of a Xia dynasty derived from a Shang myth about an earlier people who were their opposite—the Shang identified themselves with the ten suns, birds, the mulberry tree, the East, the sky and life; the Xia, by contrast, were identified with water creatures such as dragons and turtles, the Ruo tree, the West, the Yellow Springs, and death. Yu's control of the waters originated as part of a cosmogonic myth, and he was regarded as the founder of the Xia dynasty. When the Zhou conquered the Shang, they interpreted this myth in light of their own historical context and their need to establish political legitimacy. Thus they took the idea of a previous people defeated by the Shang ancestors as a precedent for their defeat of the Shang. This created the idea of a dynastic cycle of Xia, Shang, and Zhou, and it is through this prism that the Xia dynasty was understood in later times.[3]

The crux of the problem in discussing history before the Shang dynasty is that, although we now have extensive material evidence about the development of sedentary societies and civilization in China extending back almost 10,000 years, we do not have contemporaneous texts until the late Shang dynasty, around 1300 BCE. Moreover, we do not know when writing began in China. The late Shang dynasty divinations engraved on bones and shells include the names of royal Shang ancestors who received ritual offerings, but they are written from the perspective of the late Shang kings and close associates and provide little information about earlier eras. Indeed, if we did not have later records, we would know only that Tang 湯 (唐 in oracle-bone writing) was an ancestor of the Shang kings in a lineage that begins many generations earlier with Shang Jia 上甲. From the offerings proposed for him, we would know that he was a particularly powerful spirit, but we would not have any evidence with which to identify him as the founder of the Shang dynasty. All evidence about Yu and the Xia dynasty are from the Zhou dynasty [c. 1050-222 BCE] or later. This is not disputed by Wu and his colleagues, but they argue that the flood was so catastrophic it could have been retained in people's collective memory. I do not deny the possibility of this type of memory. However, as I discuss below, a closer look at the story of Yu in the ancient texts does

3 Ibid.; Sarah Allan, "Sons of Suns: Myth and Totemism in Ancient China," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44, no.1 (1981): 290-326.

not suggest a correlation with this archaeological evidence of a flood along the Yellow River. Furthermore, any attempt to date the beginning of the Xia dynasty on the basis of transmitted records will have inherent methodological problems. Nevertheless, this flood may provide a key to the rise of Erlitou culture as an early Bronze-Age society.

Yu and the Flood

The most critical problem in linking the archaeological evidence of a catastrophic flood in the upper reaches of the Yellow River with that of the story of Yu is that the water controlled by Yu in the ancient texts is never described in the ancient texts as a flood of the Yellow River. Yu's accomplishment was not in dredging the Yellow River—or any other particular river. He dug all the riverbeds in the world, so that the waters could drain into the sea. The "Tribute of Yu [Yu gong 禹貢]" chapter of the *Book of Documents* is the *locus classicus* for the story of Yu's travails. Yu is described as traveling to all nine provinces. In each place, the names of the rivers and mountains and characteristics of the topography are given. The Yellow River is mentioned in this context, but it is never singled out as the place of the flood.

The "Tribute of Yu" in its present form was probably compiled in the Warring States period [475-222 BCE]. Nevertheless, the opening line is very similar to the opening line of the inscription on a middle Western Zhou bronze vessel, the Bingong *xu* 豳公盨.[4] The "Tribute of Yu" reads: "Yu spread out the earth. Following along the mountains, he cut down trees. He determined the high mountains and great rivers."[5] And the Bingong *xu*: "Sky/heaven commanded

4 This vessel was not archaeologically excavated, and some scholars question its authenticity. The proper transcription of the name of the Lord to whom it is dedicated is uncertain; it is also called the Suigong *xu* 遂公盨. For interpretations and transcriptions, see articles by Li Ling 李零, Li Xueqin 李學勤, Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, and Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚 in *Zhongguolishiwenwu* (2002). For a consideration of the authenticity of the vessel on the basis of its form and decoration, see Louisa G. Fitzgerald-Huber, "The *X Gong Xu*: Brief Notes on the Question of Authenticity, with an Excursus into the Derivation of the *Xu* Vessel Type," in *The X Gong Xu: A Report and Papers from the Dartmouth Workshop*, ed. Xing Wen, *International Research on Bamboo and Silk Documents Newsletter*, Special Issue (2003). This same newsletter includes full translations by Constance A. Cook and the present author. Constance Cook has published another full translation in "Sage King Yu 禹 and the Bin Gong *xu* 豳公盨," *Early China* 35-36 (2012-2013).

5 禹敷土、隨山刊木、奠高山大川. Bernhard Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 13 (Chinese text; translation is by author).

Yu to spread out the earth, follow along the mountains, and make channels for the rivers."[6] That it was sky/heaven who ordered Yu in the inscription, rather than a human ruler, is an indication of the original cosmogonic status of the story. Another early reference is found in "Chang fa" 長發, a hymn in the "Shang song" 商頌 section of the *Classic of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經]. It probably draws on the Shang tradition, though it is likely to have been recorded in the Zhou. It begins, "Deep and wise was the Shang, and long-lived was its good fortune. Vast were the flooding waters, Yu arranged the lands and regions below."[7] Interestingly, mention of Yu and the flood occur here in a hymn that celebrates the Shang ancestors, and there is no mention of the Xia. This is consistent with the absence of any Xia hymns in the *Classic of Poetry*.

Rongchengshi 容成氏 is a bamboo manuscript in the Shanghai Museum of unknown date but was buried around 300 BCE. The account in the manuscript is similar to that in the "Tribute of Yu" in its general conception; that is, the world has nine regions [*jiuzhou* 九州], and Yu travels through each one. However, the account is less elaborate and the geographical description of the provinces and rivers is not identical. In this manuscript, it is quite clear that the reason for the flood was the absence of courses for the rivers and that Yu personally dug the channels that allowed the rivers to flow freely:

> $_{23}$Shun administered the government for three years.[8] There were no clear paths through the mountains and hills and the rivers and streams did not drain out, so he established Yu as the Master of Works. When Yu had $_{15}$received his command, he dressed in straw clothing and put on a bamboo hat . . .$_{24}$His face was chapped, his feet filthy, and hair no longer grew on his limbs. The streams flowed without banks and the waters ran together. Yu personally took up a scoop and ploughshare. He banked up the Ming Du [i.e., Mengzhu] Marsh and $_{25}$cut beds for the nine rivers; hence, Jia Province and Xu Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu cut a bed to link the Huai and Yi, so that they could flow east to the sea; hence, Jing Province and Ju Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu then cut beds to link the Lou and Yi rivers, so they could flow east to the $_{26}$sea; hence, Luo Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu then cut beds linking

6 天令禹敷土、隨山、濬川.

7 濬哲維商、長發其祥、洪水芒芒、禹敷下土方. Cheng Junying, ed., *Shijing zhuxi* 詩經注析 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1991), 1034.

8 The subscript numbers refer to the slip numbers given in the original publication. Alternative readings of the Chu graphs and different slip sequences are also given therein.

the Threefold Rivers and Fivefold Lakes,[9] so they could flow east to the
27sea; hence, Jing Province and Yang Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu then cut beds linking the Yi and the Luo, together with the Chan and Jian, so they could flow east to the [Yellow] River; hence, Yu Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu then cut beds linking the Jing and the Wei, so they could flow north to the [Yellow] River; hence, Ju Province could begin to be inhabited. Yu then made five hundred valleys, running south from the Han,
28and five hundred valleys, running north from the Han.

When all the people under the sky were settled, then he prepared a feast. He appointed Hou Ji to be the supervisor of the fields.[10]

The commission to Yu was given by Shun, and, after Yu had accomplished his task of making the riverbeds, Shun appointed Hou Ji 后稷, the culture hero who taught people agriculture.

"Canon of Yao [Yao dian 堯典]" is the first chapter of the *Book of Documents*. It was probably also compiled in the Warring States period, but it is a multilayered text and includes names for the four directional quadrates and their peoples that can be correlated to those of the four quadrates and their winds in Shang oracle-bone inscriptions.[11] I have previously argued that the "Canon of Yao" derives from a cosmogonic myth and that Yao 堯 was a transformation of Shang Di 上帝 [Lord on High], whereas Shun was Jun 俊 (踆), the first human ruler and an ancestor of the Shang.[12] In any case, in the "Canon of Yao," Yao

9 The terms "Threefold Rivers" and "Fivefold Lakes" follow the translation in Vera Dorafeeva-Lichtmann, "Ritual Practices for Constructing Terrestrial Space (Warring States-Early Han)," in *Early Chinese Religion*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 633, as does my understanding of how the waters were linked.

10 For the original publication of this manuscript, see Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chu zhu shu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 [*Chu-Script Bamboo Slip Manuscripts in the Shanghai Museum Collection*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), 2: 91-146, 247-293. This translation is based on my own modern character edition; see Sarah Allan, *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 239-242.

11 Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*, 79-83; Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, "Shi Yindaiqiunianyusi fang he si fang feng de jisi 釋殷代求年於四方和四方風的祭祀," *Fudanxuebao* 1 (1956).

12 After the first line of the "Yao Dian [Canon of Yao]," the protagonist is called Di rather than Yao. See Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*, 34, and "Sons of Suns." As Jun, Shun would be the husband of Xihe, the mother of the ten suns, and identifiable with Di Ku 帝嚳, the first Shang ancestor. In Warring States period Chu-script bamboo-slip manuscripts, Shun's name is consistently written with the *yun* 允 phonetic, which provides support for the identification with Jun that was not available earlier.

(or Di) establishes harmony among the people and then orders the brothers Xi 羲and He 和 to "calculate and delineate the [movements of] the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies and respectfully give the people the seasons."[13] After the sky is in order, he turns to the earth, which is flooded with water everywhere, making human habitation difficult:

> Di said, Oh you, Si Yue (Four Peaks), voluminously the waters everywhere are injurious, Extending to embrace the mountains and rise above the hills, so vast, they swell up to sky/heaven. The people below are groaning so.[14]

Yao first appoints Gun to calm the flood, but Gun is not successful. Then, after Shun has become the ruler, he appoints Yu, who successfully controlled the flooding, followed by Hou Ji, who introduces agricultural practices. Thus, people were able to grow crops and feed themselves.[15]

Hou Ji was the first ancestor of the Zhou, born miraculously after his mother trod on a giant footprint. This association of Yu and Hou Ji—the waters brought under control and then the introduction of agriculture—is common and is an indication of the cosmogonic nature of the story. In many Zhou and Han texts, Gun, Yu, and Yu's son, Qi 啟, have supernatural characteristics, such as miraculous births and deaths and the ability to transform themselves into water creatures.[16] However, even when Yu seems to be a human ruler, digging the riverbeds to prepare the world for agriculture was a supernatural feat.

Most texts do not explain why the world was flooded. The *Rongchengshi* passage cited above, which attributes it to the absence of passages for the water to flow through the mountains, is an exception. In the "Canon of Yao," no cause is given. However, it mentions Gong Gong 共工 as a figure of rebellion. Gong Gong and Yu are often textually linked, and Gong Gong's destruction of Buzhou 不周 Mountain, a pillar that joined the earth and sky, may be the cause of the flood. The sky then tilted downward in the northwest, and the waters on

13 歷象日月星辰，敬授民時.

14 帝曰。咨四岳。湯湯洪水方割。蕩蕩懷山襄陵。浩浩滔天。下民其咨. Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," 2-3 (Chinese text, author's translation).

15 I do not think that the years attributed to the work of Gun and Yu in the *Shangshu* and *Shiji* should be considered a factual recording. Nevertheless, in the texts, their work in allaying the flood is not described as immediately successive, so, even if Gun worked for nine years and Yu for thirteen, the time spent should not be added together to make twenty-two consecutive years.

16 Allan, "The Myth of the Xia," 249-252.

earth flowed toward the southeast.[17] If there was water, but it did not have any beds, this tilting of the earth would have caused flooding everywhere. Another possibility is that the waters came from underground. There are many natural springs in the Central Plains, which was presumably the source of the idea that the underworld was the watery "Yellow Springs" [*huangquan* 黃泉]. Indeed, in the "Heavenly Questions [Tianwen 天問]," the flooding waters controlled by Yu are called *hongquan* 洪泉 [flooding springs].[18]

In sum, the story of Yu and the flood are aspects of a cosmogonic myth in which the earth was habitable and conducive to farming after Yu had dug riverbeds, which directed the water in a controlled manner. In the texts that mention the flood, the Yellow River is only mentioned in the context of Yu's travel through the nine regions. Although the destruction caused by the outburst flood in the upper reaches of the Yellow River in 1920 BCE was particularly catastrophic, there is no reason to believe that any single flood was the source of the story of Yu. In ancient times, China had many floods as well as springs that burst up from under the ground. That people should have imagined that the world was once covered with water is more likely to have resulted from a combination of these conditions than from any particular flood.

The Problem of the Xia

Because Yu is traditionally regarded as the founder of the Xia dynasty, the authors of this article use the identification of Yu's flood with that of the Jishi flood to date the beginning of that dynasty. But, even if we assume that Yu, with all his supernatural aspects, was based upon a human ruler, the textual evidence that Yu founded a dynastic state is problematic. According to the *Records of the Grand Historian*, Yu was succeeded by his son, Qi, but Qi's successor, Tai Kang 太康, immediately lost the state and fled into exile.[19] It is difficult to understand how a ruling dynasty can be considered to have been founded when the state was immediately lost. It also makes any attempt to date the foundation of the Xia problematic. Three generations later, from Yu 予 on, we have a list of kings but almost no information except their names. Indeed, so

17 For textual support for the idea that Gong Gong was the cause of the flood, see Mark Edward Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 55-60.

18 *Chu ci* 楚辭 [*Lyrics of Chu*] 3/6b (Sibucongkan edition).

19 Lü Simian 呂思勉 suggested that the interregnum was an insertion. See GuJiegang 顧頡剛, ed., *Gushibian* 古史辨*Debates on Ancient History*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1982), 7 (*xia* 下), 282-290.

little information about these figures is available that it may in fact be a list of ancestors. But whose ancestors were they? And did they rule Erlitou? Or somewhere else? And if they were Xia "kings," who was the first to actually rule the state—Yu 禹, his son Qi, or perhaps Yu 予, even though Yu 予 is not present in later historiography? These questions cannot be answered without writings earlier than those discovered to date. My argument that the Shang had a myth about a Xia dynasty that was reinterpreted by the Zhou in light of their own historical context cannot be proved without earlier writing either. Nevertheless, it provides an alternative explanation for the presence of a Xia dynasty in transmitted texts. Thus, it places the burden of proof on those who regard the later tradition of such a dynasty as historical in nature.

Even more important, understanding the Xia as the first "dynasty" in a succession of Xia, Shang and Zhou involves a conceptual problem. The reason is that the theory of dynasties that were subject to a changing celestial mandate is implicit in this formulation. This theory made sense in the historical context of the early Zhou rulers who had just defeated a long-established state and adopted many of its features. But it would not have had any meaning to people who lived in the early second millennium BCE and did not know that other dynasties were yet to come. Nevertheless, the association of the Xia dynasty with Erlitou has an undeniable rationale, even if it cannot be proven. Erlitou represents a state-level early bronze culture, it precedes the Shang, and its location corresponds generally to that in the later textual tradition. However, this interpretation of the formative significance of Erlitou in the development of the state is a modern historical paradigm. The first rulers of Erlitou would have looked backward for their comparisons, not forward, and we have no means of understanding how they saw themselves in relationship to their ancestors or earlier Longshan culture leaders and contemporaneous societies.

An Alternative Interpretation of the Effect of the Flood

Because the report in *Science* is necessarily brief, many things are left unexplained. I am uncertain how the authors understand the relationship between this flood and the formation of Erlitou culture in practical terms. If this flood was powerful enough to produce major flooding in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, would a late Neolithic ruler have had the technological means to prevent its flooding by dredging it? We would expect the devastation of a flood to lead to social turmoil. How could such a flood, on the contrary, have assisted a ruler of Erlitou in establishing a higher level of social complexity and political organization?

The coincidence of this outburst flood and the formation of Erlitou culture around 1900 BCE is nevertheless intriguing, and I propose an alternative scenario to explain it. By the time it traveled to the middle reaches of the Yellow River, where Erlitou culture is centered, the flood had weakened. According to the Peking University archaeologist Sun Hua 孫華, the layers of pure silt that indicate flooding are relatively easy to identify but have not been found at the Erlitou site.[20] However, the Jishi Gorge is in a region dominated by Qijia culture [c. 2300-1500 BCE]. The Qijia were the earliest bronze-casting culture in China, and they had already developed bronze metallurgy. The technology was still relatively simple, but it included at least the use of two-part molds. Archaeologists have recognized cultural interactions between the Qijia and many other cultures. Artifacts found at both Qijia and Erlitou culture sites include turquoise-inlaid bronze plaques, ring-handled bronze knives, and pottery pouring vessels with spouts and dome-shaped lids.[21] If massive flooding in the upper reaches of the Yellow River caused the movement of people from the Qijia culture region to the middle reaches, then the migrants to the central plains with knowledge of metallurgy could have spurred the development of an indigenous bronze-casting technology in the Erlitou region. In this way, the flooding in the upper reaches of the Yellow River and the development of the state-level Erlitou society were indirectly connected.

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20 As quoted in Wu Nan 吳楠 and Zhang Chunhai 張春海, "Shiqianhongshui zhengming Xiachao cunzai yinqi xueshulunzheng 史前洪水證明夏朝存在引起學術論爭," *Wenhua*, August 17, 2016 (https://kknews.cc/culture/6lpzxp.html).

21 Li Shuicheng 李水城, "Xibei yu zhongyuan zaoqi ye tong ye de quyu tezheng ji jiaohu zuoyong 西北與中原早期冶銅業的區域特征及交互作用," *Kaoguxuebao* 3 (2005); Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, *The Archaeology of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 331.

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A Discussion on the Concept of "Sacred Narrative"

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Abstract

Sacred narratives are one of the foundations upon which human societies depend for their existence, since in all societies those narratives help establish the legitimacy of the social order and values. While Western societies have opted to regard tales of the supernatural as their main form of sacred narrative, ancient Chinese societies chose, instead, to regard ancient history as theirs. Even though the narrative contents of myths and ancient history differ, they fulfill the same social function and both are believed to represent "facts" from immemorial antiquity. Therefore, the author uses the concept of the sacred narrative to embrace both myths and ancient history, transcending differences in content between mythological and historical narratives and setting forth an argument based on their common social function. This not only allows mythology studies to be in keeping with historical reality but also contributes to an accurate understanding of the narrative foundations of different social and cultural systems.

Keywords

ancient history – Chinese mythology – multicultural perspective – sacred narrative – social function

"Sacred narrative" is a definition of myth commonly seen in the modern academic field of mythology studies. In 1984, an anthology of essays by Western scholars edited by the American folklorist Alan Dundes was published under the title *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Dundes makes the anthology's subject clear from the very first sentence of his introduction: "A myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be

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in their present form."[1] He regards the word "sacred" as the most important term in the definition of myth, thereby excluding all other narrative forms that would not emerge from a context of faith. This definition attaches great importance to the aspect of faith and to mythology's social function.

If we affirm that "myth is a sacred narrative," can we not also say that sacred narratives are myths? In a Western cultural context, this does not appear to be a problem because myth is the most fundamental form of sacred narrative. In fact, it is the only form of sacred narrative. However, could we affirm the same in China as well, that sacred narratives are necessarily myths? The present article answers this question in the light of facts regarding the specificity of Chinese sacred narratives.

The Inability of the Current Concept of Myth to Reflect the Reality of Sacred Narratives in Chinese Culture

Social and cultural life is extrinsic to humans' biological instincts. Sacred narratives must be deployed in order for each society's member to internalize the social and cultural order and its values as compatible with his own individual psychological needs. They prove the existence of a particular order since time immemorial. In this sense, sacred narratives are one of the foundations on which human societies depend for existence.

Mythology is the form of sacred narrative with which we are most familiar. The concept of myth used in the Chinese academic world is not a term specific to China and was introduced from the late Qing dynasty [1644-1911] onward through the influence of modern studies in mythology from the West. The concept is usually defined using two different methods. The first one relies mostly on the myth's narrative content. For example, the "minimum definition" of myth suggested in 1955 by the American folklorist Stith Thompson, and endorsed by Yang Lihui 楊利慧, states: "Myth has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth."[2] The second method, represented by Bronislaw Malinowski, is based on the myth's social function. Malinowski writes:

1 Alan Dundes, "Introduction," in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 1.

2 Quoted in Yang Lihui 楊利慧, "Shenhua yiding shi shensheng de xushi ma? 神話一定是"神聖的敘事"嗎? [Are Myths Necessarily 'Sacred Narratives'?]," *Minzu wenxue yan jiu* 3 (2006): 85.

> Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale but an active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.[3]

It should also be kept in mind that Lü Wei 呂微, who was deeply influenced by Malinowski, persists in defending this particular view in his work.[4]

Even though the two methods of definition mentioned above differ, they also share a common point—that is, the fact that both attribute the leading roles in mythology to deities. This is the most common and unanimous view currently shared by scholars with regard to myth. In addition, mythologists generally consider mythology the prevailing narrative form in ancient Chinese societies. The problem is that this view does not correspond to the narrative practices prevalent throughout Chinese history.

In ancient times, China did not have a concept of myth, but myths were still produced. For this reason, scholars adopted ancient Greek mythology as their model and took concepts from modern Western studies in mythology as their guide. Those scholars exploited a few story plots from ancient texts that presented a certain supernatural quality (i.e., myths). They thereby constructed the idea of "Chinese mythology," a mythology that is now regarded as the cultural foundation of the Chinese nation. More than a hundred years ago, this idea gained a lot of influence. However, because of this particular construction, scholars were also confronted with two insurmountable difficulties.

First, the vast majority of records on ancient Chinese mythology that would fit the concepts introduced above are fragmentary. They remain scattered throughout the country, and no system connects the different mythological pieces. Early Chinese narrative forms were for the most part historical, but history is the narrative form concerned with recording human activities, and little content in it touches upon deities. In China, the period when epic poems and theatrical dramas were produced that could reveal some kind of mythological narrative or content came relatively late, hence it could not possibly have reflected the recording of classical mythology. Therefore, researchers have no

3 Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life," in *Sacred Narrative*, 199.

4 Lü Wei 呂微, "Shenhuapian 神話篇 [Mythology Chapter]," in *Zhonghua minjian wenxue shi* 中華民間文學史 [*History of Chinese Folk Literature*], ed. Qi Lianxiu 祁連休 and Cheng Qiang 程薔 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 3-4.

choice but to look for those tales of the supernatural in ancient writings that are not narratives per se.

Scholars have realized that most myths could be found in works such as the geographical records of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaijing*, 山海經], the philosophical writings of *Zhuangzi* 莊子and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 as well as the lyrical poems of the "Heavenly Questions [Tianwen 天問]." Those sources were later reputed to be the ancient texts containing the most recorded myths, a reputation supported by a variety of works on the history of literature. In fact, because the ancient books mentioned above are constrained by their own characteristics, it would have been simply impossible for them to record complete versions of myths, let alone do so systematically. Therefore, the Chinese myths gathered by mythologists or, more precisely, the mythology constructed by those scholars is bound to remain scattered and disorganized. Lu Xun 魯迅 [1881-1936], in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* [*Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi lüe*, 中國小說史略], writes: "Myths usually centered round a group of gods: men described these gods and their feats." He later adds: "But China has never had monumental works putting all these myths and legends together, as in the Greek epics."[5] Scholars such as Lu Xun, Hu Shi 胡適 [1891-1962] and Mao Dun 茅盾 [1896-1981] explored the absence of any comprehensive Chinese mythological source, and all offered various explanations for it. They either attributed the fault to the geographical specificities of China's environment, or directed their criticisms at Confucianism and the saying "The subjects on which the Master did not talk were—extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings," which appears in the *Analects of Confucius* [*Lunyu*, 論語].[6] At the time, no one considered that this conundrum had been created by the mythologists themselves by borrowing the Western concept of myth without giving it careful consideration.

The second question is more critical. Following their incessant efforts to unearth the value and influence of Chinese myths, mythology experts ultimately became aware of the fact that, since the beginning of Chinese civilization—excluding the period of remote antiquity on which we are unable to perform textual research—mythology's influence on historical developments has been limited. Mythology never enjoyed cultural prestige in Chinese history. In fact, it has long been reduced to being considered in a

5 Lu Xun (Lu Hsun), *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), 10, 19.

6 Confucius, "The Analects of Conf ucius," in *The Chinese Classics*, trans. James Legge (Taipei: SMC, 2001), 1: 201.

similar vein as the "School of Minor Talks" [*Xiaoshuojia*, 小說家][7] and has been essentially disparaged as "extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings." Ancient Greek mythology, however, has achieved cultural prominence, and its influence on Western culture is monumental. In contrast, because of the awkward situation in which Chinese mythology finds itself, the actual value of the research conducted on the subject suffers considerably.

These two difficulties can also lead to problems at a deeper level. According to the principle that human societies need to be legitimated through sacred narratives, Chinese mythology, which is depicted as lacking both influence and prestige, could not possibly have provided sufficient support for maintaining order in traditional society. A society and culture that could not provide evidence that would attest to its legitimacy could hardly last. Based on Western mythology theory, China would fall into this category. However, Chinese traditional society's "ultrastable structure"[8] and its unbroken continuity are widely acknowledged. We can therefore infer that the conclusions reached by contemporary Chinese mythologists are necessarily based on erroneous reasoning.

I believe that the problem came from Western influence on Chinese mythology studies and the fact that myth was considered the sole form of sacred narrative, which led us to overlook the actual historical narrative phenomena at work in China. What is known as "ancient history" (the period from the Zhou dynasty [1045-221 BCE] onward) in reality constitutes the main form of sacred narrative prevalent in Chinese traditional culture, thus for the Chinese, ancient history assumes—as quoted above—the role of "a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom." It was certainly a mistake to devote the resources of Chinese mythology studies to unearthing tales about divinities, because we lost sight of the historical narratives about emperors in remote antiquity.

Jiang Guanyun's 蔣觀雲 [1865-1929] treatise "Figures Fostered by Myths and History," published in 1903 when the Chinese field of mythology studies was founded, contains a very enlightening supposition expressing the possibility that history could be equally considered a sacred narrative:

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7 Ban Gu 班固, "Yiwenzhi 藝文志 [Treatise on Literature]," in *Hanshu* 漢書 [*History of the Han Dynasty*]. This refers to a specific literary genre that recorded conversations heard on the street.

8 Jin Guantao 金觀濤 and Liu Qingfeng 劉青峰, *Xingsheng yu weiji: lun zhongguo fengjian shehui de chao wending jiegou* 興盛與危機——論中國封建社會的超穩定結構 [*Traditional Society in China: An Ultrastable Structure*] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984; Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2011).

> A country's mythology and history all have the greatest influence on popular consciousness. . . . things such as mythology and history can give birth to a country's greatest characters. However, they can accomplish this precisely because they reveal the genius of a country's people. Once a country's mythology and history are unable to arouse the interest of the people and to inspire them, the people's absence of genius becomes apparent.[9]

To affirm that "mythology and history [which refer specifically to written historical narratives] can give birth to a country's greatest characters" is clearly equivalent to saying that both mythology and history are sacred narratives. However, in the same treatise, Jiang considers ancient Chinese mythology devoid of any "sense of the sublime or elegance and of [any] solemnity or mystical quality" and qualifies ancient history as "a rigid enumeration of facts," hence asserting that improvements are once more needed. This illustrates that Jiang failed to understand the significance of historical writings of the pre-Qin period, and thus his treatment of history as a form of sacred narrative is based on mere supposition.

Following his own analysis of ancient documents, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 [1893-1980] concludes in his famous theory that what is known as ancient history was formed through "an accumulation of superimposed layers."[10] In addition to confirming that legends found in ancient historical records were myths posing as reality, this conclusion reveals the close relationship that existed between the recording of history and the country's governance.[11] It thus becomes apparent that, even though ancient Chinese society did not produce the kind of mythology that is implied by Western studies, it did not lack the social and cultural sacred narratives necessary for its legitimation. Sacred narratives were simply manifested in the form of historical narratives from the pre-Qin period.

It is necessary to refute the long-standing idea that fictional, numinous mythology is humanity's only form of sacred narrative and to adopt a new perspective in order to investigate narrative practices throughout Chinese

9 Jiang Guanyun 蔣觀雲, "Shenhua, lishi yangcheng zhi renwu 神話、歷史養成之人物 [Figures Fostered by Myths and History]," in *Zhongguo shenhua xue lun xuan cui* 中國神話學論選萃 [*Chinese Mythology: A Selection of Writings*], ed. Ma Changyi 馬昌儀 (Beijing: Zhongguo chuangbo dianshi chubanshi, 1994), 18.

10 層累地造成的中國古史.

11 Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, *Yu Qian xuan tong xiansheng lun gu shishu* 與錢玄同先生論古史書 [*Discussions on Books on Ancient History with Qian Xuantong*] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Educational Publishing House, 2003), 4, 169.

history. Only then will it be possible to correctly apprehend Chinese culture and its narrative foundations, such as the sacred narratives constituted by the ancient legends of the Three August Ones and the Five Lords [*sanhuangwudi*, 三皇五帝].

The Advantages of Adopting the Concept of Sacred Narrative

The previous section shows that, for people in ancient China, mythology and pre-Qin history shared the same function. However, to stop there would create another problem, because the line distinguishing ancient history and mythology would fade away.

In reality, these forms of narrative and their content have an important distinction: ancient history is concerned with historical narration and portrays human protagonists, while myths assign the main role to gods. Even though legends from ancient history occasionally also have certain supernatural qualities, those tales remain, in the final analysis, worlds apart from the supernaturalism found in myths. For this reason, when Confucius answered the question of whether the Yellow Emperor really was "four-faced" (i.e., whether he actually had four faces), he had to dispel the supernatural aspect of the Yellow Emperor and interpret this expression as indicating the four men who appear similar to the emperor and, for this reason, were sent to other parts of the country in order to represent and assist him.[12] Moreover, Sima Qian's 司馬遷 [b. 145 BCE] *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記], which is considered a comprehensive history of China, does not open on a description of the mythological and excessively colorful Three August Ones (san huang) but, rather, begins with the "Annals of the Five Emperors [Wudibenji 五帝本紀]."

Therefore, mythological and historical narratives differ in content, but after they are analyzed based on their shared social function and the points in which they can be distinguished are clearly defined, they both fall under the concept of sacred narrative. In other words, with regard to their social function, ancient Chinese history and Western mythology are equivalent. This is Lü Wei's opinion: he believes that the essence of myth lies in its social function and is not determined by its content. With regard to disparities in content, Lü affirms that the legends found in ancient historical texts are the result of historicizing primitive myths,

12 Shi Zi 尸子section, in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*], scroll 79.

> but the legends from ancient history retained the faith that myths had inspired, and continued to perform multiple functions such as acting as an authoritative discourse and setting a foundation for the transmission of values. In this sense, these legends are a particular manner of formulating the Chinese classical myths.[13]

In the "Mythology Chapter" in the *History of Chinese Folk Literature*, Lü convincingly demonstrates that the imperial system depicted in the legends taken from historical texts served as a sacred narrative during the era of the Eastern Zhou dynasty [770-256 BCE]. Lü's remark that "these legends are a particular manner of formulating the Chinese classical myths" is certainly worthy of consideration, as it reinforces the distinction between mythology and ancient history. However, the expression "Chinese classical myths" seems to transmute "myth" into a synonym for "sacred narrative." As a widespread adherence in the academic world to the demarcation between mythology and ancient history already exists, Lü's perspective on the matter is unsatisfying.

Because we need a concept that is able to embrace both narrative forms, the term "sacred narrative," which can refer to both mythology and ancient history, appears appropriate. In fact, the term originates in the social function emphasized in Malinowski's definition of myth. We are thus converting it into a new concept that refers to a fundamental narrative form on which society and culture depend for their existence.

By recognizing previous practices of narrating remote antiquity, this concept attests to the legitimacy of the social order and its system of values and thus consists in "a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom." Because of the difference between society and culture, sacred narrative can adopt a variety of narrative forms, whether myths, epics, or ancient history.

According to this concept, myths and legends in ancient history constitute two fundamental forms of sacred narratives that retain their respective characteristics in terms of content (thereby preserving the demarcation line established by the academic world between ancient history and myth). In other words, we can say that in ancient China two types of sacred narrative existed, the first concerning the relatively scattered and disorganized tales of the supernatural (i.e., myths) and the second made up of the legends in ancient historical records, which by contrast are complete and organized systematically. The latter prevailed in ancient Chinese societies.

13 Lü, "Shenhuapian," 4.

Considering those historical legends Chinese sacred narrative enables us to clearly recognize this society's narrative foundations and their important social impact. The state, the nation, and the cultural values represented by the Three August Ones and the Five Lords of the historical legends are in reality the cultural bases of Chinese traditional society. Those figures were regarded as the sages of remote antiquity, and their stories established them as models to be followed, in addition to laying the foundations for the social structure and state system of ancient China. For this reason, the Three August Ones and the Five Lords were far more influential in Chinese history (including the history of its literature) than mythology. In fact, these legends definitely compare favorably with the impact that ancient Greek mythology had on Western history. Adopting the concept of sacred narrative should certainly settle the problems brought about by the use of the concept of myth to research Chinese ancient history. In comparison with the scattered and unsystematic myths, which enjoy a lower cultural status, the ancient historical legends are not only far more complete and systematic but also have far-reaching effects on Chinese ancient society, providing ample support for the legitimation and consolidation of its social structure.

Moreover, regarding Chinese history as a sacred narrative could also resolve some issues in historical research. After the Doubting Antiquity School [*Gushibianpai*, 古史辨派] identified the fictitious nature of ancient historical legends, a majority of historians decided that, based on scientific principles, these legends were unworthy of attention because they were considered the result of the rulers' falsification of history. Although those scholars obviously respected scientific principles in doing so (because they viewed ancient history as a narrative created by man and because this narrative could not be considered a reliable record of historical events as they truly happened), the fact remains that this scientific method is flawed because it overlooks the social function and system of values embodied in ancient history as a sacred narrative. In spite of the fact that ancient history was written by men, it earned the recognition and support of people living in those times and was handed down for a significant amount of time. It clearly corresponded to the society's requirements at the time, and therefore it must have embodied certain mechanisms specific to the period's social structure and spiritual life. If this material is deemed useless, the historians' understanding of ancient societies would certainly remain superficial. We opted for the concept of sacred narrative to study ancient history: not only to establish the veracity of its narrative content itself but also to research its sacred social function. In order to spur further historical research, we must thus rescue this precious historical material that has previously been discarded by the academic world.

Remaining Doubts Concerning the Concept of Sacred Narrative

The definition of myth as a sacred narrative is not endorsed unanimously by mythologists. The questions raised by those critics can obviously influence the concept of sacred narrative, which is favored here and embraces both myths and ancient narratives. We thus examine those objections, in order to clarify the points on which we differ.

Scholars first problematized the concept of sacred narrative in the field of mythology studies.

Yang Lihui considered that the sacredness of myth was far from universal and that it was not found in the essence of myth. She determined that defining myth as a sacred narrative would not benefit research on Chinese classical myths because those myths are fragmented, scattered, and, more often than not, lack context; therefore, there is no way to assess their sacredness. According to Yang, persisting with this definition would lead to a disparity between the actual reality of the object and its conceptualization—that is, the term used would not correspond to the material and the facts. There is also a risk that oral myths that are not intrinsically sacred but still circulating today would be excluded. Therefore, she defends the "minimum definition" of myth put forward by Thompson.[14] Indeed, the definition of myth as a sacred narrative would certainly be inadequate if the myths' sacredness depended on whether they were narrated by shamans and whether they were performed in a ceremony. At this level, I do endorse her opinion. However, Yang's criticism does not stop there. The above-mentioned criticism concerning research on classical myths and folk myths is ill-founded and unreasonable. Although it is true that the bleak state of Chinese classical myths makes it extremely difficult to study their sacredness, this problem was not created by defining myths as sacred narratives. In fact, the flaws presented by classical records were produced by history (Malinowski refers to this material as having been "mummified"—that is, myths that have been revised by later generations).[15] Therefore, it would be unfair to criticize this definition for not conforming to reality. It is even more necessary to adhere to it in order to remind researchers that they must pay attention to the fact that data are incomplete and that they should refrain from offering in-depth interpretations. If we decide to adopt the "minimal definition" of myth as a way to take into account the lack of material, it would open the door to arbitrary interpretations. Chinese classical myths have long been the playground of every school of thought and deciphering

14 Yang, "Shenhua yiding shi shensheng de xushi ma?" 85-86.

15 Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life," 199.

ancient texts according to personal preference has become a common practice. It seems to me that this was precisely brought about by overlooking the sacredness of myths. Nowadays, the degree of people's faith in myths varies. Accordingly, the degree of sacredness that can be perceived when myths are narrated orally depends on who is telling the story, to the point that even banter could be included. Nevertheless, this fact is not sufficient to negate the sacredness of myth. To refute this criticism, it merely suffices to regard the oral material that does not present any sacred quality as the borrowing of myths for other purposes.

In order to present a practical definition of myth that would be neither too narrow nor too broad, Yang later slightly modified Thompson's "minimal definition" of the concept of myth so that it encompasses more aspects:

> Myth is a narrative that has to do with deities, a people's earliest ancestors, cultural heroes or sacred animals and their activities; it provides an explanation for the origin of the universe, humanity (which includes deities and specific ethnic communities) and its culture as well as the original establishment of the current social order.[16]

This definition alludes to the sacred character of myth. Which of the "deities, people's earliest ancestors, cultural heroes, or sacred animals" does not possess sacredness? If the origin of all living things and the establishment of the current order are divorced from sacredness, how can we determine the boundary between myths and the magical stories found in children's fairytales? Skirting the aspect of sacredness poses scholars with a difficult theoretical conundrum.

Myths appeal to the entire population; they can be approached from various angles, and their social function is multifaceted. Research on myths touches upon many branches of learning, and according to their respective needs, all those disciplines proceed from different bases. Consequently, it is to be expected that they would provide different definitions of myth. For example, research on classical literature emphasizes textual analysis and the analysis of symbols, therefore it is understandable that the literary studies' definition of myth reflects relatively less of its sacredness. However, anthropology and folklore studies need to confront the totality of humanity's culture and life. If we disregard the sacred social function, we are likely to forfeit the theoretical bases that allow us to analyze the relation between mythology and social life.

16 Yang Lihui, *Shenhua yu shenhua xue* 神話與神話學 [*Myths and Mythology*] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 5.

At the very least, we would sacrifice our discipline's expertise and advantage in the research of myths.

Finally, we need to discuss the use of the concept of sacred narrative when researching ancient Chinese history.

Some scholars call into question the characterization of ancient Chinese history as a sacred narrative, their reasoning being that if ancient history is regarded as a sacred narrative, then so should the history that follows. After we consider the purpose and the social function of later historical narratives, it becomes apparent that they are all sacred narratives.

The act of writing history has never consisted of a mere objective recording of events. Confucius compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu* 春秋], and his style can certainly be discerned, because, in the process of narrating facts, he necessarily inserted his personal moral judgment through the selection of laudatory or derogatory terms. For this reason, it is said in the *Mencius* [*Mengzi* 孟子] that "Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and rebellious ministers and villainous sons were struck with terror."[17]

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* were not an objective historical record; on the contrary, they were a sacred narrative that reflected Confucius' system of traditional values. The fact that they became one of the Confucian classics amply corroborates the sacred narrative quality of this historical record. In fact, not only ancient history but also the history of succeeding dynasties are sacred narratives, which explains why the past dynasties' imperial courts sought to monopolize the recording of national history.[18]

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17 Mencius, "The Works of Mencius," in *The Chinese Classics,* trans. James Legge (Taipei: SMC, 2001), 2:283.

18 On this subject, see Chen Lianshan 陳連山, "Zouchu xifang shenhua de yinying 走出西方神話的陰影 [To Escape Western Mythology's Shadow]," *Changjiang daxue xuebao, shehui xue ke ban* 6 (2007).

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Researching the Image of the Yellow Emperor in China's Early Textual Sources and Archaeological Materials

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Abstract

In China's early textual sources and archaeological materials, the Yellow Emperor 黃帝 appears in the following three contexts: in genealogical records, among predynastic rulers, and in sacrificial rituals. The earliest appearance of the Yellow Emperor is probably in genealogical records; then, after being an ancestral ruler, he becomes the earliest emperor and a legendary ruler. This demonstrates his shift from an ancestral context to a monarchic context and illustrates the gradual yet colossal shift in ancient Chinese political thought from a system of enfeoffment built on blood relations to a system of prefectures and counties based on regional ties. The image of the Yellow Emperor in the context of sacrifice is closely linked to the yin-yang and five elements theories beginning in the later stage of the Warring States period; as society developed, this image also became associated with a certain Daoist path, thereby acquiring a religious value.

Keywords

ancient rulers – genealogy – *Huang di* – sacrificial rites – Yellow Emperor

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Introduction

Among the Daoist classics, one genre builds specifically on the myth of the Yellow Emperor 黃帝.

> Unlike the *Laozi* 老子, which is one of a kind, the Yellow Emperor literature is a genre of texts with a common characteristic: they are all based on the legend of the emperor. Daoist texts such as the *Guanzi* 管子, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子; Legalist texts such as the *Book of Lord Shang* [*Shang jun shu* 商君書], the *Shēnzi* 申子, the *Shenzi* 愼子, and the *Han Feizi* 韓非子; and various other writings, such as the *Shizi* 尸子 and *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋], the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaijing* 山海經], the medical book *The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* [*Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經], war manuals by Sunzi 孫子 and Wei Liaozi 尉繚子, as well as the *Zuo Commentaries* [*Zuo zhuan* 左傳], the *Discourses of the States* [*Guoyu* 國語], the *Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記, and the *Book of Rites* [*Liji* 禮記], and the apocrypha, or *weishu* 緯書, of the Han dynasty—all tell stories of the Yellow Emperor. Not only are these widely accepted accounts that have been handed down orally, but they have also developed into a body of literary works.[1]

In the Han dynasty [202 BCE-220 CE], Huang-Lao 黃老 was often used as a combined concept, "Huang" for the Yellow Emperor and "Lao" for Laozi. But how were they connected? In order to shed some light on our fuzzy understanding of Yellow Emperor literature and the "Huang" in "Huang-Lao," this study examines early textual sources and archaeological materials.

Cautious use of data is crucial in investigating the image of the Yellow Emperor, because the choice of material is bound to have a strong impact on the conclusion reached. It is necessary to take note of the following three factors when selecting sources: first, the status of some materials from the pre-Qin and Qin [221-207 BCE] through Han dynasties within traditional authentication studies; second, the need to identify the most convincing sources on an ancient historical, legendary character such as the Yellow Emperor; and, third, the influence of contemporary discussions of ancient history. Regarding research in ancient history, the remote Yellow Emperor remains, of course, unrecoverable, even to archaeologists: only sites dating to the era of the Five Emperors, which he represents, can provide vague proof of his existence.

1 Li Ling 李零, "Shuo 'Huanglao' 說 '黃老'", in *Li Ling zixuanji* 李零自選集 [*Li Ling's Self-Selected Works*] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), 278.

Therefore, to this day, he exists only in ancient legends. Because at the time that early Chinese documentation was written it was not easy to settle on the chronological order, accounts of the same event in different documents often do not correspond with one another; legends are not factual history and therefore are almost impossible to date correctly. According to Li Ling,

> Ancient legends can be classified as follows: first, those that rely on sacrificial rites, since in antiquity people were very thorough in observing funeral rites and sacrifices for ancestors, essentially as a way of tracing their roots; second, in aristocratic education at the time, a lot of weight was placed on the teaching of "lineage [*shi* 世]"; third, genealogy from the era of the legend includes blood relations, relations by marriage, as well as fictive kinship; fourth is that the system of ancient sacrificial rites was based on blood relations, but could also consider relations by marriage, and fictive kinship.[2]

Considering Li Ling's observations, then, if one starts with different kinds of materials and explores the image of the Yellow Emperor in genealogy, among ancient rulers, and in sacrificial rites, what will emerge? Of course, these three contexts serve as only a rough categorization, as the boundaries between them are not fixed and can be crossed: it is only the perspective that changes.

The Yellow Emperor in the Ancestral Context

The first reliable accounts of the Yellow Emperor in early writings or archaeological resources date roughly from the Warring States period [475-221 BCE]. The Marquis of Chen Yin *Dui* 敦 bronze vessel inscription, which is well known to scholars and dates from the early stages of the mid-Warring States period [475-221 BCE], mentions the Yellow Emperor as follows:

> On the first month of the *guiwei* 癸未 year, the Marquis of Chen said: the strategy of my father, Duke Huan of Qi, will be successful since he carried forward the achievements of his remote ancestor, the Yellow Emperor; now I am succeeding my father in his undertaking, paying visits to feudal lords, paying back his kindness. The lords presented me with good bronze ware; I have made a ritual bronze vessel of it in honor of my father and

2 Li Ling, "Chutu faxian yu gushu niandai de zairenshi 出土發現與古書年代的再認識," in *Li Ling zixuanji*, 49-52.

> thereby protect the State of Qi, hoping that generations of descendants will forever continue to take care of it and cherish it.[3]

The "Marquis of Chen" 陳侯 in this epigraph is Yinqi 嬰齊, King Wei of Qi, and Duke Huan is his father, Huan Gongwu 桓公午. According to this inscription, the lineage of King Wei of Qi can be traced back to the Yellow Emperor. Chen's ancestral surname Gui 嬀, originally descendants of the Yu 虞 clan, was not among the twelve surnames of Yellow Emperor descendants (see "Discourses of Jin No. 4," in *Discourses of the States*), but the inscription mentions the Yellow Emperor as being Chen Qi's "remote ancestor," which corresponds precisely to the imperial ancestor worship found in the "Discourses of Lu."[4] This was, of course, consistent with lineage records. But another reason may have been that the State of Qi

> was originally founded by ancestors named Jiang 姜. This was after the Flame Emperor [Yan Di 炎帝]. Between the end of the Spring and Autumn period [771-476 BCE] and the start of the Warring States period, the Jiang clan was gradually replaced by the Tian clan from the state of Chen. At the time of King Wei of Qi, it was not long since the Jiang clan had been deposed, hence his "forefather the Yellow Emperor" defines his lineage, on the one hand, to make a clear distinction from the Jiang; on the other hand, this may also have been a way to identify with other vassal states in order to make a struggle for supremacy seem reasonable.[5]

Tracing back the ancestral lineage, the legend of the Yellow Emperor defeating the Flame Emperor therefore served to prove the legitimacy of the Tian clan's taking the place of the Jiang clan. The bamboo-slip text "Wu Wang Ascends the Throne," which dates from the mid-Warring States period and is part of a collection at the Shanghai Museum, also mentions the Yellow Emperor: "King Wu asked his teacher, Shang Fu: does the Way of the Yellow Emperor, of Emperor Zhuanxu 顓頊, of Emperors Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 still exist? I wonder whether

3 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "Liangzhou jinwenci daxi kaoshi 兩周金文辭大系考釋," in *Guo Moruo quanji* (*kaogu bian*) 郭沫若全集(考古編)[*The Complete Works of Guo Moruo* (*Archaeology*)] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2002), 8:464. Not all the contents are from this source, as other similar sources have also been consulted.

4 Li Ling, "Kaogu faxian yu shenhua chuanshuo 考古發現與神話傳說," in *Li Ling zixuanji*, 72.

5 Wang Bo 王博, "Huangdi sijing he guanzi sipian '黃帝四經' 和 管子' 四篇," in *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 [*Researching Daoist Culture*], ed. Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 211.

it has not been lost forever."[6] Tomb no. 56 at the Jiudian site in Jiangling, Hubei, contained bamboo slips from the later Warring States period, of which section 7 mentions the Yellow Emperor, though its brevity and lacunae make it hard to interpret: 東、北高，二方下，黃帝□宮，庶民居之.[7]

The title "Yellow Emperor" started to emerge frequently in documentation from after the mid-Warring States period, often to record the Yellow Emperor's lineage. In the chapters on "Imperial Genealogies," "Biographies," and "Clan Names" in the *Book of Origins* [*Shiben* 世本], extensive mention is made of the Yellow Emperor and his descendants: "the Yellow Emperor of the Youxiong 有熊 clan married Leizu 嫘祖 of the Xiling 西陵 clan, who gave birth to Qingyang 青陽 and Changyi 昌邑." "The Yellow Emperor fathered Xuanxiao 玄囂, who then had a son, Jiaoji 僑極, who in turn had a son called Di Ku 帝嚳." "The Yellow Emperor had a son called Changyi, whose son Zhuanxu fathered Gun 鯀. Gun married Nüzhi 女志 of the Youxin 有辛 clan, who gave birth to Gaomi 高密."[8] Similar accounts are in the chapters "Imperial Genealogies" and "Virtue of Imperial Genealogies" in the *Da Dai liji*, which are even more detailed than the aforementioned sections in the *Book of Origins*.

Such records about the Yellow Emperor can be divided into two branches. The first is that of Xuanxiao 玄囂, from which Di Ku and Yao stem. The second is that of Changyi, from which Zhuanxu and Shun originate.

> In establishing the connection between the *di* 帝 of the Zhou and the *di* of the Tang, the Shun, the Xia, and the Shang, we can call it the imperial lineage of the Zhou. In fact the sacrificial system mentioned in the *Discourses of the States*: "Discourses of Lu, Part 1," and in the section "Law of Sacrifices" of the *Book of Rites* (that is, the Yellow Emperor originating from Yu and Xia, and Di Ku from Shang and Zhou) does indeed reflect this lineage.[9]

6 Chen Peifen 陳佩芬, "Wu Wang Jianzuo 武王踐祚," in *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 [*Chu-Script Bamboo Slip Manuscripts in the Shanghai Museum Collection*], vol. 7, ed. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008). For annotation see p. 151.

7 Hubei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 湖北省文物考古研究所 and Department of Chinese Language, Peking University 北京大學中文系, ed., *Jiu dian chu jian* 九店楚簡 [*The Jiudian Chu-Script Bamboo Slip Manuscripts*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), p. 14 for plate, p. 51 for annotation, and p. 114 for analysis.

8 Song Zhong 宋衷 and Wang Mo 王謨, *Shiben jiben* 世本輯本 [*Book of Origins: Collection*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 3, 6, and 7.

9 Li, "Kaogu faxian yu shenhua chuanshuo," 71.

The issue of the Yellow Emperor's lineage is also mentioned in the "Discourses of Jin, No. 4," in *Discourses of the States*: "Of the Yellow Emperor's twenty-five sons, fourteen gained their own surnames. There were twelve clan names: Ji 姬, You 酉, Qi 祁, Ji 己, Teng 滕, Zhen 箴, Ren 任, Gou 苟, Xi 僖, Ji 姞, Xuan 儇, and Yi 依. Only Qingyan 青陽, and Cang Lin 蒼林 had the same family name as the Yellow Emperor: all were of the Ji clan."[10] However, looking at related records in the *Book of Origins* and the *Da Dai liji*, the sons of the Yellow Emperor were not as numerous as stated in the *Discourses of the States*, so this clearly comes from a different narrative tradition, and this point in the *Discourses* was carried on in Sima Qian's [b. 145 BCE] "Annals of the Five Emperors," in the *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記] and in Wang Fu's "The Zhi Clan," in *Comments of a Recluse* [*Qian fu lun* 潛夫論]; part of the contents of the "Table of Prominent People, Past and Present" in the *History of the Han* [*Hanshu* 漢書] are also related.

Moreover, some chapters in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*—the "Classic of the Great Wilderness: East [Dahuang dongjing 大荒東經]," the "Classic of the Great Wilderness: West [Dahuang xijing 大荒西經]" and the "Classic of Regions within the Seas [Hainei jing 海內經]"—also discuss this topic, but these accounts are not in the mainstream of early documentation. They are considerably different from records in the *Book of Origins* and the *Da Dai li ji*, except for mention of the Yellow Emperor's wife being called Lei Zu 雷祖 (i.e., the aforementioned Lei Zu 嫘祖), which is to some extent consistent with these writings. The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* seems to illustrate the mighty rule of the Yellow Emperor through the regions of his descendants. This point of view emphasizes regional management through ties of consanguinity.

Why, then, did the number of records on the Yellow Emperor's lineage increase after the middle of the Warring States period? Li Ling believes that "in the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, the importance of ties of consanguinity was overtaken by, and thinned down by, that of regional ties. The more chaotic lineages became, the more people felt the need to put them in the foreground."[11] Furthermore, according to Wang Mingke,

> genealogies and family lineages are the "history" of a community linked by blood ties. Documenting them in writing allows a community to vehemently affirm its existence and to announce its ties with the wider Chinese

10 Xu Yuanhao 徐元誥, *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 [*Collected Commentary on the Discourses of the States*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 334-335.

11 Li, "Shuo 'huanglao'," 281.

> society. The conservation and handing down of such documents caused this kind of declaration and easily became the focus of social identity.[12]

Precisely this emphasis on genealogy, therefore, explains the need, within the disorganized lineage system at the time, for an image allowing for ethnic identification: the Yellow Emperor was adapted to this need.

Again, considering the aforementioned records in the *Discourses of the States*, fourteen of the Yellow Emperor's sons gained their own surname. A clan is an ethnic unit based on consanguineous ties; units that formed around a single surname were quite large, while clans were relatively small. Looking at the Shang [approx. 1600-1046 BCE] through Zhou [1046-256 BCE] dynasties surname and clan system, "from the Western Zhou until before the middle of the Spring and Autumn period, common people certainly had neither family names nor clan names: that was altered by the implementation of the practice of bestowing the imperial family name as a reward. After the mid-Spring and Autumn period, following the collapse of the patriarchal clan hierarchy system, aristocratic surnames spread among the people, and slowly common people also began to use surnames, which gradually brought about the popularity of surnames."[13] The period from mere descriptions of the Yellow Emperor's lineage in the *Book of Origins* and the *Da Dai liji* to the account of his sons gaining surnames in the *Discourses of the States* covers a change: the passage from tribal clans to a pattern of governing a nation by means of an enfeoffment system based on blood relations.

The Yellow Emperor as an Ancient Ruler

The materials we have relied on to discuss the position of the Yellow Emperor in the context of lineage are "origin"-related texts dating from pre-Qin through Han times. The question of his position among ancient rulers is more complex. Materials I have used for this part are mostly pre-Qin documents, except for "origin"-related ones, because the object of my discussion emerges in a variety of situations.

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12 Wang Mingke 王明珂, "Lun Panfu: Jindai yan huang zisun guozu jiangou de gudai jichu 論攀附：近代炎黃子孫國族建構的古代基礎," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 73, no. 3 (2002): 610.

13 Chen Jie 陳絜, *Shang-Zhou xingshi zhidu yanjiu* 商周姓氏制度研究 [*Researching the Surnaming System in the Shang through Zhou Dynasties*] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 428.

When pre-Qin educators looked back at their origins to compile texts, they were extremely keen on commending ancient sages and praising their rule and made this their theoretical narration strategy. Confucian classics repeatedly commend the figures Yao, Shun, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, and Wen 文; the Confucian doctrine was being established, and these are all images of sages to which it was persistently traced back. As in the "Canon of Yao [Yao dian 堯典]," "Counsels of Gao Tao [Gao yao mo 皋陶謨]," "Tribute of Yu [Yu gong 禹貢]" and other similar sections in the *Book of Documents*, "Emperor Yao Said [Yao yue 堯曰]" and "Tai Bo 泰伯" in the *Analects*, "Wan Zhang 萬章" and "Jinxin 盡心" in the *Mengzi*, and Xunzi's work *Chengxiang* 成相, these all contain a similar rhetoric. The same goes for the Mohist school, only with a twist that sets it apart from Confucianism, in that it praises the Xia dynasty rather than the Zhou dynasty. However, just as stated in the "Xianxue 顯學" chapter of the *Hanfeizi*, "Confucius and Mozi all discuss Yao and Shun";[14] similar contents are also found in the sections "Suoran 所染," "Sanbian 三辯," "Shangxian 尚賢," "Tiangzhi zhong 天志中," "Tianzhi xia 天志下," "Minggui 明鬼," and "Guiyi 貴義" in the *Mozi*. The teachings of the yin-yang school in the Warring States period begin with the Yellow Emperor in the "Biographies of Mencius and Xunzi [Mengzi xun qing liezhuan 孟子荀卿列傳]" in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. Zou Yan 鄒衍

> did an in-depth study of changes in the Universe, its bizarre and tortuous transformations; he wrote over ten thousand characters in his essays "Zhongshi 終始" and "Dasheng 大聖." The contents are absurd and illogical. He studied all things, starting his survey from the very small to the greatest objects, to the point that there were no limits; he started with the present and went all the way back to the Yellow Emperor. This became a method used by all scholars.[15]

Yin-yang scholars based their discussions on the Yellow Emperor. All the above clearly shows that scholars were in the habit of incorporating narratives about ancient rulers in their discussions. Meng Wentong once commented on three of the pre-Qin schools of philosophy, pointing out that they often traced their theories back to the ancient sage kings, saying that the Legalists spoke of the ancient kings as working diligently to bring benefit to the people;

14 Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, Hanfeizi *xin jiao zhu* 韓非子新校注 [*A New Critical Annotation to the* Hanfeizi] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 1124.

15 Sima Qian 司馬遷, Pei Yin 裴駰, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, Zhang Shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 2344.

the Daoists spoke of the ancient kings in obscure and exaggerated terms; the Confucians spoke of them as being wise and benevolent.[16] On the basis of Gu Jiegang's doubts about the titles of ancient emperors, Liu Qiyu states that these imperial titles were created as scholars completed the compilation of ancient legends at the end of the Warring States period.[17]

When the Yellow Emperor is mentioned in early textual sources, it is generally as part of the combined designation of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. Of these, the "Three Sovereigns" stands for Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神農, and the Yellow Emperor 黃帝. We find this interpretation in texts such as the preface to the *Book of Documents*, the commentary on the "Annals of the Five Emperors [Wu di benji 五帝本紀]" in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the preface to the *Wuxing dayi* [五行大義], as well as the *Liwei jiming zheng* [禮緯稽命征].

Accounts that place the Yellow Emperor among the Five Emperors are far more frequent. The following interpretations of the Five Emperors are mentioned in early texts:

1. Those with the Yellow Emperor as the supreme one. (a) After him come Emperors Zhuanxu, Di Ku 帝嚳, Yao, and Shun. This interpretation is from the "Annals of the Five Emperors," and was largely adopted in later times. (b) The Yellow Emperor, Shao Hao 少皞, Zhuanxu, Di Ku, Yao, and Shun. In this version, the "Five Emperors" are actually six. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 [127-200] of the Eastern Han dynasty remarked in the "Chi sheng tu [敕省圖]" of the *Shangshu zhonghou* [尚書中候]:

> Those whose virtue correlates with the polestar are all called Sovereigns; the *Yundoushu* [運鬥樞] states that the Three Sovereigns are Fuxi 伏羲, Nüwa 女媧, and Shennong 神農. Those whose virtue correlates with the Five Celestial Seats constellation are called Emperors; the Yellow Emperor, Jin Tian, Gao Yang, Gao Xin, Tao Tang, and You Yu can all be called Emperors. They are called five but are in fact six, because they all match the Five Celestial Seats.[18]

16 Meng Wentong 蒙文通, *Gushi zhen wei* 古史甄微 [*A Thorough Examination of Ancient History*] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1999), 22.

17 Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, "Woguo gushi chuanshuo shiqi zongkao 我國古史傳說時期綜考," in *Gushi xubian* 古史續辨 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), 23-24.

18 Kong Anguo 孔安國 and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Shangshu zhengyi, shisan jing zhushu* 尚書正義，十三經注疏, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), 113.

2. Those where the Yellow Emperor is placed in the middle. (a) Fuxi, Shennong, Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun. "The House of Zhao [Zhao shi jia 趙世家]" in the *Records of the Grand Historian* says: "Fuxi and Shennong educated, but did not punish; the Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun carried out punishment, but not excessively."[19] This version is also used in the section "Xici xia [繫辭下]" of the *Book of Changes*. (b) Tai Hao, Yan Di, Yellow Emperor, Shao Hao, and Zhuanxu. The Twelve Almanacs in *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* divide into five emperors and five gods within four seasons. More specifically, as follows: Tai Hao-Ju Mang, Yan Di-Zhurong, Huangdi-Houtu, Shao Hao-Rushou, Zhuanxu-Xuanming. The "Yueling jie [月令解]" in the *Yizhou shu* [逸周書] and the chapter "Yueling [月令]" in the *Book of Rites* are identical to this tradition. (c) Tai Hao, Gong Gong, Yan Di, Yellow Emperor, Shao Hao, Zhuanxu. This version also includes Gong Gong, that is, six rather than five rulers. "The seventeenth year of the reign of Duke Zhao" in the *Zuo Commentaries* also makes mention of Tanzi 郯子 telling officials to make records of the Yellow Emperor, Yan Di, Gong Gong, Tai Hao, Shao Hao, and Zhuanxu.

These accounts of the Five Emperors "were very popular with numerologists, since they matched the five directions and five colors."[20] In the eyes of many ancient scholars, they also stood for a regional distinction. The States of Qi and Lu in the east had the Yellow Emperor, Zhuanxu, Di Ku, Yao and Shun as Five Emperors, and the State of Qin in the west recognized Tai Hao, Yan Di, the Yellow Emperor, Shao Hao and Zhuanxu.[21]

Moreover, certain ancient rulers were also mentioned in unearthed scripts. Referring to the *Rongcheng shi* 容成氏 bamboo slips in the Warring States period in the Shanghai Museum collection, Li Ling says, "this text contains legends of ancient rulers. . . . the first part of it tells of *Rongcheng shi*, and some others of the most remote emperors (there are twenty-one of them)."[22] The background from which these rulers emerged is probably also related to the wider backdrop of scholars from the mid-late Warring States period basing their theories on, and seeking deep meaning from, ancient rulers. Opinions in academic circles are still inconsistent as to the affiliation of these schools of

19 *Shiji*, 1810.

20 Li Ling, "Kaogu faxian yu shenhua chuanshuo 考古發現與神話傳說 [Archaeological Finds and Mythological Traditions]," in *Li Ling zixuanji*, 71.

21 Xu Xusheng 徐旭生, *Zhongguo gushide chuanshuo shidai* 中國古史的傳說時代 [*The Age of Myth in Ancient Chinese History*] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1960), 238-243.

22 Li Ling, "Rongcheng shi shuoming 容成氏 • 說明," in *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, ed. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 2:249.

thought. Li Xueqin believes that "accounts of abdication and ancient historical legends in the *Rongcheng shi* may have been included to further the interests of political strategists in the Warring States period.'"[23] Guo Yongbing thinks that "the text does not put any emphasis on the genealogical links between ancient rulers themselves, those between them and Yao and Shun, or those between them and three generations of their ancestors. This is very different from the one precise origin given for each imperial clan, as in the 'Imperial Genealogy 帝系.'"[24] Cao Feng also points out that the "Empress" [Huanghou 皇后] mentioned in the section "Three Virtues [Sande 三德]" on the bamboo strips at the Shanghai Museum is in fact also the Yellow Emperor,[25] which would seem plausible. In fact, also in these archaeological finds, the Yellow Emperor seems to be being portrayed as an ancient ruler.

Because the Warring States philosophers were in a constant state of debate with one another, competing for polemic advantage, their arguments often contained much exaggeration, speculation, and even defamation. These factors make the various accounts of the Yellow Emperor inconsistent and confusing. As to whether he was an ancient ruler and where he fit in the pantheon with all the other ancient rulers, this, too, was often up to speculation. One scholar pointed out, "In antiquity, many prehistoric rulers and sovereigns were mentioned, and they were mostly mentioned on a par with one another, except for occasional differences on when they had lived; no differences were made as to their ranking. In these accounts they are all on an equal level."[26] Precisely for this reason, I find that so-called imperial genealogy is unreliable and therefore unsuitable as a historical source, although it provides a rather interesting research angle for understanding scholars' thoughts and attitudes toward ancient rulers.

Because portrayals of the Yellow Emperor as an ancient ruler do exist, an entourage of officials and ministers becomes indispensable. Among the Yellow Emperor's officials were Qifu 七輔, Sifu 四輔, Sixiang 四相 (the official in

23 Li Xueqin 李學勤 and Liu Guozhong 劉國忠, "Jianbo shujide faxian ji qi yiyi 簡帛書籍的發現及其意義," in *Zhongguo gudai wenming yanjiu* 中國古代文明研究, ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 307.

24 Guo Yongbing 郭永秉, *Dixi xin yan: Chudi chutu zhanguo wenxian zhongde chuanshuo shidai gudiwang xitong yanjiu* 帝系新研——楚地出土戰國文獻中的傳說時代古帝王系統研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 221.

25 Cao Feng曹峰, "'Sande' suojian 'Huanghou' wei 'Huangdi' Kao 〈三德〉所見"皇后"為"黃帝"考 [Textual Research on the "Huanghou" in *Sande* Being Huangdi]," *Qilu Journal* 5 (2008).

26 Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, "Jici zuhe fenyun cuozade san huang wu di 幾次組合紛紜錯雜的三皇五帝," in *Gushi xubian* 古史续辨 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), 94.

charge of the universe), Sishi Guan 四史官, and Liuxiang 六相, as per Luo Mi's [1131-1189] *Lushi houji* [路史・後紀], which describes setting up ministers in their posts.[27] Discussions on the Yellow Emperor in the *Four History Classic* [*Sishi* 四史] are less complex, as Wang Yinglin 王應麟 [1223-1296] of the Song dynasty [960-1279] notes in the *Xiaoxue gan zhu* [小學紺珠]: "The Yellow Emperor was recorded by four historiographers: Ju Song 沮誦, Cang Jie 倉頡, Li Shou 隸首, and Kong Jia 孔甲."[28]

Explanations by Confucius, and by researchers after him, on the Yellow Emperor's four ministers and four assistants connect them to his four faces. The emperor's four faces corresponded to four specific ministers and symbolized the four directions and the four seasons. Confucius gives the following explanation for the four faces: "the Yellow Emperor asked four people whose thoughts on running a country he shared to administer the four directions. These four people did not conspire and had a close relationship; they ruled successfully, and without prior agreement. These are the 'four faces'."[29] Li Xueqin agrees that, "in fact, the 'four faces' are the four ministers who assisted the Yellow Emperor in governing."[30] However, according to records in the section "Establishing the Mandate [Li ming 立命]" in the *Ten Great Classics* found at Mawangdui, the four faces had yet another meaning:

> Formerly the Yellow Emperor made observing Daoism a priority and made sincerity a moral excellence; he built a portrait based on his appearance; having four faces on all sides but only one mind meant that what the faces saw helped the mind think, so the Emperor could then carefully inspect all the twelve directions of the earth—three in the front, three in the back, three at the left, and three at the right; thus he was able to be the ruler of the world.[31]

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27 Luo Mi 羅泌 and Wu Hongji 吳弘基, *Chongding lu shi quanben* 重訂路史全本, Book 4, Riben zaodaotian daxue cang qingyoushan tang keben, 4b.

28 Wang Yinglin 王應麟, "Xiaoxue ganzhu 小學紺珠," in *Congshu jicheng chu bian* 叢書集成初編 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 177-178.

29 Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), scroll 79, "Huangwang bu si yin shizi 皇王部四引尸子," 369, lower column.

30 Li Xueqin 李學勤, "*He Guanzi* yu Liang Zhong Boshu〈鶡冠子〉與兩種帛書 [He Guanzi and Two Kinds of Silk Manuscripts]," in *Jianbo yishu yu xueshushi* 簡帛佚書與學術史 [*Lost Silk Manuscripts and the History of Thought*] (Nanchang: Jiangxi Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001), 93.

31 Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Huangdi sijing jin zhu jin yi* 黃帝四經今注今譯 [*Existing Commentaries and Translations of the Yellow Emperor's Four Classics*] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 426.

This record is very interesting, as it suggests that there were four portraits of the Yellow Emperor. I believe that who the so-called four ministers, four assistants, and four historians actually were is irrelevant; what matters is why there are such people, because as a sage the Yellow Emperor governed through *wuwei* 無為 [inaction]. "Four faces" has to do with the standard requirements for sages in antiquity: "a characteristic of sages is that they were omniscient."[32] In ancient texts, the meaning of the character 聖 [*sheng*] was related to being intelligent, to listening. Having "four faces" made one sharp-eared and sharp-eyed enough: just as Laozi said, "Sages knew what was happening in the world without leaving the house and knew the Way without looking out of the window."[33] Therefore, if the fact that the Yellow Emperor could govern in peace and did not interfere with the world was thanks to the diligent work of all these ministers, it is highly likely that the tale of the Yellow Emperor's "four faces" came into being to recognize their work.

Early historical records show that the Yellow Emperor also had several teachers. The "Table of Prominent People, Past and Present [Gujin renbiao 古今人表]" in the *History of the Han* records the "teachers of the Yellow Emperor" as Feng Ju 封鉅, Da Tian 大填, and Da Shan Ji 大山稽";[34] the section "In Praise of Learning [*Zan xue* 贊學]," in *Comments of a Recluse* mentions "the Yellow Emperor's teacher Feng Hou 風后."[35] The bamboo slip "Liang Chen 良臣," kept at Tsinghua University, names his teachers Nühe 女和, Zhang Ren 章人,[36] and Bao Tong 保侗.[37] (These names are extremely rare in ancient documents.) These records on the Yellow Emperor's teachers are very diverse. The reason for this is that the sheer variety of documentation in which he is mentioned—ancient legends, accounts constructed by many people on countless occasions over time—caused people in antiquity to have many different ideas about the story.

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32 Li Ling 李零, *Qu sheng nai de zhen Kongzi: "Lunyu" zonghengdu* 去聖乃得真孔子：〈論語〉縱橫讀 (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2008), 115.

33 不出戶，知天下；不窺牖，見天道. Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注 [*Annotated Edition of the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 50.

34 Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 [*History of the Han*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 868.

35 Wang Fu王符, Wang Jipei 汪繼培, and Peng Duo 彭鐸, *Qianfulun jian jiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 1.

36 This *zhang* character should be written with a 黑 radical and 章 phonetic.

37 Research and Conservation Center for Excavated Texts, Tsinghua University 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心 and Li Xueqin 李學勤, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang zhanguo zhujian* Vol. 3 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2012), 2: 157.

Summing up on the image of the Yellow Emperor among ancient rulers, it was probably later generations that supported the version of him as having several ministers. Emerging from narratives of his political ideals and stories of technological inventions is also his monarchic image, which reflects the beginning of his efforts to set up a state. From the point of view of ancient legends, these accounts depict the stage when society transitioned from the disintegration of the clan system to the emergence of a state.

The Emperor in the Sacrificial Context

Some say that the designation "Yellow Emperor" stands for a deity. Ding Shan believes that oracle-bone script (Xu 續 5, 9 and 2; Tie 鐵 119, 12) mentions him as being a *huangshi* 黃示. According to him, "a straightforward interpretation for that *huang shi* is '*huangshen* 黃神,'" and "the Yellow Emperor of the Zhou dynasty, who derived from the *huangshi* of the Shang dynasty."[38] Thus the Yellow Emperor is actually a combination of the Earth God [Huangtu Dishen 黃土地神] and the Heavenly Ruler [Huangtian Shangdi 皇天上帝]. In oracle-bone script, the characters 矢 [*shi*], 黃 [*huang*], and寅 [*yin*] are quite easily mixed up, so it becomes rather difficult to establish the connection between *huangshi* 黃示 and *huangdi* 黃帝. Also, in Shang dynasty ideology, *di* 帝 is one with supreme powers, placed above everything else; Huangshi 黃示, Huangshen 黃神, or Huangdi 黃帝 do not appear to have as high a position. Therefore, in investigating the image of the Yellow Emperor in the sacrificial context, I do not use oracle-bone inscriptions as a source. When exploring this subject, it is actually rather difficult to avoid sources that I have used to look at the previous two images of the Yellow Emperor; I focus on material from the Former and Later Han period apocrypha and partly on textual material from archaeological finds.

The Five Color Emperors [Wuse di 五色帝], emperors of blue-green, vermilion red, white, black, and yellow, already appear in *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*. The twelve records in the *Annals* detail in full how the five elements are associated with numbers and beings, and this same system was continued in many Han apocrypha. Here the names of the emperors usually became Bluegreen Emperor Ling Weiyang 蒼帝靈威仰, Red Emperor Chi Biaonu 赤帝赤熛怒, Yellow Emperor Han Shuniu 黃帝含樞紐, White Emperor

38 Ding Shan 丁山, *Zhongguo gudai zongjiao yu shenhua kao* 中國古代宗教與神話考 [*An Exploration of Religions and Mythology in Ancient China*] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 420-423.

Bai Zhaoju 白帝白招矩, and Black Emperor Zhi Guangji 黑帝汁光紀. These five rulers were often associated with the five directions, the five elements, and the five planets. The same ideas are also picked up in the "Treatise on the Feng-Shan Sacrificial Ceremony [Feng-shan shu 封禪書]" in the *Records of the Grand Historian*; these are records on the establishment of places of worship under the Qin and Han dynasties: Duke Xiang of Qin sacrificed to the White Emperor in Xi 西, and Duke Wen of Qin sacrificed to him in Fu 鄜; Duke Xuan of Qin sacrificed to the Bluegreen Emperor in Mi 密, Duke Ling of Qin carried out the Shang 上 and Xia 下 rites to the Yellow Emperor and the Red Emperor in Wuyang 吳阳, and Duke Xian of Qin sacrificed to the White Emperor at Qi 畦. At the rise of the Han dynasty, sacrifices were made in the north to the Black Emperor. In the second year of the Han emperor Gaozu 高祖 [205 BCE], the Yellow, Red, Bluegreen, White, and Black Emperors were all recognized, and joint sacrifices were made to them. During Emperor Wen's reign, the alchemist Xin Yuanping of Zhao encouraged the emperor: "build a Five Emperor Temple on the northern bank of the Wei River, one hall for each emperor with five doors on each side, and each hall of the color of its emperor. The use of the sacrificial site and all ceremonies should also be like that at the five altars at Yong."[39] We know that Emperor Wen made sacrifices to the Five Emperors in the area surrounding the capital and on two occasions erected shrines to the Five Emperors; he toured the kingdom and made *feng-shan* 封禪 sacrifices, changed the reign name of his era, and hoped that the nine cauldrons of the Zhou dynasty would be rediscovered. Through these reforms in sacrificial rituals, Emperor Wen of Han established a base for the religious unification that later took place under Emperor Wu 武 of the Han [156-87 BCE].

The aim in religious unification under Emperor Wu of Han was that of establishing a religious system that could match the unification of a nation. In the first place, this carried forward Qin Shihuang's 秦始皇 [259-210 BCE] traditions, such as *feng-shan* rites, and make sacrifices at the Five Sacred Mountains [*Wu yue* 五嶽], the Five Altars at Yong, and *qibazhu* [齊八主]. Second, the aim was to found a large ancestral temple dedicated to the Great One [Dayi 太一], the God of Earth Houtu 后土, and the Five Emperors [*wudi* 五帝], and thereby unify minor religions by means of mainstream beliefs, and the old system by means of a new system.[40] Tian Tian has undertaken detailed research on

39 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 1382-1383.

40 Li Ling李零, "Zhongguo fangshu xukao 'xinban qianyan' 中國方術續考〈新版前言〉," in *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 9-10.

these actions of Emperor Wu of Han.[41] This great religious unification under Emperor Wu has left a lot of records in ancient scriptures on sacrificial offerings made to the Yellow Emperor. According to Li Ling's statistics, the Qin and the Han dynasties had 227 ancestral temples, of which 11 were dedicated to the Yellow Emperor.[42] These are direct observations from archaeological material on sacrifices to the Yellow Emperor under the Western Han dynasty.

In addition, a divine image of the Yellow Emperor stands out among his various appellations also in other textual materials from the Han dynasty; the ancient prescriptions "On 52 Ailments [Wushi'erbinfang 五十二病方]" and "Yangshengfang [養生方]" in the silk manuscripts of Mawangdui all mention a "Yellow Spirit [*huangshen* 黃神]";[43] also "Establishing the Mandate" makes mention of a "Yellow Ancestor [*huangzong* 黃宗]."[44] Rao Zongyi believes that these are both references to the Yellow Emperor.[45] The *Hetu woju ji* [河圖握矩記] says: "The Yellow Emperor was called Xuan 軒, he is the son of the Big Dipper 'Yellow Spirit'; his mother is Fubao, daughter of the Earth Spirit. While outdoors, a big lightning tied Fubao to the Big Dipper, whose stars sparkled; thereupon Fubao became pregnant and gave birth to Xuan, who had 'Yellow Emperor's son' written on his chest."[46] This account on the origination of antique sages is commonly seen in mythological accounts collected in apocrypha. The story of the Yellow Emperor stemming from the Yellow Spirit gave way to the story of Fubao being his mother. The "Yellow Spirit" stems from the "Star Spirit," and is a deity; the Yellow Emperor, however, was a sage who was born, and is a human. This paved the way for the image of the Yellow Emperor as one who was offered sacrifices to shift to a different system.

In the Eastern Han, under the influence of Daoism, talismanic objects started to appear on tombs. On them were carved funerary or Daoist writings

41 Tian Tian 田天, "Qin Han guojia jisi geju bianqian yanjiu—yi 'shiji fengshan shu,' 'hanshu jiaosi zhi' wei zhongxin 秦漢國家祭祀格局變遷研究——以〈史記・封禪書〉、〈漢書・郊祀志〉為中心" (PhD diss., Peking University, 2011), 82-129.

42 Li Ling, "Qin-Han cizhi tongkao 秦漢祠畤通考," in *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 142-156.

43 Mawangdui Han Tombs Silk Manuscript Compilation Team 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組, *Mawangdui hanmu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書 [*Mawangdui Silk Manuscripts*] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), 4:72, 163.

44 Ibid., 1: 61.

45 Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, "Daojiao yu chusu guanxi xin zheng—chu wenhuade xin renshi 道教與楚俗關係新證——楚文化的新認識," *in Rao Zongyi shixue lunzhu xuan* 饒宗頤史學論著選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 130-134.

46 Shanghai guji chubanshe, ed., *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成 [*Complete Collection of Weishu Texts*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 1144.

to keep the departed safe from misfortune and to ward off bad influences, and protect them from evil forces. In archaeological finds of Eastern Han tomb inscriptions, appellations such as "Yellow Spirit Envoy" and "Yellow Emperor" are often mentioned; the funerary inscription on a ceramic bottle that dates from the third year of the Yongping 永平 era [60 CE] of the Eastern Han dynasty found in the Shaanxi Province in 1999, is the earliest accurately dated inscription of this kind found so far. Part of the text says: "On October 9 of the third year of the Yongping era, the *bingshen* 丙申 year, the Messenger of the Yellow Spirit marked out an area for the dead to reside, providing a final resting place for the ancestors of the living, thereby protecting the living relatives of the dead from disaster and errors, and protecting generations of the dead's descendants."[47] Wu Rongzeng was the first to link the denominations of 'Yellow Spirit' and 'Yellow Emperor.'[48] From looking at the characters alone, they should be the same person. Antique seals also contain many such references, which further leads us to believe these two figures are connected. In Chen Jieqi's 陳介祺 [1813-1884] work from the Qing dynasty, the chapter "Government Seals [Guanyin 官印]" in *Selected Seals from the Shizhong Shanfang Studio* [*Shizhong shanfang yinju* 十鐘山房印舉] says that twenty records include two kinds of "Yellow Spirit" seals, and two kinds of "Yellow Spirit and Celestial Ruler" seals.[49] This shows that "Yellow Spirit [*huangshen* 黃神]" is probably an abbreviation of "Yellow Emperor Spirit [*huangdishen* 黃帝神]." In recent research on funerary inscriptions and on Daoism, the funerary texts enumerated earlier that bear contents related to the "Yellow Spirit" have attracted more attention. Han dynasty shamanist or occultist traditions borrowed the longstanding Yellow Emperor image and transformed him into a "Spirit" with a divine character; this is quite dissimilar from the aforementioned being that was offered State sacrifice.

On the whole records in ancient texts that mark the transition from the Yellow Emperor as one who received State sacrifice to one who received folk sacrifice all date roughly from the Eastern Han. The chapter "Ying bu zhuan [英布傳]" in the *History of the Later Han* [*Hou Han Shu* 後漢書], says: "When

47 Xianyang Municipal Institute of Archaeology 咸陽市文物考古研究所, "Xianyang jiaoyu xueyuan hanmu qingli jianbao 咸陽教育學院漢墓清理簡報," in *Wenwu kaogu lun ji—xianyang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo chengli shizhounian jinian* 文物考古論集——咸陽文物考古研究所成立十周年紀念 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006), figure 6.

48 Wu Rongzeng 吳榮曾, "Zhenmuwen zhong suo jiandaode donghan daowu guanxi 鎮墓文中所見到的東漢道巫關係," *Wenwu* 3 (1981).

49 Chen Jieqi 陳介祺, *Shizhong shanfang yinju* 十鐘山房印舉 [*Selected Seals from the Shizhong Shanfang Studio*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1985), 63.

Ying Bu was young, he had a lot of contact with guests, he was very chivalrous . . . later, once he became King of Chu, Ying Bu enjoyed reciting the words of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, and held Buddhist sacrifices [仁祠]."[50] The term *renci* 仁祠 in this text undoubtedly stands for ancestral halls or temples, or similar buildings with a sacrificial function that would certainly contain Buddhist imagery and idols to worship. However, since we are limited to concrete historical records, we do not have a very clear idea of what sacrificial rituals were like. We can nevertheless notice how among the upper-class society of the Eastern Han the Yellow Emperor had a very prestigious position in Huang-Lao doctrine. The opportunity of Buddhism just being introduced to China was also used, in that joint sacrifices were being made to Buddha, the Yellow Emperor, and Laozi. Joint sacrifices like those carried out by King Ying of Chu were widely praised and endorsed by the rulers at the time.

The image of the Yellow Emperor in the so-called sacrificial context was retained in current archaeological finds. In the early 1980s the cliffside images on Kongwang Mountain in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, were officially recognized as being late-Eastern Han dynasty Buddhist and Daoist imagery,[51] and since then have gained widespread attention in religious, artistic, and archaeological circles. A survey of these images revealed a total of 105 characters, among them, three stand out as human, non-Buddha. Of these three images, bust X68 in group 6 is the tallest, reaching 1m 14cm. It is seated with cupped hands, on the terrace beneath it are carved round chandeliers and a lotus throne, which proves that this is the most important character among the Kongwang Mountain sculptures, and also the most important to offer sacrifices to. As for the quality of its figure, this "is an image completely unrelated to Buddhism, but that it has been placed on the highest spot of the cliffs shows its status was higher than that of Laozi. And in Daoist beliefs, the only one with a status higher than Laozi is the Yellow Emperor. Therefore, X68 in Group 6 is certainly a representation of him."[52]

From the above discussion we can see that in Chinese religious sacrificial tradition, there was originally an ancestral Yellow Emperor, who was naturally offered sacrifice by virtue of his status. This superior status was then further emphasized by pre-Qin through Han thought (such as the yin-yang and five

50 Fan Ye 範曄 and Li Xian 李賢, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 [*History of the Later Han*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 1428.

51 Lianyungang Museum 連雲港市博物館, "Lianyungangshi kongwangshan moya zaoxiang diaocha baogao 連雲港市孔望山摩崖造像調查報告," *Wenwu* 7 (1981).

52 Xin Lixiang 信立祥, "Kongwang shan moya zaoxiang zhong daojiao renwu kao 孔望山摩崖造像中道教人物考," *Zhongguo lishi bowuguan guankan* 2 (1997).

elements doctrines) which made it spill over into other fields, and become a spiritual kind of image.

A Brief Summary

Charles LeBlanc has pointed out that the image of the Yellow Emperor in pre-Qin through Han documents bears three connotations: one is "genealogical ancestrality," the second is "paradigmatic emperorship," and the third is that of a divine ruler.[53] These three images represent the Yellow Emperor in ancient genealogy records as a historical ruler and as a divine Emperor. As to the historical reliability of these portrayals, the one we find in the lineage context is rather credible and the one among ancient rulers comes second, while that in the context of sacrifice bears more of a religious significance. As for the distance between them, Qi Sihe finds that "originally, 'Huangdi' was used as name for a deity, which then gradually turned into a legendary monarch. Huangdi may have become ruler at a relatively late stage, but he was made to be the highest of them; through his popularity and the complexity of the legends surrounding him, he emerged supreme among the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors."[54] I have some doubts on this statement. The earliest appearance of the Yellow Emperor should be in the genealogy context; then, as ancestral ruler, he came to exist as the earliest of Emperors, as a mythological monarch, and between these shows both his passage from the ancestral to the monarchic context, and the enormous shift from a system of enfeoffment based on blood relations towards a system of prefectures and counties based on regional ties. As to the 'Huangdi' in the sacrificial context, his existence is inseparably linked to the five elements theory of the yin-yang school from the end of the Warring States period. The generations that followed also linked this image to a Daoist context, and it thereby acquired a religious value.

The implied value of these three portrayals of the Yellow Emperor lies in a gradual change, and this point is in agreement with Gu Jiegang: "when researching the Yellow Emperor, do not be led to believe that this subject is pre-Xia history; it should be seen as Warring States period, Qin, and Han history, because legends about him only reflect the thought of Warring States,

53 Charles Le Blanc, "A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14 (1985-86): 45-46.

54 Qi Sihe 齊思和, "Lun huangdizhi zhiqi gushi 論黃帝之制器故事," in *Gushi bian* 古史辨 [*Debates on Ancient History*], ed. Lü Simian 呂思勉 and Tong Shuye 童書業 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 7: 385.

Qin, and Han times, and only display culture from the Warring States, the Qin, and the Han Periods."[55] Therefore, it can be said of the image of the Yellow Emperor that the earlier we look, the more primitive the image is; the later we look, the more multifaceted it becomes. His existence in lineage records is likely the earliest, his appearance in the sacrificial context as a divine image came rather late, however this image is also the richest in content.

As to writings and imagery on the Yellow Emperor in Daoist scripts, the distribution range of Yellow Emperor literature is mainly among practical manuals of numerology and occultism. "The qualities of each Yin-Yang scholar and Daoist depended on their background. The 'Huang' of yin-yang scholars and Daoists and the 'Huang' of scholars and occultists are also interconnected in meaning."[56] The two key themes of technological inventions and political ideals in later Yellow Emperor literature mainly relied on the further refinement of the aforementioned practical manuals; this happened particularly in the case of technological inventions. Technological inventions are more related to the context of ancient rulers and sacrifice. The reason why the Yellow Emperor as an ancient monarch has been attributed so many inventions is very closely connected to the expectations people at that time had of rulers and sages. Political ideals back then revolved around the lineage of the Yellow Emperor within the genealogy context and the ancient ruler context, and around the achievements of his entourage.

Of course, this statement is also not perfect; it is based on the Yellow Emperor, and is related to the scholarly practices of people in antiquity. It is also necessary to consider the latent ability for dialogue between different pre-Qin schools of thought, which in the middle of the Warring States period led to the embryonic stages of the Confucian and the Mohist schools of thought. Both of these liked to refer to their predecessors, and thereby set up a "utopia." The development of Daoism happened after this, and they mention an even more remote ancestor than Confucians and Mohists—the Yellow Emperor, who then became the symbol of establishing their own doctrine of identity. This trait shows particularly clearly in pre-Qin Daoist texts. The narrative patterns of the chapters "Yuyan [寓言]" and "Chongyan [重言]" in the *Zhuangzi* also fall into this category.

Of course, these things may not have happened, the Yellow Emperor may not even have existed, these were legends that emerged and were continuously passed down. How should we see this phenomenon? Meng Wentong finds that

55 Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, *Qin-Han de fangshi yu rusheng* 秦漢的方士與儒生 [*Alchemists and Classicists in the Qin and Han Dynasties*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 26.

56 Li, "Shuo 'Huanglao,'" 280.

"during the late Eastern Zhou period, scholarly discourse was more relevant than political discourse and mostly incompatible with monarchical power; many books that supported it appeared during the late Warring States Period. At the beginning, relying on the past to put ideas in writing was normal. The chapters "Taigong [太公]" and "Yiyin [伊尹]" are examples of such works. Later on, the development of theories relied on discussing antiquity, as is quite common in the Six Classics compiled by Confucius. Books relying on antiquity to establish theories are of dubious authenticity, and theories based on events in ancient times are mostly biased."[57] This statement is debatable. First, as mentioned earlier, we have to take note of the background discrepancies between the works of pre-Qin scholars that are based on different "ancestors"; second, titles of early documents are often the same as a person's name, but this person's lifetime will not necessarily correspond to the epoch they were written in; third, as in Ban Gu's self-annotation of the "Treatise on Literature [Yiwenzhi 藝文志]" in the *History of the Han*, we can see how Ban Gu 班固 [32-92]often refuses to rely on peculiar matters or shallow language; this kind of text is particularly frequent among Daoist works and novels. We have to see the logic behind his way of doing so: Ye Gang believes that people like Liu Xiang 刘向 [76 BCE-6] and Ban Gu thought that history books should "speak bluntly," "be based on actions," "follow the ways of people," and "discuss the roots of things," and only then can they "be authentic."[58] Therefore books we rely on are not necessarily false, and the same goes for Yellow Emperor literature.

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57 Meng Wentong 蒙文通, *Jing xue jue yuan* 經學抉原 [*Research on Confucian Classics*] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006), 206.

58 Ye Gang 葉崗, "Zhongguo xiaoshuo fashengqi xianxiangde lilun zonghe—'hanshu yiwenzhi' zhongde xiaoshuo biaozhun yu xiaoshuojia 中國小說發生期現象的理論總結——漢書・藝文志中的小說標準與小說家," *Wenyi yanjiu* 10 (2005).

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An Exploration of the Queen Mother of the West from the Perspective of Comparative Mythology

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Abstract

Constant interactions among cultures make it possible to conduct cross-cultural studies on the myth of the Queen Mother of the West 西王母. Since the original manuscript of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaijing* 山海經] served as the expository writing of the now lost *Map of Mountains and Seas* [*Shanhaitu* 山海圖], there is reason to believe that it contains information on early depictions of the goddess. By revealing the symbolism at work in those descriptions and by consulting a wide range of ethnographic data, it becomes possible to reconstruct her primeval form. The Queen Mother of the West, once regarded as the Chinese version of the prehistoric Great Mother, was seen as the goddess embodying both death and regeneration. However, after the rise of the patriarchal system, the original Queen Mother of the West slowly fell into obscurity and was ultimately relegated to the subordinate status of a spouse for the Jade Emperor [*yuhuang* 玉皇].

Keywords

comparative mythology – ethnography – goddess – literary anthropology

Since early antiquity, the Queen Mother of the West [*Xi wang mu* 西王母] has been considered an important female deity in Chinese mythology. Oracle-bone inscriptions excavated in Yinxu 殷墟 mentioned of a certain "Western Mother," which, according to scholars such as Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 [1911-1966], Ding Shan 丁山 [1901-1952], and Zhang Guangzhi 張光直 [1931-2001], most

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probably refers to the Queen Mother of the West.[1] Moreover, after the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* was written, the Queen Mother of the West repeatedly appears in various classical books and records. After the Han dynasty [202 BCE-220], she was gradually incorporated into the Daoist pantheon and gained influence. Today, the goddess is widely known among the Chinese people; the legends related to her as well as manifestations of her worship are numerous and extremely varied. The academic world's interest in the Queen Mother of the West generally concerns her evolution from the disheveled, androgynous, and therianthropic ferocious deity depicted in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* to the Jade Emperor's poised and stately imperial wife, which now dominates popular consciousness. By analyzing the primeval form of the Queen Mother of the West, the present article attempts to explore this question of her evolving image from the perspective of comparative mythology.

Research Trends Regarding the Myth of the Queen Mother of the West

In China's modern academic history, research on the Queen Mother of the West traces back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In his book *The Fundamentals of Chinese Mythology* [*Zhongguo shenhua yanjiu ABC* 中國神話研究 ABC],[2] completed in 1928, Mao Dun 茅盾 [pseud., Shen Dehong; 1896-1981] put forward the theory of the "three stages of evolution" undergone by the Queen Mother of the West, thus marking the beginning of contemporary research of profound and lasting influence on this myth. This work was followed by others, such as Wu Han's 吳晗 [1909-1969] "The Queen Mother of the West and the Xirong,"[3] Lü Simian's 呂思勉 [1884-1957] "A Study of the Myth of

1 See Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "Guwenzi zhong zhi Shang Zhou jisi 古文字中之商周祭祀 [The Shang and Zhou Dynasty Worship Featured in Ancient Texts]," *Yanjingxuebao*19 (1936); Ding Shan 丁山, *Zhongguo gudai zongjiao yu shenhua kao* 中國古代宗教與神話考 [*A Study of Religion and Mythology in Ancient China*] (Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chuban jituan, 2011), 76; Zhang Guangzhi 張光直, *Zhongguo qingtong shidai* 中國青銅時代 [*The Chinese Bronze Age*] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2013), 384.

2 This book was written in Tokyo and published in 1929 by Shijie shuju chuban. It was then republished in 1978 in *Mao Dun pinglun wenji* 茅盾評論文集 [*Mao Dun: A Collection of Critical Essays*] under the title "Zhongguo shenhua yanjiu chutan 中國神話研究初探 [Primary Explorations in the Field of Chinese Mythology]."

3 Wu Han 吳晗, "Xi Wang Mu yu Xirong: Xi Wang Mu yu Kunlun shanzhiyi 西王母與西戎：西王母與昆侖山之一 [The Queen Mother of the West and the Xirong: The Queen Mother of the West and the Kunlun Mountain]," *Qinghuazhoukan* 6 (1931).

the Queen Mother of West,"[4] and Fang Shiming's 方詩銘 [1919-2000]"A Study of the Queen Mother of the West's Legends,"[5] all of which adopted the traditional method of textual criticism [*kaojuxue* 考據學] in order to determine the location of the goddess's dwellings as well as to investigate the relation between the goddess and the faith in the immortals [*shenxian* 神仙], which became prevalent during the Han dynasty. In order to demonstrate his point, Fang Shiming used data consisting of inscriptions found on the Chang'an 長安 bronze mirrors and of travel descriptions in *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* [*Da tang xiyuji* 大唐西域記]. This was indeed an important breakthrough, because, traditionally, the use of a single document had sufficed to provide evidence.

After the 1950s, research on the Queen Mother of the West slowly declined in mainland China. Since the revival of mythology studies in China in the 1980s, the Queen Mother of the West's myth has once more become the subject of academic interest and papers, and monographs have subsequently been published on it. One important aspect they touched on concerned the goddess's original form. Two main trends emerged. In the first trend, scholars tended to historicize mythology and consider the goddess nothing more than a female sovereign who had lived among the ethnic tribes of western China. Hence, the fearsome figure portrayed in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* would have been the result of exaggeration and totemism. The practice of historicizing mythological characters is a long one in China: one needs merely to consider the two examples repeatedly raised by academics: Confucius' interpretations of the "Yellow Emperor's four faces" [*huangdi simian* 皇帝四面] and the "one-legged Kui" [*kuiyizu* 夔一足], recorded in the *Shi zi* 尸子[6] and the *Han feizi* 韓非子,[7] respectively. In early antiquity, when theocratic views dominated, some mythological characters were incorporated into the ethnic groups' lineages, while some historical characters were, conversely, elevated to the rank of gods. This occurred in ethnic groups all over the world. Beginning

4 Lü Simian 呂思勉, "Xi Wang Mu kao 西王母考 [A Study of the Myth of the Queen Mother of West]," *Shuowenyuekan* 1 (1940).

5 Fang Shiming 方詩銘, "Xi Wang Mu chuanshuo kao 西王母傳說考 [A Study of the Queen Mother of the West's Legends]," *Dongfangzazhi* 14 (1946).

6 "Huangwangbu si 皇王部四," in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 369. For more discussion on Huangdi's "four faces," see Su Xiaowei, "Researching the Image of the Yellow Emperor in China's Early Textual Sources and Archaeological Materials" and Zhang Hanmo, "From Myth to History: Historicizing a Sage for the Sake of Persuasion in the Yellow Emperor Narratives" in this issue.

7 Liang Qixiong 梁启雄, *Han zi qian jie* 韩子浅解 [*Brief Commentary on* Hanfeizi] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 299-300.

in the twentieth century, after the importation of the concept of myth, which originated in the West but was introduced to China through Japan, and the thorough re-examination of Chinese early antiquity by the Doubting Antiquity School [*gushibianpai* 古史辨派] of Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 [1893-1980], the question of the "mythological factor" interwoven with ancient history was for the most part clarified. On this basis, I believe that, because of the present lack of evidence, efforts to interpret the Queen Mother of the West as a historical character remain strained and perpetuate the forced historicization of mythology practiced in the past.

In the second trend, scholars did not believe that the goddess was a historical figure, merely a female deity imagined by the ancients. These studies investigate the mythological context from which the goddess emerged, but a lot of contention exists about her precise attributes. According to various opinions, she is conceived as personifying death, the moon, or fertility; she is also believed to be in charge of granting protection and good fortune; or she is represented as the deity who created the world.[8] Yet, after having studied those discussions carefully, we realize that some issues remain. First, researchers have overlooked the disparities between her primeval form and the different characterizations that were generated afterward. In his preface to a critical edition of *The Three Heroes and Five Gallants* [*Sanxiawuyi,* 三俠五義] by Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 [1900-1990], Hu Shi 胡適 [1891-1962] remarked:

> The period of early antiquity witnessed many inventions, and since later generations did not know who had made these inventions, they could only attribute them to the Yellow Emperor, who consequently changed into an extraordinary personage venerated throughout early antiquity. In middle antiquity, many things were created, and since later generations wondered who was at the origin of these new creations, they accredited them to the Duke of Zhou, who thereupon became the great sage who would be admired throughout middle antiquity. Himself, he would "tear out his own hair and spit out his food" so eager was he to seek men of worth!
>
> I once found a name for this kind of men who were blessed: I called them "target characters," since they resemble the scarecrows used by the [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*] hero Zhuge Liang [諸葛亮] to collect arrows. Originally, the scarecrows were mere bundles of hay, but then

8 Regarding discussions surrounding the myth of the Queen Mother of the West, see Zhao Zongfu 趙宗福, "Xi Wang Mu de shen'ge gongneng 西王母的神格功能 [The Queen Mother of the West's Functions]," *Xun'gen* 5 (1999).

> they were pierced by so many arrows that they would remind one of hedgehogs. These arrows did not hurt their flesh, however; quite the contrary, they contributed to Zhuge Liang's deeds and fame.[9]

I find Hu Shi's famous thesis regarding legendary characters applicable to the realm of myth. The Queen Mother of the West served as a "target" figure. While her myth circulated among the people, the attributes and functions with which she was invested inevitably proliferated, to the extent that variations were bound to develop. Among the different versions of the myth, some may have been closer to the goddess' primeval form, while others may have emerged relatively late. If these variations had not been differentiated and analyzed, we would find ourselves in the same situation as those researchers who offer convoluted and confusing descriptions of the goddess.

The research mentioned above was unable to explain the incompatible and even contradictory aspects of the Queen Mother of the West. For instance, a lot of researchers pointed out that she was primarily in charge of inflicting death, but, at the same time, she had the extraordinary ability to bring the dead back to life. It becomes obvious that in investigating the myth of the Queen Mother of the West, one cannot avoid the specific question of how those two opposite functions happened to be embodied by the same deity.

The Contribution of Comparative Mythology to the Research on the Queen Mother of the West

To address the issues mentioned earlier, we have to adopt a methodology developed in the Western field of comparative mythology. Mythology studies have early origins in the West, as attempts to interpret myths have been conducted as early as ancient Greece. However, mythology studies as a specialized field of study within the humanities officially emerged in the late nineteenth century. Influenced by European romanticism, German poets who were part of the Heidelberg school of romantics began to collect and study folk literature, such as myths and legends. They wished to uncover the cultural roots of their nation and restore German nationalism. It is in this historical context that the school of mythology studies led by the Brothers Grimm emerged and

9 Hu Shi 胡適, "*Sanxiawuyi* xu 三俠五義序 [A Preface to *The Three Heroes and Five Gallants*]," in *Hu Shi wenji* 胡適文集 [*An Anthology of Hu Shi's Works*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), 369.

that the modern Western field of mythology studies was ultimately founded.[10] Different schools of thought were then successively created, whose focus was anthropological, ritualistic, functionalist, psychological, structuralist, feminist, or archeological. Because this field was characterized by its strong and distinctive taste for the interdisciplinary and intercultural, it also came to be known as "comparative mythology."

If there was one particular movement that significantly propelled the development of the Western field of comparative mythology, it would be the functionalist school represented by Bronislaw Malinowski. Functionalist scholars took up residence for long periods in indigenous communities, where they conducted fieldwork and recorded popular myths and legends that had been transmitted orally among aboriginal communities. Following these efforts, mythologists broadened their scope of research to include "living myths." About half a century later, the archeologist Marija Gimbutas initiated a new trend: by relying on her archeological expertise, she used material that dated from prehistoric cultures and spanned Eurasia to reconstruct what she called societies from "Old Europe," societies that had, according to her, chiefly worshiped female deities. As a result of her contribution, the subject of research, which had previously been extended by mythologists from written to oral narratives, now embraced visual narratives and the narratives of material objects.

The term "comparative mythology" acknowledges the merit of a field that distinguished itself by transcending divisions among disciplines. What needs to be emphasized here in particular is the archeological methodology employed. The research led by scholars from other disciplines focuses exclusively on the classics (i.e., on myths recorded after the invention of writing), or on oral myths transmitted among contemporary indigenous societies, while archeology, because of the particularities of its methodology, reveals the mythological secrets of early antiquity by deciphering the symbolism conveyed by artifacts and pictorial representations that originated before the emergence of writing.

In recent years, Chinese scholars such as Ye Shuxian 葉舒憲 effectively applied the methods of Western comparative mythology in their work. Following the dual confirmation approach 二重證據法 of Wang Guowei 王國維 [1877-1927], which emphasized the use of evidence from a variety of sources (i.e., historiographical and archeological), these scholars introduced methods of verification that increased the required data to three or four different sorts of material (i.e., including ethnographical data or an analysis of

10 Yang Lihui, *Shenhua yu shenhua xue* 神話與神話學 [*Myths and Mythology*] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 203.

material culture). They thus made valuable discoveries that contributed to the development of Chinese mythology studies.

With regard to the myth of the Queen Mother of the West, Western comparative studies, particularly the recent research led by Gimbutas, provide us at least with the following instructive lessons: first, because of the passage of time, clues are sometimes hard to come by in the culture that is being investigated, in which case we can use ethnographic material in order to compare similar mythological phenomena from different cultural contexts. Second, myths do not merely take the form of stories; they are also manifested as visual narratives or as narratives present in material culture. In the case of prehistoric mythology in particular, considering that people did not have access to writing, artifacts and pictorial representations are the main or even the sole kind of evidence available to interpret the mythological ideas prevalent during that period of history. Hence, by deciphering the meaning behind different sorts of visual imagery and signs, it becomes possible to unearth the mythological narratives concealed in their symbolism.

The Symbolism in the Myth of the Queen Mother of the West

In order to explore the original attributes of the Queen Mother of the West, we naturally should start with data from the earliest periods. Two main types of material have been preserved: the first is excavated artifacts, including stone, brick, and sarcophagi reliefs, murals, and bronze mirrors from ruins from the provinces of Sichuan, Anhui, Shaanxi, Shandong, and Shanxi. It is unfortunate that at present the earliest data from these different sources originate in Xi'an, and the vast majority pertains to the period after the emergence of Daoist belief in the immortals. Hence, they can hardly help us recover the original representation of the Queen Mother of the West. The second type is written documents, the most important of which is the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* which, according to Yuan Ke 袁珂 [1916-2001], was completed during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), a statement that is generally acknowledged by the academic world. However, scholars such as Lü Zifang 呂子方 [1895-1964] and Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈 maintain that the book's content should be traced back far earlier in history and may in fact originate in "time immemorial."[11] Nevertheless, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* remains,

11 See Yuan Ke 袁珂, "*Shanhaijing* de xiezuoshidijipianmukao 山海經的寫作時地及篇目考 [Investigations on the *Classic of Mountains and Seas'* Writing Period and Time]," *Zhonghuawenshiluncong* (1978); Lü Zifang 呂子方, "Du *Shanhaijing* zaji 讀山海經雜記

at the moment, the earliest reliable data we possess concerning the myth of the Queen Mother of the West. More importantly, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* differs from other classical records that rely purely on written narratives, because it originally served as the expository writing of the illustrations featured on the now-lost *Map of Mountains and Seas*.[12] Therefore, in order to recover the Queen Mother of the West's attributes, we can refer to the methodological model set by Gimbutas, who used visual material to research "Old Europe's goddesses," and proceed to interpret the imagery and symbols relating to the goddess in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas.*

All the following chapters contain records concerning the Queen Mother of the West: the *Classic of the Northern Regions within the Seas* [*Haineibeijing* 海內北經], the third section of the *Classic of the Western Mountains* [*Xishanjing* 西山經], and the *Classic of the Great Western Wilderness* [*Dahuangxijing* 大荒西經]. Even though those records are scattered and contradictory in some places, and despite the fact they were written at different times, the mythological ideas they transmit should originate far earlier in time than the period in which the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* was compiled, because it consists of "commentaries" on actual depictions of the goddess. Moreover, the characteristics attributed to the Queen Mother of the West in those records are distinctly primitive, which means that they can serve to retrieve the primeval appearance of the goddess. Finally, when combing through this material, we can identify two main aspects of the symbolism at work in this specific myth: death and regeneration.

Representation of the goddess as personifying death is first seen in the directions used to describe her abode: "350 *li* farther to the west,"[13] "on the South of the Western Sea, on the edge of the Drifting Sands, after the Red River and before the Black River."[14] In the "Explaining Earth [Shidi 釋地]"

[Miscellany on the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*]," in *Zhongguo kexue jishu shilun wenji* 中國科學技術史論文集 [*An Anthology of Essays on Chinese Scientific and Technological History*](Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984); Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, "*Shanhaijng* chutan 山海經初探 [Primary Explorations in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*]," *Zhonghuawenshiluncong* 3 (1979).

12 See Sun Zhizhong 孫致中, "*Shanhai jing* yu *Shanhai tu* 山海經與山海圖 [The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and Its Map]," *Hebei xuekan* 1 (1987); Ma Changyi 馬昌儀, "*Shan Hai Jing* tuxunzhao *Shan Hai Jing de lingyi ban* 山海經圖尋找山海經的另一半 [The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* Map: In Search of the *Classic*'s Other Half]," *Wenxue yichan* 6 (2000).

13 Hao Yixing 郝懿行, *Shanhaijing jianshu* 山海經箋疏 [*Commentaries on the* Classic of Mountains and Seas] (Chengdu: Ba shu shushe, 1985), 33.

14 Ibid., 7.

section of the *Erya* [爾雅] it is written: "Gu Zhu [觚竹], Bei Hu [北戶], Xi Wang Mu [西王母], Ri Xia [日下]—these are the four places that are known for being extremely desolate and remote."[15] Here is Guo Pu's 郭璞 [276-324] annotation: "Gu Zhu in the north, Bei Hu in the south, Xi Wang Mu in the west and Ri Xia in the east—these are the uncivilized and bleak states of the four corners of the world, rivaled only by the four pillars of heaven."[16] Even though Guo Pu's interpretation of Xi Wang Mu as the name of a state is debatable, these passages still reveal that she was thought to reside in the far west, where the sun sets, surrounded by dirty waters, and on dangerous terrain. What needs to be pointed out is that the west and the sunset are often associated with the land of the dead and death itself. Ye Shuxian writes that

> in mythological thinking, the sunrise and the sunset are far from being purely objective natural phenomena; they are also bound to represent a certain god or a hero's destiny. Therefore, the phase in which the sun rises corresponds to the auspicious circumstances of a hero's life, such as birth, maturity, and his extraordinary feats, while the phase in which the sun sets and disappears corresponds to the tragic circumstances of a hero's life, such as the times he was defeated and the moment of his death.[17]

In earlier cultures, people commonly believed that the phenomena around them reflected the gods' will and existence. According to them, the fact that the sun rose every day in the east and after having gone through its daily itinerary descended every day in the opposite direction, corresponds precisely to the cycle of life—that is, birth, adulthood, old age, and death. Hence, more often than not, the west came to symbolize death. For example, the people of ancient Egypt believed that the soul never died, and because they observed that the sun disappeared in the west, they thought that the souls of the deceased would return there. For this reason, mausoleums were all constructed on the western shore of the Nile River.[18] In the Solomon Islands, people believed that the souls of the departed would enter the sea with the sunset; this idea closely resembled the belief that sunrise represents birth and the sun's disappearance

15 *Erya* 爾雅, annot. Guo Pu 郭璞 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1985), 337.

16 Ibid., 338.

17 Ye Shuxian 葉舒憲, *Tansuo fei lixing de shijie* 探索非理性的世界 [*Exploring an Irrational World*] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 229.

18 Huang Xinchuan 黃心川, ed. *Shijie shi da zongjiao* 世界十大宗教 [*The World's Ten Greatest Religions*] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2007), 6.

at dusk represents death.[19] The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* also contains a description of the Queen Mother of the West's role as a goddess: "she governs things such as calamities and death."[20] Guo Pu's annotation reads as "[The Great Mother of the West] was responsible for foreseeing scenes such as disasters and death,"[21] while Hao Yixing 郝懿行 [1757-1825] interprets this passage as "the Queen Mother of the West governs death."[22] Clearly, all these quotations point to the fact that the Queen Mother of the West was indeed a deity of death.

The second aspect of the symbolism revealed by the myth of the Queen Mother of the West concerns reincarnation. The first image supporting this system of representation is the Jade Mountain [*yushan* 玉山]. In the "Classic of the Western Mountains" it is recorded: "350 *li* farther to the west is the Jade Mountain, the dwelling place of the Queen Mother of the West,"[23] on which Guo Pu comments by adding: "The mountain abounds in jade, and therefore it received this name."[24] The descriptions of the goddess's dwelling place in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* may appear contradictory, as it is sometimes characterized as being in the Kunlun 崑崙 Mountain, which is encircled by dirty waters and is, in fact, sometimes referred to as the "Jade Mountain."[25] Visually speaking, because the Kunlun Mountain is permanently covered with snow, it reminds one of the sparkling and crystal-clear pure white color and luster of fine jade. Additionally, the Huaxia ancients had realized early on that the Kunlun Mountain was rich in jade, and, since ancient times, jade from Hotan [Hetian 和田] in the Kunlun region was continuously transported through the Hexi 河西 Corridor to the Central Plains, a commerce that led to the development of the Jade Road, the precursor of the Silk Road in the history of communication between the East and the West. More importantly, jade was used mainly in ancient Chinese tombs in ritual objects, and those were entrusted with the desire that people who had died would be reborn. Large quantities of jade that

19 Julius Lips, *The Origins of Things* [*Shiwu de qiyuan* 事物的起源], trans. Wang Ningsheng 汪寧生 (Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 342.

20 Hao, *Shanhaijing jianshu,* 34.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 33.

24 Ibid.

25 See Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "Shanhaijingzhong de Kunlun qu 山海經中的崑崙區 [Kunlun in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*], *Zhongguoshehuikexue* 1 (1982); Ye Shuxian 葉舒憲, *Hexi zoulang xibu shenhua yu Huaxia yuanliu* 河西走廊西部神話與華夏源流 [*The Hexi Corridor: The Origin and Development of Western China's Mythology and Huaxia*] (Kunming: Yunnan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2008), 17.

had been buried with the deceased have already been discovered in prehistoric ruins. In the Lingjiatan 凌家灘 Neolithic ruins, located in Anhui Province, more than two hundred jade articles were excavated from tomb 07M23: more than twenty jade rings had been laid near the occupant's head, ten bracelets near the arms, and ten semicircular pendants near its waist.[26] Naturally, these articles were not used as mere ornaments but, rather, were offered to the dead for profound religious reasons. When confronted with death, the majority of people wished for it to consist of nothing more than reincarnation in a new body. The fact that people take great care in performing funerals for their loved ones clearly reflects this desire. Archeological discoveries such as the one just mentioned show that jade articles were deeply connected to faith in reincarnation and eternal life. In the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the Queen Mother of the West's dwelling place is referred to as the "Jade Mountain," thus acknowledging her attributes as the deity granting reincarnation.

Moreover, there is Kunlun. In Chinese traditional culture, "Kunlun" does not refer merely to a mountain but is also permeated with symbolism. One of its symbolic connotations has to do precisely with creating and fostering life. Lü Wei 呂微 in his treatise "A Semantic Approach to Kunlun's Origins," which was based on a comprehensive review of multiple studies, points out:

> Kunlun is an entity that exists spatially, but that can also embody many things; indeed, it is the mythological symbol representing the female sex, and the real-world model on which it was conceived concerns specifically the organs related to female fertility, such as the womb, the vagina, or even the entire abdomen of the mother.[27]

The Queen Mother of the West, whose abode is located on Kunlun, the symbol of fertility itself, naturally possesses powers closely related to the creation of life and reincarnation.

Our analysis of the symbolism associated with the Queen Mother of the West gives us reason to believe that, in her earliest form, she appears as a version of the Great Mother, who presides both over death and reincarnation.

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26 Zhang Jingguo 張敬國, "Anhui Hanshanxian Ling jia tan yizhi di wu ci fajue de xin faxian 安徽含山縣凌家灘遺址第五次發掘的新發現 [New Discoveries during the Fifth Excavation in the Lingjiatan Ruins (Hanshan County, Anhui)]," *Kaogu* 3 (2008).

27 Lü Wei 呂微, "Kunlun yuyishiyuan 崑崙語義釋源 [A Semantic Approach to Kunlun's Origins]," in *Zhongguo shenhua xue wenlun xuancui* 中國神話學文論選粹 [*A Selection of Essays on Chinese Mythology*], ed. Ma Changyi 馬昌儀 (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1994), 504.

In prehistoric cultures, goddesses seem to have been similarly worshiped in every part of the world, until patriarchal societies emerged, and they were replaced with male deities. Nowadays, the worship of female deities that prevailed during prehistoric times is far from having vanished completely, and traces of faith in the goddesses can still be discerned in local religions, myths, legends, and customs. However, the question remains as to how death and reincarnation, which are usually regarded as opposites, can be embodied by the same goddess. Regarding this question, Miriam Robbins Dexter, the editor of *The Living Goddesses,* observes:

> Unlike the early historical cultures, most of which venerated the givers of life . . ., while dishonoring those who brought death . . ., the Old Europeans did not divide the great-goddess into fragments of "good" and "bad." The goddess was one and many, a unity and a multiplicity. The hybrid bird-and-snake goddess was the great-goddess of the life continuum, the goddess of birth, death, and rebirth.[28]

Even though Dexter discusses primarily the goddesses in which people in Old Europe invested their faith, she provides an enlightening point of view that is certainly helpful in understanding the Queen Mother of the West's contradictory attributes. In the eyes of the prehistoric ancients, life was essentially a cyclical process that continued perpetually, and death was just the beginning of a new life. For instance, based on the fact that every day the sun rises in the East and sets in the West and that every year vegetation withers and then grows again, people in ancient Egypt conceived the idea that rebirth would necessarily follow death, and they thus thought of every possible way to preserve the remains of the deceased, in addition to building gigantic mausoleums (i.e., pyramids) for them.[29]

The English-speaking world had a similar understanding of life, and the connection between the roots of the words "tomb" and "womb" serves as proof in itself: not only is the tomb the final home reached at the end of one's life but the womb is also nurturing the next cycle of life. The complete cycle of gestation, birth, death, and rebirth is hence reconstituted by connecting the different elements of symbolic imagery present in the Queen Mother of the West's myth—Kunlun, the west, death, and jade. As a result, the Queen Mother

28 Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, ed. Miriam Robbins Dexter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xvii.

29 Huang, *Shijieshidazongjiao*, 6.

of the West is simultaneously regarded as the goddess of death and as the deity who brings the dead back to life.

From a Goddess with the Teeth of a Tiger and Who is Skilled at Whistling to a Goddess Who Excels at Singing and Poetry

When studying the Queen Mother of the West, we can hardly avoid referring to the *Tale of King Mu, Son of Heaven* [*Mu tianzizhuan* 穆天子傳]. During the third reign period [372-396] of Emperor Xiao Wu 孝武 of the Eastern Jin dynasty [317-420], this book was discovered in Ji 汲 County, Henan, in a tomb dating to the Warring States period. Although it is widely believed to have been written during the late Warring States period, it retains some relatively early material on the myth of the goddess. Of the six extant chapters, the first five mainly narrate the journey westward of King Mu 穆 of Zhou. The third chapter includes King Mu's audience with the goddess and their exchange of gifts and poems:

> On the auspicious *jiazi* 甲子 day, the son of Heaven paid a formal visit to the Queen Mother of the West. Grasping a white jade tablet and a dark jade circle, he had an audience with the Queen Mother of the West. He submitted 100 lengths of multicolored damask and 300 lengths of [xxx]. The Queen Mother of the West repeatedly bowed and accepted them.
>
> On the *yichou* 乙丑 day, the son of Heaven toasted the Queen Mother of the West beside the Turquoise Pond. The Queen Mother of the West composed a ballad for the son of Heaven:
>
> White clouds are in the heavens;
> Mountains and mounds emerge of their own accord.
> Our ways and byways are distant and far off;
> Mountains and rivers separate them.
> If I take you and make you deathless,
> Perhaps you'll be able to come again.
> The son of heaven replied to her:
>
> I will return home to the eastern earth,
> To harmonize and set in order the various Chinese tribes.
> When the myriad people are peaceful and equitable,
> I will turn my head back to see you.
> Three years from now,
> I will return to this wild place.

The Queen Mother of the West chanted again for the son of heaven:

> I'm going off to that western land,
> Where I reside in its wild places.
> With tigers and leopards I form a pride;
> Together with crows and magpies I share the same dwelling place.
> Fortune and destiny cannot be transcended.
> I am the emperor's daughter. . . .
> Blow the pipes and sound the reeds!
> My heart is soaring and wheeling!
> Oh, son of the people of the world—
> You are what is looked at from afar in heaven![30]

Scholars generally refer to this passage as indicating the first major transformation in the development of the figure of the Queen Mother of the West: the frightening depiction in the *Classics of Mountains and Seas* of a "disheveled" goddess "with the tail of a leopard and the teeth of a tiger," "who excels at howling," is thus replaced by a representation of the daughter of Heaven who can both sing and recite poetry beautifully and who is full of tenderness for King Mu. However, even at this precise moment, the attributes she had previously displayed have not yet vanished. Indeed, her dwelling place is still located in the far west and the lines

> I'm going off to that western land,
> Where I reside in its wild places.
> With tigers and leopards I form a pride;
> Together with crows and magpies I share the same dwelling place

still remind us of the disheveled and howling Great Mother who lived in desolate and wild places. In later developments, the Queen Mother of the West's primeval appearance never ceased to cast off one old skin after the other, until she ultimately adopted the definite form of the elegant and poised empress accompanying the Jade Emperor of the Daoist pantheon. This leads us to wonder about the reasons that could explain the emergence, during the goddess's evolution, of two figures that are poles apart from each other. Many scholars

30 *Mu tianzizhuan* 穆天子傳 [*Tale of King Mu, Son of Heaven*], annot. Guo Pu 郭璞 (Shanghai: Shanghai gujichubanshe, 1990), 68; translation from Suzanne E. Cahill, in *Transcendence & Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 50-51.

have attempted to provide an answer by approaching this question from the perspective of totemism. However, after we draw support from comparative mythology, we realize, first, that in the realm of myth, transformations such as these are far from accidental and, second, that they are far from rare. On the contrary, in many areas of the world, they commonly characterize the goddesses of death and regeneration. For instance, here is Gimbutas's description of the goddess Holla in her book *The Living Goddesses*:

> The oral tradition of Germany preserves the ancient goddess of death and regeneration in many forms. . . . Myths portray her as nightmarish and fearsome. . . . She appears with her wolfdogs, who rip the flesh from the corpse. As mother of the dead, she escorts the dead to the otherworld in the inner depths of mountains and caves. . . . [she] is also a regeneratrix. She brings out the sun, and as a frog, she retrieves the red apple, symbol of life, from the well into which it falls at harvest. When ice melts in the spring, Holla sometimes appears as a beautiful nude woman bathing in a stream or lake. Then she personifies the returning powers of life after winter, as the dangerous death hag turns into a young spring maiden.[31]

Artemis in Ancient Greece can both grant happiness and bring death or calamity to humankind. Above everything else, she prefers hunting, and after she is done, she bathes in the limpid waters of the mountain springs. She is also a dark, cruel, and fierce goddess, and her name implies cruelty (the meaning of Artemis is "slaughterer"). In Laconia, until Lycurgus abolished this custom, people paid their respects to her by offering sacrifices. However, near Ephesus, worship was widespread of a goddess named Artemis who had many breasts, which clearly indicates that she was the goddess of nurturing and fostering children.[32]

Gimbutas enumerates a great quantity of goddesses who embodied simultaneously fierce and seductive features. Without a doubt, this can be explained by the fundamental differences in conceptions that existed between the ancients and their descendants: in patriarchal societies that emerged later on, people developed a habit of treating females as spouses or male subordinates, and they paid attention only to their power of reproduction. In line with this idea, varying images of a goddess more often than not stemmed from the male viewpoint, which emphasized only standards of beauty, while

31 Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 195.

32 Otto Seemann, *The Mythology of Greece and Rome* [*Xila luoma shenhua* 希臘羅馬神話], trans. Zhou Hui 周惠 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005), 46.

in the early stage of civilization, the key questions that concerned people were the entire cycle of life from pregnancy to birth, maturity, death, and regeneration. Consequently, "The goddess manifested her countless forms during various cyclical phases to ensure that they functioned smoothly. She revealed herself in multiple ways through the myriad faces of life, and she is depicted in a very complex symbolism."[33] In other words, during the early phase of civilization, the focus of people's attention was not on whether the goddess conformed to standards of beauty but on the symbolic expression of her divine powers. This is why the early Queen Mother of the West in China was regarded as the goddess of death and reincarnation and she presented frightening features that can hardly be understood nowadays. Over the course of her evolution, the facet of the goddess that concerned death was slowly forgotten and those attributes were then assumed by a new deity representing the netherworld, while the Queen Mother of the West's regenerative powers gradually gained prominence. In comparison, the image of the goddess with the teeth of a tiger and the tail of a leopard was gradually altered by later generations and was transformed into the imperial wife who was skilled at singing and poetry, so as to coincide with the representation of her as a benevolent deity who presided over eternal life.

Concluding Remarks

The American scholar Riane Eisler once pointed out:

> Facts have proven that the East and the West may have had similar histories, or to be more precise, that they might have had similar prehistories. . . . If I look back to the literature I once read on Chinese mythology and archeology, I am equally convinced that the prehistoric period of Asia probably once went through developments similar to those that occurred in the West.[34]

These similarities between Eastern and Western culture provide potential for cross-cultural comparisons in literary anthropology. By consulting material from comparative mythologists, we realized that the Queen Mother of the

33 Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 3.

34 Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1987); trans. Cheng Zhimin 程志民 as *Shengbei yu jian* 聖杯與劍 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 1.

West, who, in prehistoric times, was once regarded as the Great Mother, simultaneously governed the realms of both death and reincarnation. In the eyes of the early ancients, the phenomena pertaining to life itself corresponded to the natural phenomena they witnessed, such as sunrise and sunset and changes in the seasons. All those phenomena were characterized by a cyclical process. For this reason, the Queen Mother of the West's dwelling place, which was in the sacred Kunlun Mountain, represented the tomb where one is laid at the end of his life as well as the mother's body and womb, which lead to a new cycle of life. Following the advent of the patriarchal system, however, the image of the goddess was gradually obscured by the patriarchal discourse, and she was ultimately relegated to the subordinate position of a spouse. Yet the limited records of the goddess's primeval form, preserved in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, as well as the extensive comparison of ethnographic material from different places across the globe, enable us to restore the primeval appearance of the Queen Mother of the West. Scholars such as Gimbutas, who broke down barriers between disciplines and cultures, provided us with an all-encompassing horizon, which definitely bears great significance for current research on Chinese mythology. Its outlook, far from being regional, embraces myths from cultures around the world and ultimately represents humanity's efforts at transcending the most extreme difficulties.

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From Myth to History: Historicizing a Sage for the Sake of Persuasion in the Yellow Emperor Narratives

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Abstract

Among the many depictions of the Yellow Emperor that survive in a number of early Chinese texts, the historicized image of this purported ancient sage king has been accepted by many Chinese scholars as that of a historical figure and has greatly inspired their reconstruction of China's remote past. In examining some of the extant Huangdi narratives, especially passages preserved in the *Discourses of the States* [*Guoyu*], *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji*], and *Remaining Zhou Documents* [*Yi Zhoushu*], this paper reveals a trend of historicizing an originally mythical Yellow Emperor presented in early Chinese writings. It also explores the historiographical reasoning behind such historicization and provides an alternative approach emphasizing the role of persuasion in the Huangdi narratives.

Keywords

ancient Chinese history – historiography – myth – persuasion – Yellow Emperor

In early Chinese writings, Huangdi 黃帝 [the Yellow Emperor] is received as a cultural hero, which is generally defined as a legendary or mythical inventor of the culture (or of particular cultural creations, such as agriculture, fire, music, or law) of an ethnic or religious group. In Warring States [475-221 BCE] ritual texts, the culture heroes are identified as ancient sage kings and their ministers who have been commemorated in sacrifice for their devotion to and invention

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of governance, ritual, tools, and writing for the good of their people.[1] As the extant texts demonstrate, the legends associated with the Yellow Emperor as a sage king occupied a significant place in Chinese culture in which venerating him as a person and celebrating his cultural inventions have continued to the present day.[2]

Among the earliest extant textual sources mentioning the Yellow Emperor is the *Discourses of the States* [*Guoyu* 國語], in which the Yellow Emperor is exalted on different occasions as the ancestor, remote yet historical, of the polities located in the heartland of China proper.[3] What is particularly relevant to our discussion is one of the *Discourses of the States* passages providing specific information about the home base of the Yellow Emperor. Because the description of the actual location in this passage is associated with the Yellow Emperor, it becomes the *locus classicus* most frequently cited in the search for a historical Yellow Emperor.

This passage is part of the speech given by Sikong Jizi 司空季子, a follower of the Jin 晉 prince Chong'er 重耳 [r. 636-628 BCE] during his exile, on the

1 K. C. Chang 張光直, "Shang Zhou shenhua zhi fenlei 商周神話之分類," in his *Zhongguo qingong shidai* 中國青銅時代 (Taibei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), 41-43; "Jifa," in *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, *Shisanjing zhushu* (*biaodian ben*) 十三經注疏 (標點本) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 46: 1307.

2 Qi Sihe 齊思和, "Lun Huangdi zhi zhiqi gushi 黃帝之制器故事," in *Gushi bian* 古史辨 [*Debates on Ancient History*], 7 (2), ed. Lü Simian 呂思勉 and Tong Shuye 童書業 (Repr. 1941 Kaiming shudian edition. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982).

3 The "Zhouyu 周語" says that Gun 鯀, Yu 禹, Gonggong 共工, Siyue 四岳, and the rulers of a number of states "were all the descendants of the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor" (皆黃炎之後也) (Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 98; "Jinyu 晉語" says that the Yellow Emperor had twenty-five sons but only two of them inherited his surname Ji 紀 (Xu, *Guoyu jijie*, 333-334); and the "Luyu 魯語" says the Yellow Emperor is mentioned as the sacrificial receiver of several states (ibid., 154-162). The Yellow Emperor's name is also found on a Warring States bronze vessel called "Chenhou Yinqi dui 陳侯因齊敦," the earliest among the datable sources pertaining to the Yellow Emperor, who, according to the reading of the inscriptions by some scholars, is considered the "Remote Ancestor 高祖" of the Tian Qi 田齊 royal family. See Xu Zhongshu 徐仲舒, "Chenhou siqi kaoshi 陳侯四器考釋," in *Xu Zhongshu lishi lunwen xuanji* 徐仲舒歷史論文選輯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 412-431, 438. We need to be aware of the typo in the Zhonghua shuju version of this article, saying that the Yinqi *dui* was commissioned in 375 BCE (p. 434). In consulting with what Xu says in its previous section, the Yinqi *dui* should be dated in 357 BCE. See ibid., 425, 427. For a different reading of this passage, see Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi kaoshi 兩周金文辭大系考釋," in *Guo Moruo qianji* 郭沫若全集 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2002c), 8: 464-466; Zhang Hanmo, "Authorship and Text Making in Early China" (PhD dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2012), 81-87.

eve of Chong'er's return to power. In order for Chong'er to seize rule from his nephew, the then-king of Jin [Lord Huai 懷, r. 637 BCE], he and his entourage went to the state of Qin 秦 to seek political alliance and military aid. The king of Qin attempted to seal the alliance with the deposed prince by having Chong'er marry his daughter, Huai Ying 懷嬴, who had some time earlier been married to, and then been abandoned by, the current Jin ruler. Learning that Chong'er intended to refuse Qin's request, Sikong Jizi persuaded him to accept. Sikong Jizi suggested that a marital tie between Jin and Qin would not only help the exiled prince return to power but would also make his offspring flourish. Taking the Yellow Emperor as an example, Sikong Jizi says:

> In the past Shao Dian married the daughter of the You Qiao clan and she gave birth to the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor. The Yellow Emperor settled in the Ji River valley, and the Flame Emperor, in the Jiang River valley. They both were established, yet their powers differed. Therefore, the Yellow Emperor was surnamed Ji, and the Flame Emperor was surnamed Jiang. That the two emperors used their armies to conquer each other resulted from their differing powers. Those who are surnamed differently differ in power; those different in power are different in kind. Those who differ in kind, even though they live close, when their men and women match each other, will successfully generate offspring.[4]

This passage, likely one instance of the euhemerization of the Yellow Emperor,[5] names both the Yellow Emperor's biological parents and the place where he was established, even though none of this information can be verified. The identities of Shao Dian and You Qiao are difficult to trace, but they are generally regarded as two different ancient tribes located in the western highland

4 昔少典娶于有蟜氏，生黃帝、炎帝。黃帝以姬水成，炎帝以姜水成。成而異德，故黃帝為姬，炎帝為姜，二帝用師以相濟也，異德之故也。異姓則異德，異德則異類。異類雖近，男女相及，以生民也。"Jinyu," in *Guoyu* [*Discourses of the States*], 4:356.

5 Euhemerization is a method usually referred to as euhemerism, called the "historical interpretation" of mythology by Thomas Bulfinch. According to this theory, myths are a reflection of historical events and mythological characters, historical personages, although both the historical events and historical personages may have been reshaped and exaggerated under the influence of traditional mores during their transmission. It is defined in modern literary theory as an approach holding that myths are distorted accounts of real historical events. See Thomas Bulfinch, *Mythology* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004), 194; Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 45.

region of China in today's Gansu and Shaanxi provinces. This inference is derived from the belief that the Ji and Jiang Rivers, which were close to the bases of the Shao Dian and You Qiao tribes, were in western China.

Guided by such assumption, scholars seem to have confidently located the Jiang River in present-day Baoji, but the location of the Ji River has long been under debate.[6] Since the Zhou 周 later rose to power in the west with the help of its major ally, the Jiang people, the location of the Ji River is considered closely related to the origin of the Ji Zhou 姬周 tribe. A long-held idea is that the Zhou culture originated from the Jing 涇 and Wei 渭 River valleys.[7] Following Qian Mu 錢穆 [1895-1990], however, many scholars now believe that the Zhou had lived in present-day Shanxi Province, at least from the time of Hou Ji 后稷,[8] the alleged ancestor of the Zhou according to the ode "Shengmin [生民]."[9] Later, the Ji tribe migrated from Shanxi to Bin 豳 and then to Zhouyuan 周原 [the plain of Zhou] in present-day Shaanxi Province, which became its new base and from which it rose to threaten the western border of the Shang 商 [ca. 1600-1046 BCE] domain as it grew in power.[10]

Many other sources agree with the *Discourses of the States* passage, but the exact location of the Yellow Emperor's original power base is still far less than definite.[11] For example, both the *Records of the Grand Historian* and "Wudide

6 Cf. Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, *Gushi xukao* 古史續考 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), 1-73, 161-197; Yin Shengpin 尹盛平, *Zhouyuan wenhua yu Xi Zhou wenming* 周原文化與西周文明 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005); Xu Bingchang 徐炳昶 [Xu Xusheng 徐旭生], *Zhongguo gushi de chuanshuo shidai* 中國古史的傳說時代, Minguo congshu series 2, vol. 73 [photocopy of 1946 edition], 26-36; Zou Heng 鄒衡, *Xia Shang Zhou kaoguxue lunwenji* 夏商周考古學論文集 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 297-356; Yang 1992, 13-44.

7 For example, see Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐, *Di wang shi ji* 帝王世紀 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997); Hsu and Linduff 1988.

8 Han Jianye 韓建業 and Yang Xin'gai 楊新改, *Wudi shidai: Yi Huaxia wei hexin de gushi tixi de kaogu guancha* 五帝時代：以華夏為核心的古史體系的考古觀察 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2006), 53-54.

9 "Shengmin," in *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, ed. Shisanjing zhushu 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 17: 1055-1078.

10 "Gongliu," in *Maoshi zhengyi*, 17: 109-1123; "Mian," in ibid., 16: 979-995; Han and Yang, *Wudi shidai*, 53-54.

11 Cf. Wang Hui 王暉, *Gushi chuanshuo shidai xintan* 古史傳說時代新探 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe 2009), 9-11; Guo Moruo, "Yin qi cuibian 殷契粹編," in *Guo Moruo qianji* (Kaogu bian 考古編) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2002a), 4: 16-22; idem, "Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen yanjiu 殷周青銅器銘文研究," in ibid., 5: 114; Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎, *Zong Zhou shehui yu liyue wenming* 宗周社會與禮樂文明 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1992), 21-23; Zou, *Xia Shang Zhou kaoguxue lunwenji*, 297-356.

[五帝德]" in the *Da Dai liji* [大戴禮記] suggest that the Yellow Emperor was also called Xuanyuan 軒轅, and Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 [215-282 CE] explains that he was named this because he was born on Mount Xuanyuan.[12] Based on phonological similarities between the terms *gui* 鼈 [*kwrə] and *ji* 姬 [kə (*kjə)], *xuanyuan* 軒轅 [*hŋan wan] and *tianyuan* 天黿 [*thîn ŋwan] as well as on the provenance of some of the bronzes marked with the characters 天黿 [*tianyuan*], which is interpreted as the family emblem of the Yellow Emperor, Guo Moruo and Yang Xiangkui propose that the Yellow Emperor tribe originally lived northeast of the Luo 洛 River in Shaanxi Province before moving to northern Shaanxi and finally migrating southward to the Zhouyuan area.[13]

Regardless of the differences in their conclusions, these two lines of argument about the location of the Ji River share the same presumption: Sikong Jizi's narration about the origin of the Yellow Emperor is a trustworthy historical account. In fact, this assumption has been so solidly established that this passage is often cited in scholarly works either as self-evident proof or as the premise in the search of the Yellow Emperor's original power base. Nevertheless, such an assumption is not without question if we examine how the Yellow Emperor is portrayed in early Chinese literature. A careful review of these materials reveals the Yellow Emperor as both a mythical and a historicized figure in extant early writings. By reviewing some of these materials, this paper aims to present how the historicization of the Yellow Emperor occurred and, at the same time, explore the persuasive power of the Huangdi

12 "Wudide," in *Da Dai liji huizhu jijie* 大戴禮記匯注集解, ed. Fang Xiangdong 方向東 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 62: 689; "Wudi benji," in Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [*Records of the Grand Historian*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 1: 5.

13 Wang, *Gushi chuanshuo shidai xintan*, 11-13; Zou Heng 鄒衡, *Xia Shang Zhou kaoguxue lunwenji* 夏商周考古學論文集, 2d ed. (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2001), 310-312. For a discussion of the connection between the Huangdi clan and the *tianyuan* emblem, see Guo, "Yin qi cuibian," 16-22; Guo, "Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen yanjiu," 114; Yang 1992, 21-23. Another scholar, Chen Ping 陳平, inspired by Su Bingqi 蘇秉琦 and others, traces the origin of the Huangdi tribe even farther east. He believes that the Yellow Emperor is associated with the Hongshan 紅山 culture in northeastern China. He suggests that it was from the Hongshan cultural base that the Huangdi tribe expanded and gradually moved to the west highland, becoming one of the groups later known as the Ji Zhou of Zhouyuan. He also argues that the legendary Battle of Zhuolu in present-day northern Hebei 河北 Province was caused by the westward migration of the Ji tribe out of the Hongshan culture base, rather than by the expansion of the Hua Xia 華夏 ethnic groups from the west highland. See Chen Ping, "Lüelun Banquan Zhuolu Dazhan qianhou Huangdi zu de lailongqumai 略論阪泉、涿鹿大戰前後黃帝族的來龍去脈," in *Yan Qin wenhua yanjiu: Chenping xueshu wenji* 燕秦文化研究：陳平學術文集 (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2003).

narrative, a function that, by nature, defines the historicity of the Huangdi narrative as secondary to its purpose of persuasion. The research on Huangdi as a mythical or historical figure is abundant. Nevertheless, for its own purposes, this article focuses on a few important but often misinterpreted passages from *Records of the Grand Historian, Discourses of the States*, and *Remaining Zhou Documents*. Its main purpose is not only to stress that historicized information does not represent historical facts but also to reveal the force driving such historicization.

The Mythical, Macrobian Yellow Emperor with Four Faces

Generally speaking, two scholarly approaches are used to deal with the emergence of the Huangdi myth. One of them tends to view the Huangdi myth as a historical development, which I call the historical approach, while the other—the structuralist approach—prefers to explore the symbolic meanings of the Huangdi myth by analyzing its structural elements while avoiding embroilment in debates about the putative oral transmission upon which the historical approach relies.[14] The historical approach consists of two main lines of arguments. The first line, advocated by Yang Kuan 楊寬 [1914-2005], suggests that the myth of the Yellow Emperor as presented in Warring States writings was primarily the product of a tradition of oral transmission extending back to a distant past when the belief in the Supreme Being [*shangdi* 上帝] was first formed. According to Yang Kuan, this supreme being was called the "August Thearch" [*huangdi* 皇帝], which became a general term to refer to many regional gods during the Eastern Zhou period, as it imparts an air of antiquity to such deities. Because the syllable *huang*皇* [(g) wâŋ] is phonetically identical to the syllable *huang* 黃 [*wâŋ, or yellow], the term "August Thearch" was thus rendered later as the "Yellow Thearch" 黃帝 or, more commonly, the "Yellow Emperor." Because of this, the myths of other godlike figures—Yao 堯, Shun 舜, and Yu 禹, for instance—also contain hints of the later historicizating of the Yellow Emperor.[15] Following Yang Kuan, Mark Lewis

14 Cf. Charles LeBlanc, "A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13-14 (1985-1986); Yün-hua Jan, "The Change of Images: The Yellow Emperor in Ancient Chinese Literature," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 19, no. 2 (1981). The structuralist approach is not the focus of this paper.

15 Yang Kuan, "Zhongguo shanggushi daolun 中國上古史導論," in *Gushi bian*, 189-199. For related arguments identifying the Yellow Emperor as Yao or Yu, also see Sun Zuoyun 孫作雲, "Huangdi yu Yao zhi chuanshuo jiqi diwang 黃帝與堯之傳說及其地望," in

examines the Warring States myths regarding Huangdi and Chi You 蚩尤 in the ancient tradition in which those myths were rooted, reconstructed, and interpreted to argue that they are closely associated with the philosophy of Warring States warfare and statecraft.[16]

The second historical approach, taken by Michael Puett, accepts that the emergence of the Huangdi myth concerns Warring States history, but it disagrees with the opinion that the Huangdi myth was connected to any earlier tradition. For Puett, connecting the Warring States Huangdi myth to an earlier mythical tradition not only takes the already scattered information on the Huangdi myth out of context and leads to the reconstruction of an earlier tradition that is historically meaningless but also fails to explicate the diverse and, in some cases, conflicting narratives on the Yellow Emperor. He also takes issue with the structuralist approach to the Huangdi myth, an approach that does not account for the differences among the various narratives on the Yellow Emperor. Puett believes that, by pursuing the "ultimate symbolism" in the structures of the Huangdi narratives, the structuralist approach fails to read the Huangdi myth in its proper context. He suggests that, to avoid decontextualizing the myth, one has to avoid reconstructing a composite Huangdi myth based on materials scattered in different texts. On the contrary, he suggests that we situate the Huangdi myth only in the Warring States debates pertaining to the use of warfare in the creation of statecraft.[17]

Both Lewis's and Puett's arguments are inspiring, but this paper separates the emergence of the Huangdi narratives from how they were used in early Chinese Literature. Whether a mythological Yellow Emperor existed in the ancient past is one question; how the Huangdi narratives contributed to the Warring States intellectual debates is another. The Huangdi myth could have occurred very early on, but it functions differently in different contexts in which this myth is often conveniently recreated and reinterpreted. That is, when the myth is adapted in a new narrative, it may appear so scattered that its original context can no longer be meaningfully recognized and reconstructed. The following is a good example of this point.

Sun Zuoyun wenji: Zhongguo gudai shenhua chuanshuo yanjiu 孫作雲文集：中國古代神話傳說研究 (Zhengzhou: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2003); Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu 商代的神話與巫術," *Yanjing xuebao* 20 (1936).

16 Mark Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1990), 165-212.

17 Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 92-101.

According to the *Shizi* 尸子, a text allegedly associated with Shang Yang's 商鞅 [395-338 BCE] contemporary Shi Jiao 尸佼,[18] one day Confucius's disciple Zigong 子貢 asked the master, "Is it true that in ancient times the Yellow Emperor had four faces?"[19] Confucius answered this question with a twist on the term *simian* 四面, suggesting a rational response to a rather odd inquiry:

> The Yellow Emperor summoned four persons who agreed with him and dispatched them to govern the four quarters. They remained close to one another without intention and accomplished the task without prearrangement. They had achieved great success and merits. This is what the term *simian* means.[20]

Confucius intentionally dismisses a literal reading of the word *simian* [four faces] emphasized in Zigong's question. Instead, he translates this term into a figurative expression for the Yellow Emperor's wisdom in governance. In this new context, the term "four faces" turns into four ministers representing the Yellow Emperor to govern the "four quarters."[21]

However bizarre Zigong's question may sound, the notion that the Yellow Emperor had four faces does not seem to have been raised out of thin air. Not only did Zigong ask about it, but in a text preceding one of the versions of the *Laozi* 老子 on one of the silk manuscripts found at Mawangdui 馬王堆, Tomb 3, the Yellow Emperor is depicted as literally having four faces. According to this account, these four faces enabled the Yellow Emperor to observe the four quarters and to collect information more efficiently than ordinary people, thereby allowing the Yellow Emperor to make more informed policies and to conduct the affairs of state with greater understanding of the conditions of the people: "he was therefore able to act as the model of all under heaven."[22]

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18 "Yiwen zhi," in Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 [*History of the Han*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30:1741.

19 古者黃帝四面，信乎?

20 黃帝取合己者四人，使治四方，不謀而親，不約而成，大有成功，此之謂四面也。Li Shoukui 李守奎 and Li Yi 李軼, *Shizi yizhu* 尸子譯註 (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), 67.

21 A similar interpretation of the term *simian* 四面 also appears in the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 [*Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü*]. See Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), 740.

22 是以能為天下宗. See Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi: Mawangdui Hanmu chutu boshu* 黃帝四經今注今譯 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011), 196. Mark Csikszentmihalyi imagines that this type of writing might have been carved on ritual objects and our understanding of it must be based on such ritual context; see his

Similarly, it is not surprising that, in various sources, the Yellow Emperor appears as a godlike figure associating with or commanding dragons, monsters, beasts, ghosts and spirits, or wind and rain gods either on ritual occasions or in battle.[23] Even the *Records of the Grand Historian* preserves this image of a divine Yellow Emperor in the "Treatise on the Feng and Shan sacrifices [Fengshan shu 封禪書]." In that chapter, Gongsun Qing 公孫卿, a *fangshi* 方士, describes to Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 [r. 141-87 BCE] how the Yellow Emperor ascended to heaven as an immortal.[24] This account also reflects that different images of the Yellow Emperor circulated in different circles of learning. Nevertheless, as Yang Kuan points out, because the name Yellow Emperor was derived from the general term "august thearch," the stories surrounding the Yellow Emperor and other sage kings all evolved out of the myth of this "august thearch."[25]

Confucius's answer highlights the central role of rationalization in discourse at the time this anecdote was formed. Through rationalization, a mythical figure is transformed into an actual sage king documented in a historical account. In other words, after such a historicization has taken place, the mythical figure becomes a historical fact.[26]

"Reimagining the Yellow Emperor's Four Faces," in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

23 Scattered information pertaining to different images of the Yellow Emperor is still available in a number of sources, especially in the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 [*Classic of Mountains and Seas*], the *weishu* 緯書 [weft] writings, and the *zhuzi* 诸子 [speculative] writings considered inelegant by the Grand Historian. For examples on how the *Shanhaijing* depicts the Yellow Emperor, see Mori Yasutarō 森安太郎, *Kōtei densetsu: kodai Chūgoku shinwa no kenkyū* 黃帝傳說：古代中國神話の研究 (Kyōto: Kyōto joshi daigaku jinbun gakkai, 1970), 149-174; for a summary of information in the *zhuzi* texts, see Xu Shunzhan 許順湛, *Wudi shidai yanjiu* 五帝時代研究 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2005), 69-78; for the depictions of the Yellow Emperor arranged according to different categories, see Huangdiling jijinhui 黃帝陵基金會, *Huangdi wenhua zhi* 黃帝文化志 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2008), 1-220; for related information text by text, see Nakajima Toshio 中島敏夫, *Sankō gotei ka u senshin shiryō shūsei* 三皇五帝夏禹先秦資料集成 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2001); for the analysis of the Yellow Emperor appearing in different sources as the god of rain, storm, and fog, see Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 179-183.

24 "Fengshan shu," in *Shiji*, 28: 1393-1394.

25 Yang, "Zhongguo shanggushi daolun," 195-206.

26 Compared with their Greek counterparts, who, as William G. Boltz points out, "have mythologized their history, Chinese historicized their mythology." Therefore, to restore Chinese myths means a process of "reverse euhemerization," that is "to peel away, so to

Another similar conversation between Confucius and one of his disciples comparable to this narrative also deals with the mythical aspect of the Yellow Emperor as well as Confucius' attempt to historicize this figure. Like Zigong, who doubts that the Yellow Emperor could have had four faces, Zaiwo 宰我 questions the ancient sage about his abnormal longevity in the "Wu Di De":

> In the past I heard from Rong Yi that the Yellow Emperor lived for three hundred years. May I ask whether the Yellow Emperor was a human being? How could he have lived for three hundred years?[27]

Three-hundred-year longevity is as strange as a human being with four faces. Both inquiries question the superhuman characteristics of the Yellow Emperor. As with Zigong's question in the *Shizi*, here in the "Wu Di De" narrative, Confucius interprets Zaiwo's question in an ethical, political sense. After repeating almost verbatim some of the information included in the Yellow Emperor's account in *Records of the Grand Historian*, Confucius explains:

> When [the Yellow Emperor] was alive, people benefited from his rule for a hundred years; after he died, people stood in awe of his spirit for a hundred years; after [his spirit] disappeared, people used his teachings for a hundred years. For this reason, people say [that the Yellow Emperor lived for] three hundred years.[28]

Here, again, in answering his disciple's questions, Confucius transforms the literal strangeness of the sayings into political wisdom that comments on the Yellow Emperor's governance and merits. What Zaiwo asks about is the unbelievably long life of the Yellow Emperor, but Confucius extends the connotation of longevity to include the time of one's influence after death.

It is also worth noting the persuasive power of Confucius' rationalizations to historicize and moralize the old sayings in these two passages. In demythicizing the saying that the Yellow Emperor had four faces, Confucius interprets the Yellow Emperor's four faces as four persons who agreed with him. Such rhetoric links the strangeness of the Yellow Emperor with his actual governing

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speak, the Juist [Confucian] overlay" ("Kung Kung and the Flood: Reverse Euhemerism in the Yao Tian," *T'oung Pao* 67, nos. 3-5 [1981]: 141-142).

27 昔者予聞諸榮伊言黃帝三百年。請問黃帝者人邪？亦非人邪？何以至於三百年乎? Fang, *Da Dai liji huizhu jijie*, 689.

28 生而民得其利百年，死而民畏其神百年，亡而民用其教百年，故曰三百年。Ibid., 690.

skills and his virtue of being willing to share power with others. Similarly, in explaining how the Yellow Emperor could have lived for three hundred years, Confucius reinterprets a person's lifespan into the lasting influence of his contributions to a society, a strategy that further facilitates the euhemerization of the Yellow Emperor. In both cases, the rhetoric privileges the figurative over the literal.

What caused the demythicization of the Yellow Emperor in the Eastern Zhou ritual and religious context is a very interesting question worth further discussion, but it is not the focus of this paper. Suffice it to say that it is related to the change in ritual and religious thinking after the decline of Zhou royal power. Behind this change was an increase in the role of the human realm in the workings of the cosmos: heaven now responded to the human manipulation of the patterns and forms in which the mandate of heaven was believed to manifest itself. Under such a religious mentality, although people still presented sacrifices to all sorts of spirits, deities, and constellations to avoid disasters and seek blessings, the causality between the heaven and the human realm now became explicable and predictable according to those forms and patterns.[29] In contrast, this paper aims to reveal the function of the Huangdi narrative in the tradition of early Chinese historiography.

Historiographical Reasoning behind the Historicization

The rationalization at work in the transmission of the Huangdi stories makes unifying the depiction of the Yellow Emperor difficult. If one aims to present a consistent image of the Yellow Emperor, this task requires not only the rationalization of all the Huangdi myths but also the eradication of all the pre-rationalized myths to remove all those incompatible sayings and accounts from Huangdi lore. This is not how it had worked. In fact, on the contrary, the reinterpretation of the Huangdi stories that resulted from such a rationalization by different groups in different circumstances further complicates consistency in the Huangdi lore.[30] Such a diversity of sources seems to have confronted the

29 For an extended discussion, see Zhang, "Authorship and Text Making in Early China," 95-117.

30 Nakajima mentions 39 Han and pre-Han texts in which the Yellow Emperor's name appears at least once (*Sankō gotei ka u senshin shiryō shūsei*, 2-5). Liu Baocai 劉寶才 also lists 39 major texts (dating from pre-Qin to the Qing dynasty) containing information pertaining to the Yellow Emperor in a conference paper (Jiang Linchang 江林昌, "Zhongguo

Grand Historian when he had to choose among available sources to compile the Yellow Emperor's biography.

In terms of structural organization, the *Records of the Grand Historian* account begins with the protagonist's genealogy and his extraordinariness, even as a youth; then it delineates his achievements, before ending with information regarding his death and progeny. Although the narrative is included in the "Basic Annals [Benji 本紀]" section of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the structure of the story of the Yellow Emperor resembles that of a *Records of the Grand Historian* biography. The *Records of the Grand Historian* uses the biographical structure to present the first comprehensive image of the Yellow Emperor, one that depicts him as the founding father of Chinese civilization, an idea that was flourishing at the time the *Records of the Grand Historian* was compiled. Thus the Yellow Emperor's military accomplishments—that is, his defeat of the Flame Emperor and Chi You—consequently saved a large domain from the chaotic rule of his predecessor, the Divine Farmer [Shennong 神農], and he became the starting point for human history, as expounded by the Grand Historian.[31]

The Grand Historian's comments at the conclusion of the chapter on the Yellow Emperor and the other four ancient Thearchs, however, also indicate that the historicized Yellow Emperor is not his only image. He indeed had other "faces" preserved in the materials that the Grand Historian intentionally excluded from his writing, as he says:

> Men of learning frequently mention the Five Thearchs and consider them ancient. Nevertheless, the *Book of Documents* merely records what had occurred since the time of Yao. As for what the Hundred Schools have said about the Yellow Emperor, their writings are neither elegant nor refined, and it is difficult for gentlemen to talk about them. Some Confucian scholars do not transmit Confucian's teaching on Zaiyu's [Zaiwo] inquiry about the virtues of the Five Thearchs and the Yellow Emperor's lineages and clans. I once reached Kongtong to the west, visited Zhuolu to the north, approached the sea in the east, and floated along the Yangzi and the Huai Rivers in the south, arriving at the places often mentioned

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shoujie Huangdi wenhua xueshu yantaohui zongshu 中國首屆黃帝文化學術研討會綜述," *Xueshu yuekan* 4 [2001]: 83).

31 "Wudi benji," 1:1-10. For the Grand Historian's own voice revealing his ambition of "exploring the edge between humans and heaven" (*jiu tian ren zhi ji* 究天人之際), see his letter to Ren An 任安 preserved in his biography in the *Hanshu*; "Sima Qian zhuan," in *Hanshu,* 62: 2735.

> by each and every one of the seniors and elders as where the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun once lived. The customs and teachings of those places indeed are different, but in general those that do not deviate from the ancient texts are close to the truth. I have observed that the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and *Discourses of the States* have noticeably elucidated the *Virtues of the Five Thearchs* and the *Yellow Emperor's Lineages and Clans*. Although I have not examined them in depth, what they present is not empty at all. The *Book of Documents* has long remained incomplete, yet what is not included in the *Documents* frequently appears in other sayings. One could not truly understand their meaning unless he is fond of learning and thinks deeply. It is indeed difficult to discuss them with those who lack ideas and knowledge. I have put the sayings in order: selecting the refined, elegant words, I put them at the beginning of the Basic Annals.[32]

Several points in this passage illuminate how the Grand Historian selected data to present in the Yellow Emperor's biography. First, he points out that he had access to both "elegant" and "inelegant" materials, but he left out the inelegant materials because they lacked the canonicity of the more elegant Confucian classics. What, in the view of the Grand Historian, constituted inelegant information? According to this passage, it consisted of the sources related to the teachings of the Hundred Schools as well as legends and myths orally circulated by elders as recollections of the past. Bizarre details, such as the belief that the Yellow Emperor had four faces, may have been found in the inelegant sources at the Grand Historian's disposal. Moreover, the heterogeneity of the sources must have naturally resulted in inconsistent descriptions of the Yellow Emperor. That the Grand Historian chooses "those words that are refined and elegant" to portray his version of the Yellow Emperor unambiguously shows his disbelief in the materials of the "inelegant" category.

The second principle for selecting sources is closely associated with the first. The Grand Historian's decision to use the biography seen in the "Wu Di De" and the "Di Xi Xing [帝系性]," authoritative teachings supposedly passed

32 學者多稱五帝尚矣。然尚書獨載堯以來；而百家言黃帝，其文不雅馴，薦紳先生難言之。孔子所傳宰予問五帝德及帝繫姓，儒者或不傳。余嘗西至空桐，北過涿鹿，東漸於海，南浮江淮矣，至長老皆各往往稱黃帝、堯、舜之處，風教固殊焉，總之不離古文者近是。予觀春秋、國語，其發明五帝德、帝繫姓章矣，顧弟弗深考，其所表見皆不虛。書缺有閒矣，其軼乃時時見於他說。非好學深思，心知其意，固難為淺見寡聞道也。余并論次，擇其言尤雅者，故著為本紀書首。"Wudi benji," 1: 46.

down from Confucius and through his disciples, requires additional support of related information about a historical Yellow Emperor from other Confucian classics, especially the *Book of Documents*, the work considered the most reliable collection of materials about ancient kings and ministers. What made the Grand Historian uneasy is that the Yellow Emperor is not mentioned in the *Documents*. Instead, this collection of speeches and documents ascribes the beginning of a civilization ruled by the innovations of ancient sage kings not to the Yellow Emperor, as the *Records of the Grand Historian* does, but to Yao, another sage ruler who greatly postdates the Yellow Emperor according to the genealogy in the "Wu Di De" and the *Records of the Grand Historian* account. This puts the Grand Historian's historicization of the Yellow Emperor on an unstable ground: his painstaking effort to exclude "inelegant" sayings is rendered moot because of this contradictory genealogy in the *Documents*, even though in reality he consulted "ancient texts" [*guwen* 古文] to tease out "those words that are neither refined nor elegant."[33] This inevitably compromises the Grand Historian's methods for evaluating and selecting materials to present a historical Yellow Emperor in his writing.

This leads to the last important point about this passage. Aware of the above-mentioned dilemma, the Grand Historian offers two explanations for his stance. On the one hand, "The *Documents* has long been incomplete." This statement indicates that he trusts the "Wu Di De" and believes that the Yellow Emperor is indeed the starting point of Chinese history even though this position is not verified by the *Documents*. That is, the Yellow Emperor's absence in the *Documents* could be due to the loss of written records. On the other hand, the Grand Historian finds that "what is not included in the *Documents* frequently appears in other sayings" of reliable texts such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Discourses of the States*, which "have noticeably elucidated the *Virtues of the Five Thearchs* as well as the *Lineages and Clans of the Thearchs*." In linking the "Wu Di De" to historical sources such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Discourses of the States*, the Grand Historian justifies his historicization of the Yellow Emperor without support from the *Documents*, which he considers the more authoritative source.

The Grand Historian's historicization of the Yellow Emperor not only has influenced the interpretation of the Yellow Emperor's stories but also has shaped the conception of the origin of Chinese ethnicity and civilization.

33 According the commentaries, the term *guwen* denotes to the "Wudide" and the "Dixixing." Nevertheless, if the word *gu*, or "archaic," does play a role in this context, the writings collected in the *Documents* certainly look more archaic than the former two. For the *Shiji* commentaries on the term *guwen*, see "Wudi benji," 1:46.

The Yellow Emperor is the root of almost all ancestral trees, upon which the entire system of ancient Chinese history is reconstructed. Those texts used by the Grand Historian—the "Wu Di De," the "Di Xi Xing," and the *Discourses of the States*, among others—are still accepted as historical evidence and are fundamental in structuring, depicting, and interpreting a historically undocumented past. Although historians of the "doubting antiquity" persuasion have claimed that the Yellow Emperor is a legendary or mythological figure, his stories are still tailored to match or interpret archaeological finds. To be sure, nowadays his image as a historical individual seems less appealing to many scholars of ancient Chinese history, who tend to conceive of the Yellow Emperor as a collective term denoting a group of people, a society, or a culture that is archaeologically traceable, but the premise of this view undoubtedly rests upon the historicization of the Yellow Emperor initiated in the *Records of the Grand Historian*.[34]

Despite its lasting influence, the Grand Historian's approach to the Yellow Emperor has a noticeable limitation. His method for omitting the inelegant sources when trying to historicize the Yellow Emperor results in an incomplete image of this figure. Such an intentional omission also obscures the earlier or concomitant context that is linked to the phenomenon of the Yellow Emperor's sudden rise in popularity since the Eastern Zhou period [770-221 BCE]. A further danger in this regard is that the predominant historiographical principle of rationalizing the selected materials may lead to a false representation of the Yellow Emperor as a historical figure. After the description of a historicized Yellow Emperor is widely accepted and the image of him as a historical figure is established, all the materials selected to describe him are also historicized and rationalized and are further woven into a structure of historical knowledge legitimized as historical facts by this structure itself. This is why we saw in the beginning of this paper that scholars willingly consider what is presented in the *Discourses of the States* passage as historical description and painstakingly try to locate the Yellow Emperor's original power base. A careful reading of the *Discourses of the States* passage and other relevant information, however, not only reveals competing images of the Yellow Emperor that cannot be completely reconciled by the historicization discussed above but also helps elucidate how the Huangdi narratives work in their proper contexts.

34 Many works approach both related textual and archaeological data in this similar vein, however different some of details might be. See Xu, *Wudi shidai yanjiu*; Liu, *Gushi xukao*, 1-73; Yin, *Zhouyuan wenhua yu Xi Zhou wenming*, 115-118.

Competing Images and Purpose of Persuasion

The *Discourses of the States* passage cited above mentions the conflict between the Ji and Jiang tribes, which seem to denote the battle between the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor[35] referred to as the Battle of Banquan [*Banquan zhizhan* 阪泉之戰] in both the "Wu Di De" and the *Records of the Grand Historian*. According to the "Wu Di De," the Yellow Emperor "taught his army of bears, leopards, and tigers to fight against the Flame Emperor in the field of Banquan and was able to achieve his goal after three battles."[36] The animal troops are interpreted as the names of the Yellow Emperor's armies, possibly distinguished by different banners emblazoned with bears, leopards, and tigers. Such an interpretation is again influenced by the tendency to historicize the Yellow Emperor as an ancient sage king. It is also possible that in the legend the Yellow Emperor indeed commanded animals in battle. The *Records of the Grand Historian* account about the Battle of Banquan accords with the "Wu Di De" passage,[37] but it narrates the details of another battle (the Battle of Zhuolu) immediately after its account of the Battle of Banquan. In the narrative about the Battle of Zhuolu, Chi You, often depicted as a beastlike war hero in a number of sources, was captured and killed in the field of Zhuolu for his rebellion.[38]

The Yellow Emperor's two adversaries, the Flame Emperor and Chi You, who are confronted separately according to the *Records of the Grand Historian,* are united as a single narrative preserved in the "Changmai [嘗麥]"—a piece related to the writing of punishment [*xingshu* 刑書]—in the *Remaining Zhou Documents*. The story forms part of the Zhou king's speech to his Grand Corrector [Taizheng 大正], the official in charge of punishment, and is as follows:

> In the past, at the beginning of the formation of heaven, two rulers were established; as a result, norms were also set up. The Red Emperor was ordered to assign the governing duties to two ministers; Chi You was ordered to live with Shao Hao, in charge of the four quarters and

35 The Flame Emperor [Yandi 炎帝] sometimes is also referred to as Chidi 赤帝, the Red Emperor, as seen in the cited sentence that follows.

36 教熊羆貔豹虎，以與赤帝戰於版泉之野，三戰然後得行其志. Fang, *Da Dai liji huizhu jijie*, 689.

37 "Wudi benji," 1:5.

38 Ibid.

> the work that had not been accomplished by heaven above. Chi You then expelled the Emperor and the two fought by the Zhuolu River,[39] leaving nowhere in the nine corners unaffected. The Red Emperor was greatly frightened and thus persuaded the Yellow Emperor to capture Chi You and kill him in central Ji. The Yellow Emperor released the anger [toward Chi You] with armors and weapons, therefore he achieved his governance greatly. He followed the order of heaven, and heaven recorded his achievements. For this reason, central Ji was also called the "Field without War Horse Bridles." Then Shao Hao, that is, Qing,[40] was appointed minister of war and master of bird to command the officials of the five elements;[41] therefore he was also called Zhi. Heaven thus accomplished [its work], lasting until today without being disturbed.[42]

Despite its vague wording and poor organization, this passage clearly attests that the Battle of Zhuolu started with a dispute between the Red Emperor and Chi You. Initially defeated by Chi You, the Red Emperor went to seek assistance from the Yellow Emperor, who was able to capture and kill Chi You in central Ji. Contrary to the account in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, in the *Remaining Zhou Documents* it is not the Yellow Emperor but the Flame Emperor (if he can be equated with the Red Emperor, as commentators suggest) who plays the major role in the Battle of Zhuolu against Chi You. This passage indeed states that the Red Emperor and Chi You were the two rulers. The reason that scholars now identify the *erhou* [二后] as the Red Emperor and the Yellow Emperor has to do with the modern synthesization of Huangdi lore, which elevates the Yellow Emperor to the role of the central protagonist in Chinese

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39 Some commentators suggest 河 is a mistaken rendering of 阿, denoting Mount Zhuolu instead of a river. See Huang Huaixin 黃懷信 et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 逸周書彙校集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 732-733.

40 Most commentators tend to think that 請 is 清, meaning Shao Hao. See ibid., 734-736.

41 The term *wudi* 五帝 is interpreted as the five elements with the reference from Shanzi's 剡子 speech recorded in the *Zuozhuan* [*Zuo Commentaries*]. See "Zhao," in Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 17.3: 1386-1388.

42 昔天之初，[character missing] 作二后，乃設建典，命赤帝分正二卿，命蚩尤宇于少昊，以臨四方，司 [two characters missing] 上天未成之慶。蚩尤乃逐帝，爭于涿鹿之河，九隅無遺。赤帝大懾，乃說于黃帝，執蚩尤殺之于中冀。以甲兵釋怒，用大正。順天思序，紀于大帝，用名之曰絕轡之野。乃命少昊請司馬鳥師，以正五帝之官，故名曰質。天用大成，至于今不亂。Huang et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 730-736.

legendary history.[43] In helping the Red Emperor to punish Chi You, the Yellow Emperor accomplishes what heaven had commanded the *erhou* to undertake. Violence, whether legal punishment or war, was henceforth legitimized as a means to establish the "norms" of good governance and peace. The theme that violence is necessary for the restoration of peace from chaos remains consonant with the ideology of Shang and Zhou statecraft. The founding fathers of both the Shang and Zhou dynasties established their rule by overthrowing kings in the preceding dynasties. The Zhou king's reference to the Yellow Emperor's defeat of Chi You in the chapter "Chang Mai" in the *Remaining Zhou Documents*, invokes this principle of statecraft.

The "Chang Mai" version of the Yellow Emperor's story is considered fairly early. Li Xueqin 李學勤 observes that the wording of the chapter resembles early Zhou bronze inscriptions and suggests that it could have taken its written form by the time of King Mu's 穆王 reign [r. 956-918 BCE], if not earlier, as suggested in the postscript to the *Remaining Zhou Documents*.[44] Li's article aims to relate the "Chang Mai" to Western Zhou legal writings, particularly those mentioned in the *Zuozhuan* [*Zuo Commentaries*] as the "Nine Punishments" [*jiu xing* 九刑]. But Li does not provide substantial evidence to prove his speculation; his dating of the "Chang Mai" to King Mu of Zhou also awaits verification, as there are not enough specifics in the "Chang Mai" to link it to King Zhao's 昭王 [r. 995-977 BCE] southern campaign, as Li surmises.[45] In fact, Li considers those expressions anachronistic in Western Zhou writing conventions, which undermine his early dating of this passage. A final blow to Li's dating is delivered by the *Zuo Commentaries* passages indicating that the creation of legal writings is a later occurrence.[46] The use of the phrase "rectifying writings of punishment" [*zhengxingshu* 正刑書] in the "Chang Mai" appears to be an

43 Huang et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 731.

44 Li Xueqin 李學勤, "'Changmai' pian yanjiu《嘗麥》篇研究," in *Dangdai xuezhe zixuan wenku: Li Xueqin juan* 當代學者自選文庫：李學勤卷 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 575. For related information in the postscript of the *Yi Zhoushu*, see Huang et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 1133.

45 Li, "'Changmai' pian yanjiu," 575.

46 "Zhao," in Yang, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 6.3: 1274-1277. The strong disagreement expressed in Shu Xiang's 叔向 letter to Zichan 子產 for the latter's drafting of legal writings seems to suggest that at that time legal writings were rather innovative. Those earlier legal writings mentioned by Shu Xiang in his letter, such as the "Punishment of Yu [Yu xing 禹刑]," the "Punishment of Tang [Tang xing 唐刑]," and the "Nine Punishment (Writings)" that Li Xueqin tends to believe as the Western Zhou legal writings, make more sense to the overall debate in the *Zuozhuan* context if we understand them as rhetorical devices, rather than historical documents.

Eastern Zhou event when considered in light of the more concrete evidence of its historical context in the *Zuo Commentaries*. Interestingly, this dating accords with Li Xueqin's dating of the less archaic expressions in the "Chang Mai" chapter, which he considers to be Eastern Zhou interpolations. The *Zuo Commentaries* narratives suggest, however, that those "less archaic" expressions are not later interpolations; rather, they betray the later date of the "Chang Mai" chapter as a whole.

To attest to the reliability of Sikong Jizi's statement about the Yellow Emperor in the *Discourses of the States*, Wang Hui 王暉 embraces Li Xueqin's dating of the "Chang Mai." In examining the usage of the character 中 [*zhong*] in a variety of sources (including the newly discovered "Baoxun [保訓]" in the Qinghua University collection of Warring States Writings) in comparison with its use in the "Chang Mai," Wang argues that the it is a written record of the Western Zhou dynasty. Moreover, by linking a phrase in it to oracle bone inscriptions and Shao Hao's naming his officials with birds names mentioned in the *Zuo Commentaries*, Wang Hui further traces the official system emphasizing the number five in its numerological sense to the pre-Shang period and suggests that not only was the it written early but what it depicts is also historically reliable.[47]

Wang Hui's argument is flawed. To interpret the character中 [*zhong*] as he does, as a burial banner on the basis of such later texts as the *Book of Rites* [*Liji* 禮記] and *Etiquette and Rites* [*Yili* 儀禮] does not prove the "Chang Mai" was an early text. Moreover, the different uses of the character *zhong* in the "Bao Xun" only reflect how complex this issue is, which certainly compromises the "Bao Xun" as evidence of the reliability of the "Chang Mai" as a Western Zhou source. Also, the connection of the "Chang Mai" to some oracle bone inscriptions and the legendary associations with the number five in Wang Hui's argument seems to ignore how the number five had been used and how its meaning changed over time. For example, he could have included in his argument that the number five is related to the development of the theory of the "five elements" in the Warring States period. A final shortcoming of Wang Hui's argument is that, in explaining why the Chen 陳 rulers had not offered the *di* 禘 sacrifice to the Yellow Emperor before they usurped the Jiang Qi family,

47 Wang, *Gushi chuanshuo shidai xintan*, xi-xvii; for Shao Hao's naming of his officials, see "Zhao," in Yang, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 17.3: 1386-1388; for the "Baoxun" bamboo strips and text, see Li Xueqin, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2010), 1: 8-9, 55-62, 142-148.

he asserts that the *di* sacrifice could be performed only by hegemonic rulers.[48] In fact, the *di* sacrifice consisted of two seasonal and ancestral offerings. Offering *di* sacrifices to one's ancestor was not merely limited to hegemonic rulers.[49] The state of Lu had never achieved hegemonic status, but its rulers periodically performed *di* sacrifices.[50]

Instead of selecting different versions of the Huangdi story in different sources as historical data, I prefer to read them in context. Take the *Discourses of the States* and the *Remaining Zhou Documents* passages mentioned earlier, for example. In those passages, it is understandable that Sikong Jizi and the Zhou king care about the persuasive effect of their speeches. But are they equally concerned about the factuality of the stories about the Yellow Emperor?

To answer this question, let us first examine Sikong Jizi's speech. He informs us that the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor were brothers, but because they grew up in different places, they developed different "potencies," and, because of their different "potencies," they could not get along with each other. If this has anything to do with the Battle of Banquan, a decisive battle won by the Yellow Emperor, it indicates that, after its defeat, the Jiang clan submitted to the Ji clan. This can hardly be proved. The "Sheng Min," an often-cited piece in the *Book of Odes* [*Shijing* 詩經] considered to convey information of the past of the Zhou people, describes the Ji (referring to the Zhou people) and the Jiang as longtime allies. It also indicates the latter as helping the former in its ascendancy,[51] but no sources recount how submissive the Jiang clan was, nor do they detail how dominant the Ji clan was, especially in its early stages. If we interpret Sikong Jizi's story in the context of the situation prompting his speech, however, it becomes clear that his purpose is to liken the relationship between the Ji and Jiang to that between the Jin and Qin.

Each and every point in the story regarding the relationship between the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor corresponds to a parallel relationship between Jin and Qin, and this correspondence highlights the thrust of Sikong Jizi's speech for his intended audience. Sikong Jizi argues that the advantages

48 Wang, *Gushi chuanshuo shidai xintan*, 8-9. Here Wang Hui refers to the contents of the bronze inscriptions on the "Chenhou Yin Qi dui." Cf. Xu, 'Chenhou siqi kaoshi"; Ding Shan, 丁山, *Gudai shenhua yu minzu* 古代神話與民族 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), 154-178; Guo, "Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi kaoshi," 464-466; Wang, *Gushi chuanshuo shidai xintan*, 7-9; Mori, *Kōtei densetsu*, 149-174; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China,* 165-212.

49 "Zhao," in Yang, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu,* 15.1: 1369; see both the main text of the *Zuo Commentaries* and the notes by Yang Bojun.

50 "Min," in ibid., 2; "Zhao," in ibid., 15; "Zhao," in ibid., 25; "Ding," in ibid., 8.

51 "Shengmin," 17: 1055-1078.

of obtaining Qin's support through marriage to the king's daughter should trump any concerns about clan differences and occasional conflicts between the states. And his account of the Ji and Jiang clans underscores his point: Ji and Jiang lived in different areas, had different potencies, and geopolitically did not get along well with each other, but the two groups had longtime marriage ties and their descendants prospered. To ensure the prosperity of the state of Jin, Chong'er should model himself after the Yellow Emperor. Moreover, as with many other speeches in the *Zuo Commentaries*, the function of relating the success of the Yellow Emperor in dealing with the Flame Emperor anticipates the Jin prince's future victory over the Qin, and, even if for this purpose alone, Chong'er should follow Sikong Jizi's advice.

Seeking the historical factuality of the statements in stories about the Yellow Emperor misses the point. Sikong Jizi was concerned about the persuasive effect, not the historical accuracy, of the comparison he makes between the Huangdi story and the situation facing Chong'er. Although many scholars insist on the historical truthfulness of Sikong Jizi's statements about the Yellow Emperor by assuming that it is part of a chain of oral transmission extending back to a distant past, it is impossible to verify how far into the past this chain extends. The lack of explicit connections explains the multiplicity of attempts to locate the Yellow Emperor's domain and the difficulty in pinpointing the area of the Ji River where the Yellow Emperor allegedly grew up. This difficulty is largely caused by the assumption that all the sources record historical facts about the Yellow Emperor that can be pieced together, without regard for their textual contexts, to create a unified, historically accurate image of the Yellow Emperor. The conflicting information presented in different sources, however, leads us to question the validity of such an assumption. In fact, in Sikong Jizi's story, the location of the Ji River must be in Jin because he has equated the territory of the Yellow Emperor in the vicinity of the Ji River with the territory of Jin. That is, the precise location and the actual existence of the Ji River play no part in Sikong Jizi's persuasion.

As with Sikong Jizi's story, the narratives recounting the Yellow Emperor's battles against Chi You and the Flame Emperor present a labyrinth of nominally concrete information on the battles of Banquan and Zhuolu. Both the "Wudide" and the *Records of the Historian* mention the Yellow Emperor's fight against the Flame Emperor, but unlike the latter, the "Wu Di De" says nothing about the Battle of Zhuolu. The *Records of the Historian* describes the "Battle of Banquan" and the "Battle of Zhuolu" as separate events; in both cases the Yellow Emperor appears as the initiator and the eventual victor. In the "Chang Mai" chapter, however, the Flame Emperor and Chi You, both appointed by heaven, are the central characters. The Yellow Emperor is portrayed merely as an assistant of

the Flame Emperor, and there is no indication, as other sources claim, that the two engaged in a major battle with each other at Banquan. Interestingly, the "Explanation of the *Records of the Grand Historian* [Shiji jie 史記解]," another chapter in the *Remaining Zhou Documents*, even suggests that it was Chi You instead of the Flame Emperor who fought the Yellow Emperor at the "Battle of Banquan," which would explain why this chapter refers to Chi You as "Sir Banquan."[52] Moreover, the *Commentary on the Water Classic* [*Shuijing zhu* 水經注] cites an earlier text to confirm this notion that Banquan is closely related to Chi You.[53] Another geographical source even suggests that Banquan was also called Huangdiquan 黃帝泉 [Spring of the Yellow Emperor], while Zhuolu was the Yellow Emperor's capital city.[54] In synthesizing all the information, some scholars conclude that Banquan is located in the same area as Zhuolu and that the Battle of Banquan was none other than the Battle of Zhuolu.[55] In short, what all these sources preserve is nothing but a narrative framework about emperors and battles in which the line between the memory of real events, if they were real, and an imagined past is almost impossible to draw.[56]

If, however, we read the story about Chi You, the Red Emperor, and the Yellow Emperor related in the Zhou king's speech as a rhetorical strategy, all the seemingly conflicting elements fit the import of the speech. Keep in mind that the "Chang Mai" is a work devoted to the establishment of a series of laws relating to punishment. Since the real aim of the king's speech is to issue the "nine writings on punishment [*xingshu jiupian* 刑書九篇]," it is not surprising that he advocates the legitimacy of violence as the means for achieving good

52 Huang et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 965-966.

53 Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 and Xiong Huizhen 熊會貞, *Shuijingzhu shu* 水經註疏 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1989), 1184-1186.

54 "Wudi benji," 1: 5.

55 Qian Mu, *Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1991), 10; Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩, *Shiji zhiyi* 史記志疑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 3-4.

56 Some scholars attempt to solve this problem with the support of archaeological data. For example, Han Jianye and Yang Xin'gai believe that the Miaodigou 廟底溝 and Hougang 後崗 archaeological cultures in the present-day area of Zhuolu correspond to the Huangdi and Chi You groups, respectively. The conflicts between the Huangdi and Yandi clans are archaeologically reflected in the interaction between the Zaoyuan 棗園 culture in Shanxi and the Banpo 半坡 culture in Guanzhong 關中. This kind of match obviously accepts the interpretation on the locations of the three ancient groups provided by textual information as preknowledge. Archaeological cultures do not explain specific historical events or heroical biographies. For this reason, K. C. Chang laments that most of the pre-Shang legendary history cannot be proved by archaeological data ("Shang Zhou shenhua zhi fenlei," 287; see also Han and Yang, *Wudi shidai*, 154-156.

governance. For this reason, the story is set in the time of an imperfect world waiting to be brought to perfection by two heaven-appointed rulers, the Red Emperor and Chi You. Unfortunately, shared rule soon leads to a chaotic situation: Chi You upends the balance of power by exiling the Red Emperor. To end the chaos and restore peace, the Red Emperor seeks the aid of the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor uses military force to eliminate the threat posed by Chi You and then establishes the rule of law. Only through violence is heaven's work carried out and peace restored. Viewed from this perspective, the Zhou king's telling of these particular events about the Yellow Emperor is not intended to recount historical facts but to justify the king's own promulgation of new laws. Citing the Yellow Emperor's use of punishment to pacify the world, the king evokes a connection between his current actions and those of the legendary sage king.

Conclusion

As illustrated in the preceding discussion, anecdotes about the Yellow Emperor should be read as hortatory rhetoric rather than as a reflection of historical facts. Even the Yellow Emperor's biographical account in the *Records of the Grand Historian* is a rearrangement of scattered, historicized information within a fixed narrative framework. Such biographical writing is not history. As K. C. Chang points out in his study on the Shang and Zhou myths, the primary approach to them is to view them as myths created to fill the needs of their own times; these myths do not reflect the life of earlier societies even though their contents may claim to do so.[57] The same can be said for the Yellow Emperor's biographical account in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. Its historical value is not as a factual record of the times of the Yellow Emperor but as a reflection of the Western Han scribes' view of the Yellow Emperor. Likewise, the sources upon which the Han Grand Historian relied are a better record of how Eastern Zhou people viewed the Yellow Emperor than of who the Yellow Emperor actually was. Instead of studying a "historical" Yellow Emperor, we need to examine how he was received during the Eastern Zhou and early imperial periods and how he was associated with a changing sociopolitical environment, religious context, and way of thinking.

57 Chang, "Shang Zhou shenhua zhi fenlei," 288.

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Two Modes of Goddess Depictions in Early Medieval Chinese Literature

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Abstract

Early medieval Chinese literature depicts two modes of goddesses, derived from the two masterpieces attributed to Song Yu, "Rhapsody on the Goddess" and "Rhapsody on Gaotang." Since Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" overshadowed other works among rhapsodies and poems, it appeared as if the influence of "Rhapsody on Gaotang" had stopped. This study reveals the two lineages of goddess depictions in medieval Chinese literature, showing that the "Goddess of Love" has never disappeared.

Keywords

early medieval China – goddess depiction – literature

The "Rhapsody on Gaotang [Gaotangfu 高唐賦]" and "Rhapsody on the Goddess [Shennüfu 神女賦]," traditionally attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 [c. 290-c. 223 BCE], are the most famous and likely the earliest works that describe hierogamous encounters between a mortal and a goddess. These two works exerted great influence over various genres of literature in later times. Although the influence of "Rhapsody on the Goddess" has been well addressed, the influence of "Rhapsody on Gaotang" has long been neglected or understated; one scholar even went so far as to claim that the "Goddess of Love" in the "Rhapsody on Gaotang" had disappeared altogether from Chinese literature.[1] This study attempts to reveal the two modes of depicting goddesses in the

1 See Ye Shuxian 葉舒憲, "Gao tang shennü de kua wenhua yanjiu 高唐神女的跨文化研究," *Renwenzazhi* 6 (1989): 100-101.

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literary works of early medieval China [220-589] derived from the above-mentioned early works of Song Yu, showing that the "Goddess of Love" never truly disappeared.[2]

Bringing the Subject in Question into Clearer View

Tradition has it that Song Yu, a famous rhapsody writer, wrote the noted "Rhapsody on Gaotang" and "Rhapsody on the Goddess" to depict encounters between King Huai 懷 of Chu 楚 [r. 328-299 BCE] and King Xiang 襄 of Chu [r. 298-263 BCE], respectively, and female divinities.[3] The preface to "Rhapsody on Gaotang" reads:

> In the past, the former king [King Huai of Chu] once visited the Gaotang shrine; he was tired and took a nap during the daytime. He dreamed of a woman who said to him, "I am the daughter of Mount Wu, and now a visitor to Gaotang. I heard that Your Majesty is traveling here, so I wish to serve you with my pillow and mat." Thus the king favored her with his bed.[4]

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2 This essay was originally written for a seminar for graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and presented at the 49th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Conference on Asian Studies, Louisville, KY, January 15-17, 2010. In recent years, someone has tried to outline the "two branches of goddess depictions" (see Jin Cui 金翠, "Gao tang shennü xingxiang yanjiu 高唐神女形象研 [A Study of the Image of Gaotang Goddess]," MA thesis, Shenyang Normal University, 2012), but some of her observations are problematic, as discussed below.

3 The authenticity of these two rhapsodies has been challenged. Lu Kanru 陸侃如, for example, argues in his *Song Yu* 宋玉 (Shanghai: Yadongtushuguan, 192, 107-110) that most of the works attributed to Song Yu are unreliable. But Shi Zhimian 施之勉 holds a totally different opinion; see his "Song Yu wufu 宋玉五賦," *Daluzazhi* 22 (1961). Western scholars, such as Arthur Waley, David Knechtges, and Steven Owen, all accepted the traditional attribution of the two rhapsodies. See Arthur Waley, *The Temple and Other Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 65-72; David Knechtges, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3: 325-349; and Steven Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 189.

4 昔者先王嘗遊高唐，怠而晝寢，夢見一婦人曰：妾者，巫山之女也。爲高唐之客。聞君遊高唐，願薦枕席。"，王因幸之。Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wen xuan* 文選 [*Selections of Refined Literature*] (Shanghai: Shangwuyinshuguan, 1936), 393. Previous English translations of this rhapsody include Waley, *The Temple and Other Poems,* 65-72; and Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, 3: 325-339. Recent Western scholarship on the Gaotang goddess

In another version quoted by Li Shan 李善 [c. 630-689] from *Anthology of Song Yu* [*Song Yu ji* 宋玉集], there are several variations in the words of the goddess:

> In the past, the former king once traveled to the Gaotang shrine; he was tired and took a nap during the daytime. He dreamed of a woman who said of herself, "I am the youngest daughter of the Emperor [of Heaven], and my name is Yaoji. I died before I could marry and was enfeoffed with the terrace of Mount Wu. I heard that Your Majesty has come to travel here, and I wish to serve you with my pillow and mat." Thus the king favored her with his bed.[5]

"Rhapsody on Gaotang," in essence, is a work about a goddess and sex, likely the earliest extant narrative about an erotic dream in Chinese literature. The goddess is beautiful, passionate, free-spirited, and brave, taking the initiative in seeking a tryst with the king. This may be why some consider her the Chinese "Goddess of Love."[6]

The female divinity in "Rhapsody on the Goddess" is quite different. Although she shares the beauty and ethereal loveliness of the goddess in "Rhapsody on Gaotang," her attitude toward the mortal ruler differs greatly:

> Restless with anger she seeks to maintain self-control
> She has remained inviolate.
> Thus she shakes the decorations she wears,
> And rings the jade simurgh bells.
> Straightening her garment,
> She assumes a serious expression.
> Looking back at the Woman Tutor,
> She gives an order to the Grand Tutor.

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includes Li Wai-Yee, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 23-46; and Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Tests* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 8-69.

5 昔先王遊於高唐，怠而晝寢。夢見一婦人，自云："我帝之季女，名曰瑤姬，未行而亡，封於巫山之台。聞王來遊，願薦枕席。王因幸之." Li Shan's annotation to Jiang Yan 江淹, "Zatishi 雜體詩," in Xiao, *Wen Xuan*, 696-697. For explorations of the origin of the Gaotang goddess, see Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in Tang Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 34-38; and a summary of Chinese scholarship on this topic in Jin, "Gao tang shennü xingxiang yanjiu," 4-9.

6 Ye, "Gao tang shennü de kua wenhua yanjiu," 100-101.

> Though our joyful feelings have yet to be joined,
> She is about to say good-bye and depart.[7]

In the end, King Xiang of Chu, failing to consummate the erotic dream as his father had, could only shed tears of disappointment:

> Harboring private feelings myself,
> Whom could I speak with?
> Disappointedly shedding tears,
> I seek her until dawn.[8]

Apart from their physical beauty, the goddesses in the two rhapsodies differ markedly from each other in personality and morality. In other words, in "Rhapsody on the Goddess," the goddess's attitude about sex differs from that of the goddess in the "Rhapsody on Gaotang." In a discussion of the two works, Ye Shuxian 葉舒憲 observes,

> Simply put, the goddess in "Rhapsody on Gaotang" devotes herself to a man through her initial action of offering her pillow and mat, but the goddess in "Rhapsody on the Goddess" makes the man attracted to her give up his intimate desire after seducing him. As the rhapsody depicts, she is a woman who "has remained inviolate," interrupting King Xiang of Chu's fervent wish to recreate his father's erotic dream. Therefore, "Rhapsody on the Goddess" is clearly in accordance with the traditional moral model, "initiated by emotions but curtailed by rituals."[9]

Then Ye gives his explanation for the difference between the two pieces:

> We can say that the Goddess of Love created by Song Yu in the "Rhapsody on Gaotang" has already been removed in the "Rhapsody on the Goddess." By talking about King Huai of Chu's erotic meeting with the goddess, Song Yu drew on the image that had been activated by his own desire and created a goddess who initiates a tryst and makes love to a man in the

7 頫薄怒以自持兮，曾不可乎犯干；於是搖珮飾，鳴玉鸞。整衣服，斂容顏；顧女師，命太傅；歡情未接，將辭而去。(Xiao, *Wen xuan*, 19: 397-400). An English translation of this rhapsody is found in Knechtges, *Wen Xuan* 3: 339-349; and Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 58-68.

8 情獨私懷，誰者可語。惆悵垂涕，求之至曙。(Ibid.).

9 Ye, "Gao tang shennü," 100-101.

> "Rhapsody on Gaotang." When he wrote the "Rhapsody on the Goddess," however, social morality and ritual propriety caused Song Yu to constrain the desire of the ego, the essential characteristic of the Goddess of Love, so the goddess changed into a chaste beauty who keeps her body as pure as jade. From the fact that more than half the lines are used to describe the beauty of the goddess, the goddess had changed from the Goddess of Love into the Goddess of Beauty.

Furthermore, he concludes, "From then on, China has only Goddess of Beauty, but no Goddess of Love,"[10] and the sensual love deity, the Gaotang goddess, has no descendants and never appears in later literature.

Generally speaking, distinctions between the two works exist, and Ye mentions some important ones. His conclusion, however, is not necessarily accurate. The theme of "great beauty with restrained desire" in "Rhapsody on the Goddess" undoubtedly continued and was well received in later times, especially in the popular Chinese literary form rhapsody;[11] meanwhile, the motif of sensual love in "Rhapsody on Gaotang" did not disappear either. In fact, the story of a goddess and her dalliances with men was not merely retold but extended in two distinct lines in early medieval Chinese literature.

The Motif of "On the Goddess" in Jian'an Literature

In the Jian'an 建安 reign period [196-219] of [Emperor Xian of] the late Eastern Han dynasty, four rhapsodies with the same title, "On the Goddess [Shennüfu 神女賦]," were written around the same time. Moreover, Cao Zhi's 曹植 [192-232] "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess [Luoshenfu 洛神賦]," with its gorgeous words and evocative descriptions, overshadowed other works on goddesses before and after it. For these reasons, the Jian'an reign period was an important time for the development of literary depiction of goddesses, during which the Luo River goddess emerged as the most popular literary subject.

"Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" shares the theme of "great beauty with restrained desire" with Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess":

10 Ibid.

11 Liao Guodong 廖國棟 has identified five stages in this motif: origin of the goddess, dreams of the goddess, the beauty of the goddess, hierogamous encounters, and departure of the goddess. See Liao Guodong, *Jian'an cifu zhi chuancheng yu tuo xin* 建安辭賦的傳承與拓新 [*The Inherence and Creation of the Jian'an Rhapsodies*] (Taibei: Wenjinchubanshe, 2000), 358.

> Parting her vermilion lips, she slowly speaks,
> articulating the key principles of her liaisons [with men].
> How hateful that the ways of men and spirits are different!
> How woeful that the prime of my life has gone!
> I lift sleeves to cover the tears on my face,
> The tears flow down the front of my garment as a stream.
> Grieving that the fine meeting will be forever cut off,
> I mourn for the fact that, once I leave, I will be in a different land.[12]

Because "the ways of men and spirits are different," the meeting tragically ends. This is the same ending as Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess." Jin Cui classifies the Luo River Goddess in Cao Zhi's rhapsody as one who "serves a man with her pillow and mat" but was resolutely refused by the author.[13] This is clearly overstated, because, apart from the line cited above, "Grieving that the fine meeting will be forever cut off," what we can see in Cao's rhapsody are no more than the lines, "Lifting a jasper gem to reply my offering, she points to the hidden depth as a place for our meeting."[14] Clearly, their desire was consummated.

Many scholars maintain that depictions of goddesses in this period all derived from Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess," and, apart from the celebrated "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess," other works do not merit mention.[15] In fact, this is not true at all. The motifs of the four "On the Goddess"

12 動朱唇以徐言，陳交接之大綱。恨人神之道殊兮，怨盛年之莫當。抗羅袂以掩涕兮，淚流襟之浪浪。悼良會之永絕兮，哀一逝而異鄉。Ding Yan 丁晏, *Cao jiquan ping* 曹植集銓評 [*A Collection of Cao Zhi's Works with Annotation and Commentary*] (Beijing: Wenxuegujikanxingshe, 1957), 18. An English translation of this rhapsody is found in Knechtges, *Wen Xuan* 3: 355-365.

13 Jin, "Gao tang shennü xingxiang yanjiu," 21.

14 抗瓊琚以和予兮，指潛淵而為期。

15 See Ye Shuxian, *Gao tang shennü yu wei na si* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1997), 431; Gao Qiufeng 高秋鳳, "Cong Song Yu 'Shennüfu' dao Jiang Yan 'Shuishang shennü fu'—Xian Chin zhi Liuchao shennü fu zhi fazhan 從宋玉”神女賦”到江淹”水上神女賦”——先秦到六朝”神女賦”之發展 [From Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" to Jiang Yan's "Rhapsody on the Goddess of the River": The Development of Rhapsody on Goddess from Pre-Qin Period to the Six Dynasties]," in *Di san jie guoji cifu xue xueshu yantao hui lunwen ji* 第三屆國際辭賦學學術研討會論文集 [*A Paper Collection of the Third International Conference on Rhapsody*] (Taibei: Guoli zhengzhi daxue, 1996), 849; Deng Shiliang 鄧仕樑, "Lun Jian'an yi xian xie he shennü wei zhuti de liang zu fu 論建安以’閒邪’和’神女’為主題的兩組賦 [On the Rhapsodies on Leisure and Goddess in the Jian'an Period]," *Xinya xue shuji kan* 13 (1994).

poems, for example, are actually fairly different and distinct, not merely copies of Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess."

It is hard to say anything about Ying Yang's 應瑒 [ca. 172-217] "Rhapsody on the Goddess" because only six lines are still extant.[16] But the other three are complete. Wang Can's 王粲 [177-217] work mainly describes the beauty of the goddess, and it seems that the author and the goddess are becoming intimate. At the end, however, the mortal in Wang Can's rhapsody decides not to consummate the tryst, reasoning that, "different ideas in my mind fight against each other and finally chastity wins, thus I changed my mind and cut her off myself."[17] Although the goddess takes the initiative, the mortal, the author himself, gives up his desire himself. The works of Chen Lin 陳琳 [d. 217] and Yang Xiu 楊修 [173-217] are even more complicated.

Below is Yang's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" in full. Its ending is ambiguous:

> Thinking that the superb girl who is subtle and gentle,
> she nurtures brightness at the spirit court.
> Sucking the fragrant liquid of the morning clouds,
> at her ease she roams around in the Highest clarity.
> Insisting on righteousness and being secretly inspired,
> through a dream I connect with her numinousness.
> Splendidly attired and made up on top of her innate beauty,
> Glowing with dragon luster and phoenix glory.
> [Wearing] green garment and colorful wild-chicken coat,
> And put on fine cape and patterned shirt.
> Flowing up and down with the wind,
> sometimes together and sometimes apart.
> When they drift up as if she is excited,
> But her jade toes do not move.
> Carefully examining into her subtlety,
> In the whole world she is matchless.
> Her glittering face is bright as jade,
> Vital as a flowering hibiscus.
> Her skin texture is fine and stainless like white jade,
> Her flesh is fresh, and pliant as a goose down.
> Turning away her shoulders, her garment opens and closes.
> How beautiful and elegant when she bends down and lifts her face.

16 Yu Shaochu 俞紹初, ed., *Jian'an qi ziji* 建安七子集 [*A Collection of the Works of the Seven Masters of the Jian'an Period*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 174.

17 心交戰而貞勝，乃回意而自絕。 Ibid., 103.

Delighting in the lucky union tonight,
Obtaining the carriage for women, we share the same expectation.
When my emotion is fervent and I long to move further,
She is stern, quiet, and respectful.
When I subtly satirize her and express my opinion,
Her expression becomes happy and agreeable, and she follows me.[18]

Here identifying the subject of the second line from the end is the key to understanding the theme. Gao Qiufeng's interpretation of this work is: "Yang Xiu initiates the tryst while the goddess is passive, but at the very end Yang listens and follows the subtle persuasion and tactful explanations and so does not take the lead anymore."[19] He continues, "Apart from describing the wonder and beauty of the goddess in detail, rhapsodies on the Goddess of the Jian'an period mainly emphasize 'different ideas in my mind fight against each other and finally chaste wins' and 'interpreting the rituals as the guard so as to prevent oneself from falling into lust.'"[20] But Liao Guodong's 廖國棟 interpretation is the opposite of Gao's: "Toward the earnest pursuit, 'my emotion is fervent and long to move further,' the goddess originally keeps a straight face, 'she is serious, at ease, and quietly respectful.'" After the author's amorous advances—following Liao's understanding, after the author "subtly criticizes her and expresses [his] opinion," the goddess blithely completes their tryst: "her expression is happy and agreeable, and she follows me." From this and other examples, Liao concludes that these four other goddess poems from the Jian'an era not only did not mimic Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" but followed very different trajectories.[21] Liao's reading of Yang Xiu's rhapsody is apparently closer to the original text, and his conclusion is accurate with respect to the group of rhapsodies on the goddess.

Chen Lin's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" reads:

18 惟玄媛之逸女．育明曜乎皇庭。吸朝霞之芬液．澹浮遊乎太清。余執義而潛厲；乃感夢而通靈。盛容飾之本艷，奐龍采而鳳榮。翠翹翬裳，纖縠文褂。順風揄揚，乍合乍離。飄若興動，玉趾未移。詳觀玄妙，與世無雙。華面玉粲，韡若芙蓉。膚凝理而瓊絜，體鮮弱而柔鴻。回肩襟而動合，何俯仰之妍工。嘉今夜之幸遇，獲帷裳乎期同。情沸踊而思進，彼嚴厲而靜恭。微諷說而宣論，色歡懌而我從。Chen Yuanlong 陳元龍, ed., *Lidaifuhui* 歷代賦彙 [*A Collection of Rhapsodies of the Past Dynasties*] (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1999), 10: 707-708.

19 Gao, "Cong Song Yu 'Shennüfu' dao Jiang Yan 'Shuishang Shennü fu,'" 848.

20 Ibid.

21 Liao, *Jian'an cifu zhi chuancheng yu tuo xin*, 359.

In the thirteenth year of Jian'an of the Han,[22]
[People] of the Jing hinterlands stupidly became our enemy.
Assisting the royal troops that arrived in the south,
We crossed the limpid Han River.
Touched by the sighing utterances of the poet,
I thought of the goddess who came and roamed around,
imagining her indistinct spirit.
Through a good dream we connect our feelings.

Watching the waves, which were deep and endless,
I saw the spirit subtle and beautiful.
The crimson dragon pattern [of her dress] was grand and beautiful,
"Ying ying" was the sound of her jade simurgh [bell].
I consider that your jade body matches the flowers of the *tiao*,
Liken your alluring looks to the ephemeral beauty of the althea.[23]
Moved by midspring, the pleasant season,
I sighed as the call of the wild goose echoed.
Holding the fragrant plant she gave to me,[24]
as she invited me to share a feast in a secluded room.
Briefly we enjoyed the pleasures of fine union,
an eternity cut off from the outside world and flourishing alone.
I admired you on account of your gorgeous beauty,
and you were pleased at my stamina.
Following Heaven and Earth in developing our nature,
Why should you have other words to say?[25]

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22 Yu Shaochu says that, although the original says *san qi* 三七, this might be a mistake for *shi san* 十三 [thirteenth]. See his *Jian'an qi ziji*, 410.

23 Guo Jingchun 郭景純, "Youxianshi 遊仙詩 [number 7]": "蕤榮不終朝，蜉蝣豈見夕?" See Xiao, *Wen xuan,* 463.

24 *Shenwojiao* 申握椒should be *Woshenjiao. Shenjiao* 申椒 is a kind of fragrant plant. Qu Yuan 屈原, "Li sao": 雜申椒與菌桂兮 [they brought together peppers and cinnamon]. See Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫*Chongding Qu Yuan fujiaozhu* 重訂屈原賦校注 [*Revised Qu Yuan's Rhapsodies Collated and Annotated*] (Tianjin: Tianjin gujichubanshe, 1987), 13. David Hawkes renders *shenjiao* as "peppers," but this might not be right. See his *The Songs of the South* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 68.

25 漢三七之建安， 荊野蠢而作仇。贊皇師以南假， 濟漢川之清流。感詩人之攸歎， 想神女之來遊。儀營魄於髣髴， 託嘉夢以通精。望陽侯而瀇瀁， 睹玄麗之軼靈。文綷虬之弈弈， 鳴玉鸞之嚶嚶。答玉質於苕華兮， 擬豔姿於蕤榮。感仲春之和節， 歎鳴鴈之噰噰。申握椒以貽予， 請同宴乎奧房。苟好樂之嘉

The structure of the entire work is almost the same as Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess," but the second half describes a tryst between the author and the goddess. Liao Guodong thinks that the last line of this rhapsody means that, in the Jian'an period, the desire for love, which had been constrained, was, to a certain extent, liberated.[26] We have to say that this rhapsody is truly daring and unconventional, diverging significantly from the others. Thus we can say that in Chinese literature, the "Goddess of Love" never disappeared since she appeared even in the rhapsodies of Jian'an period.

Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" and Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess"

While Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" is one of the most brilliant and well-liked works on female divinities in Chinese literature, Zhang Min's 張敏 [fl. 317] "Rhapsody on the Goddess" is virtually unknown to modern readers. The reason that these two works are examined together in this study is that, as representative works derived from Su Yu's rhapsodies on the Gaotang goddess, both are important in the history of early medieval Chinese rhapsody and even in the wider history of Chinese literature.

This comparison was raised in the studies of Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess."[27] Specifically, Hong Shunlong raises the relationship between

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合，永絕世而獨昌。既歎爾以艷采，又悅我之長期。順乾坤以成性，夫何若而有辭。(Yu, *Jian'an qi ziji*, 44).

26 Liao, *Jian'an cifu zhi chuancheng yu tuo xin*, 358.

27 Study of "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" has overshadowed the research on goddesses, and it mainly focuses on the context of the text or the author's motivation for writing. Since the 1980s, however, new directions have been taken in the study of the influences of "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess." For example, Zhong Laiyin 鍾來因 points out that many words and phrases, such as *luopu* 洛浦, *luoshen* 洛神, *jinghong* 驚鴻, and *youlong* 游龍 appeared frequently in poetry, *ci* 詞 poetry, drama, and novels, having become a widespread literary phenomenon (see his "'Luoshen fu' yuanliu kao lun 洛神賦源流考論 [A Textual Study of the 'Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess']," *Jianghai xuekan* 5 (1985); Hong Shunlong 洪順隆conducts detailed research on the influence of "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" on Six Dynasties rhapsodies (see his "Lun 'Luoshenfu' dui liuchao fu tan de yingtou 洛神賦對六朝賦壇的映投 [The Impact of 'Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess' on the Rhapsodies of the Six Dynasties]," *Xinya xue shuji kan* 13 [1994]); and N. Harry Rothschild's recent book reveals the function of "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" in sanctifying Luo River, elevating Wu Zhao's Divine Capital, and helping her distinctively imprint her political authority upon

Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" and Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess":

> The prototype of the theme of "love between man and goddess" appeared before the Warring States period, but, in the field of rhapsody, it was passed down by Song Yu's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" and Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess." For this reason, the prototype of the theme of Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" shares the same sequence of ideas as Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess." . . . In general, the prototype theme, the mode of structure, the nature and habits of the heroine, the supporting roles, and some vocabulary in Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" are indeed similar to their counterparts in Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess."[28]

As Hong argues, Zhang Min's "On the Goddess" was influenced by Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess," and in many respects these two works are similar. For example, Zhang's work borrows many words or phrases and mentions the same goddess as Cao Zhi's "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess." However, Hong's conclusion overstates the similarities between the two works.

The major difference between "Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess" and Zhang's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" is at the narrative level, the motif. Structurally, they have different precursors. The former draws on the motif of meeting a goddess, ending in disappointment, while in the latter an erotic hierogamous union between mortal and goddess is successfully concluded. Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" narrates the coupling as follows:

> The Emperor [of Heaven] has observed my pure virtue,
> And so I walk into the lofty red building.
> Entering the secret palace by the high stairs,
> I serve the Supreme Ultimate of the solemn purity (Heaven).
> Taking pity on my diligence and seriousness,
> The Emperor [of Heaven] was placing me in the central state.
> Relying on dark quietude, I have dwelt alone,
> So I will be a good partner for you.[29]

Luoyang (N. Harry Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon of Devils, Divinities, and Dynastic Mothers* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2015], 41-59).

28 Hong, "Lun 'Luo shenfu' dui liu chao fu tan de yingtou," 105.

29 皇覽余之純德。步朱闕之崢嶸。
靡飛除而入秘殿。侍太極之穆清。

These eight lines seem to be an introduction to the goddess from her own mouth. Although she possesses pure virtue, diligence, and seriousness and relies on tranquility to live alone, the author/protagonist is still suspicious. Below is their conversation:

> Upon this, the host asked her unhappily:
> "Are you the Baosi of the Zhou, or Wen Jiang of the Qi,
> Those kind of evil women and licentious ghosts, come to hide yourselves?
> Or, are you the roaming goddess of the Han, or E Huang of the Jiang,
> Who tires of the pleasure of being chaste and serving as immortals?"
> Upon this, the goddess straightened her clothes and seriously replied:
> "I am truly a chaste and gentle girl.
> Why are you suspicious of me?
> Further, I am eloquent and know proper ritual,
> Respectfully act in accordance with good norms;
> With good looks and exceptional gifts,
> I dress splendidly and to be a model of virtue.
> With all these to receive your favor,
> What doubts can you still have?"[30]

Suspicions assuaged, intimacy quickens between man and goddess:

> Thus they laid the mattress,
> And pulled down the decorated curtains.
> After delectable foods were set out,
> They enjoy the feast with each other.
> Smelling slightly the fragrant perfume,
> His heart agitated and mind restless.

帝愍余之勤肅。將休余於中州。
託玄靜以自處。寔應夫子之好仇。

30 於是主人憮然而問之曰:
"爾豈是周之褒姒。齊之文姜。
孽婦淫鬼。來自藏乎?
儻亦漢之遊女。江之娥皇。
猒真愆。倦仙侍乎?"。
於是神女乃斂袂正襟而對曰:
"我實貞淑。子何猜焉?
且辯言知禮。恭為令則。
美姿天挺。盛飾表德。
以此承歡。君有何惑爾?

Upon this, they search for the extreme goodness within the room,
and exhaust the joyful love of long night.
His mind is ambiguous and indistinct,
Thinking of the leftover music of the Northern Ward.
Narrating the wonder of this moment,
he presents a splendid garment that is spreading.
Bowing her head and straightening her clothes, she takes her leave;
looking up, she sighs deeply and sobs.
Riding the clouds and fogs thereby she transforms;
Discarding me far behind, where does she go?[31]

Obviously, this is a work about intimate love between a goddess and a man. Even though the goddess left at the end and the man was disappointed, this happens after they "exhaust the joyful love of long night." The goddess in this work is forthright and longs for love, like the one in the "Rhapsody on Gaotang," rather than the divinity in the "Rhapsody on the Goddess," indicating the impact of the "Rhapsody on Gaotang" on it.[32]

"Goddesses of Love" in Classical Chinese Tales

Among the rhapsodies, some works have a distinct motif similar to that in "Rhapsody on Gaotang." Outside that genre, however, many other works can be found that are derived from "Rhapsody on Gaotang," especially in classical tales, including *zhiguai* 志怪 [account of anomalies] and *chuanqi* 傳奇 [transmission of marvels].[33]

31 爾乃敷茵席。垂組帳。
嘉旨既設。同牢而饗。
微聞芳澤。心盪意放。
於是尋房中之至嬿。極長夜之懽情。
心眇眇以忽忽。想北里之遺聲。
賦斯時之要妙。進偉服之紛敷。
俛撫衽而告辭。仰長歎以欷吁。
乘雲霧而變化。遙棄我其焉如。(*Yiwenleiju, juan* 79).

32 In her attempt to outline the "two branches of goddess depictions," Jin Cui lists the goddess in Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" among the goddesses who observe the rituals, concluding that "before consuming the pleasure of love, she discarded her host and departed" (歡情未接，棄主人而去; see Jin, "Gao tang shennü xingxiang yanjiu," 19-20). It seems that she did not read the entire rhapsody.

33 Zhang Min's "Shennüfu" was also derived from one of his own tales.

In fact, Zhang Min's "Rhapsody on the Goddess" was written on the basis of a folktale about Xuan Chao 玄超 and the goddess Zhi Qiong 智瓊. The earliest version of this story, only twenty words, is in Cao Pi's 曹丕 [187-226] *Arrayed Marvels* [*Lie yizhuan* 列異傳].[34] In Gan Bao's 干寶 [fl. 335-349] *In Search of the Supernatural* [*Soushenji* 搜神記], it becomes a much longer story. This story narrates that Xuan Chao was sleeping alone at night, and dreamed of a goddess coming to him. She said that she was a jade maiden in Heaven and lost her parents during her childhood. The Emperor of Heaven took pity on her because of her loneliness and allowed her come down to this world to marry a man. The goddess not only was beautiful but also took the initiative.[35]

In addition to the story about Zhiqiong, the tales of the Six Dynasties period (222-589) included many other goddesses who love men in the mortal realm. In *In Search of the Supernatural*, "Du Lanxiang 杜蘭香 and Zhang Chuan 張傳," "Yuan ke 園客," and "Dong Yong 董永" have experiences similar to those in Xuan Chao.[36] We can say that the Goddess of Love was revived in classical tales.

In some tales, the image of a goddess gradually changed into that of a female ghost. In Tao Qian's 陶潛 [365-427] *Sequel to "In Search of the Supernatural"* [*Soushenhouji* 搜神後記], an anthology of tales from the Northern and Southern Dynasties [420-589] features two erotic dream stories, "The Daughter of Xu Xuanfang [Xu Xuanfangnü 徐玄方女][37] and "The Daughter of Li Zhongwen [Li Zhongwennü 李仲文女],[38] which in many aspects are similar to the story in "Rhapsody on Gaotang." Both works describe a young man, the present governor's son, who dreams of a young girl coming to his room and becoming

34 See Lu Xun 魯迅, "Gu xiaoshuo gouchen 古小說鉤沉 [Collected Lost Old Stories]," in *Lu Xunquanji* 魯迅全集 [*Complete Works of Lu Xun*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979), 8: 257.

35 Wang Genlin 王根林 et al., ed., *Han wei liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* 漢魏六朝筆記小說大觀 [*Grand Spectacle of Han Wei and Six Dynasty* Zhiguai *Stories*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 287-288. For an English translation, see Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 16-18.

36 For an English translation, see DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 13-16. Li Fengmao 李豐楙 has singled out the story of Xuan Chao, the story of Du Lanxiang, and "Adjutant He's Daughter" from the *Soushenhouji* and described their relationship with Daoist myth regarding descended goddesses. See his *Xianjing yu youli: shenxian shijie de xiangxiang* 仙境與遊歷：神仙世界的想象 [*Immortal Land and Traveling: The Image of the World of Transcendents*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 47-81.

37 Wang et al., *Hanwei liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 456.

38 Ibid., 458.

intimate with him. The girl says that she is the daughter of the previous governor who died young, and since she favors him, she goes to him. But these stories combine with the motif of rebirth; the former has a happy ending, in which the girl is revived, while the latter has a tragic ending, in which the girl fails to be revived because her body is dug up.

The story "Yan Zhi 閻陟" in *The Vast Record of Marvels* [*Guangyiji* 廣異記] is similar to those above:

> When Yan Zhi was young, his father was the adjutant of Mizhou. Yan Zhi lived with his father at the official residence. While sleeping in the daytime, he suddenly dreamed that a girl, who was about fifteen or sixteen years old and very beautiful, came to have a liaison with him. This happened repeatedly for several months. Every time he went to sleep, he dreamed of her arrival. One day, he dreamed that the girl had come to take her farewell. Her voice and appearance were both extremely sad. She said that she was the former adjutant's daughter and after she had been died she was buried at the southeastern corner of the city. "You didn't consider me humble and lowly, allowing me to serve you with my pillow and mat. My elder brother will come to take my bones back home tomorrow. Thus we have to part forever. What a pity! Now I have a hundred thousand coins to give you, to show my sentimental attachment to you." After saying that, she asked a servant girl to put the money under the bed, and then she left. When Yan Zhi awoke and looked under the bed, he found a hundred thousand in [ghost] paper money.[39]

Even though this story does not depict the sexual relationship between Yan Zhi and the young girl in detail, it is still a typical sexual dream. The evidence of the consummation of the relationship in the dream is not ejaculation, as in some Indian stories,[40] but a hundred thousand in paper money.

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39 閻陟幼時，父任密州長史，陟隨父在任。嘗晝寢，忽夢見一女子，年十五六，容色妍麗，來與己會。如是者數月，寢輒夢之。后一日，夢女來別，音容淒斷，曰："己是前長史女，死殯在城東南角。明公不以幽滯卑微，用薦枕席。我兄明日來迎己喪，終天永別，豈不恨恨。今有錢百千相贈，以伸允眷。"言訖，令婢送錢於寢床下，乃去。陟覺，視床下，果有百千紙錢也。Li Fang 李昉, ed., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [*Extensive Recordings from the Taiping Reign Period*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 280: 2235.

40 See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66-67.

Apart from the fact that the status of the hero and heroine was much lower than that of a king and goddess, these stories have many similarities with "Rhapsody on Gaotang": A beautiful young girl appears in a man's dream; the girl is revealed to have died and returned from the spirit world; the girl's social status was high before she died; the girl comes to the man on her own initiative; the dream occurs during the daytime; and, most importantly, the man and the girl consummated their love, showing that the motif of a free-spirited and sexual Goddess of Love was indeed prevalent in Chinese literature.

The pre-Qin "Rhapsody on Gaotang" and the later, medieval erotic dream stories share a common narrative model: In the dream, the love affair always occurs between a man and a beautiful woman or, more specifically, a female spirit or ghost. In the dream, the woman is always an independent agent and goes to the man to fulfill her desire for love; what is emphasized is not only the sexual desires of the male dreamer but also the more taboo desire of the woman, especially the woman who died prior to marriage. In other words, the characteristics of Chinese erotic dream stories were established in "Rhapsody on Gaotang." In certain rhapsodies, as mentioned above, and such sex dream tales, we can find definite traces of "Goddesses of Love."

Conclusion

It is clear that early medieval Chinese literature has two lineages of goddess depictions that derived from, or at least were influenced by, the two masterpieces attributed to Song Yu: "Rhapsody on the Goddess" and "Rhapsody on Gaotang."

Like "Rhapsody on the Goddess," "Rhapsody on Gaotang" had a profound influence on later literature, and its version of the Goddess of Love was never lost, even in the rhapsodies of the Six Dynasties. If we say that "Rhapsody on the Goddess" had more influence on rhapsody and poetry, then we should say that "Rhapsody on Gaotang" had more influence on popular literature in general and tales in particular.

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