

EARLY MYTH AND THE GODDESS IN ANCIENT CHINA



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ANCIENT HISTORY and RELIGION TIMELINE PROJECT

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"When man created language with wisdom,
As if winnowing cornflower through a sieve,
Friends acknowledged the signs of friendship,
And their speech retained its touch." Rg Veda 10.71

"Whatever is happening is happening for good..."
Krsna to Arjuna in the Bhagvad Gita

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CHINESE DYNASTIES TO 900 A.D.

"IN ANCIENT CHINA, HOWEVER, WHERE THERE WAS NO CLEARLY DEFINED OTHER, SUPERNATURAL REALM, MYTH AND HISTORY WERE ALWAYS INSEPARABLE."¹

Dynasty	De Bary et al 1960;	Chang 1977	Keightley 1983
Yang-shao Culture ²	5700 - 2100 BC		
Fu Hsi ³	2852 BC.		
Shen Nung ⁴	2737 BC.		
Yellow Emperor ⁵	2697 BC		
Yao ⁶	2357 BC.		
Shun ⁷	2255 BC		
Yü ⁸	2205 BC		

¹Allen 1991: 23.

²The Yang-shao is the most prominent Neolithic culture of China but by no means the only one, as a quick perusal of Barnes (1993) will reveal where the Yang-shao is only discussed as a pottery tradition.

³Fu Hsi is the mythical culture hero credited with the invention of writing, fishing nets, hunting, the Eight Trigrams, music and musical instruments and cooking. He is depicted with animal features and later becomes the consort of the goddess Nü Kua. Both deities are then depicted with serpentine lower bodies. He holds a carpenter's square and knotted rope (Birrell 1993: 42-46, 300; Williams 1976: 203-204). As with all the culture heroes in this table, assigned dates are legendary and, are not supported by either archeological or modern interpretations of ancient texts. Fu Hsi was still worshipped in Nanking in the early twentieth century (Williams 1976: 285).

⁴Shen Nung is the culture hero who invented agriculture and commerce.

⁵The Yellow Emperor named Chi was born of Shao Tien and was the half brother of the Flame Emperor who he defeated in a contest for the whole world. He defeated Ch'ih Yu, the god of war and many other deities but is depicted in later tradition as a peaceful culture bearer, where he is associated with boats, agriculture, the fire drill and musical instruments. The Yellow Emperor was taught the secrets of the cosmos and supernatural beings by the Beast of White Marsh and the art of warfare by the Dark Lady. He became the supreme deity of Taoism (Birrell 1993: 130-137, 235-236, 314).

⁶Yao, also known as Fang Hsun, T'ao T'ang or T'ang is the first of the three sage kings of China's mythical Golden Age. His life became the model for the Confucian sage-king. Believing his own sons unworthy, he chose Shun as his successor (Birrell 1993: 138, 193, 238, 313-314).

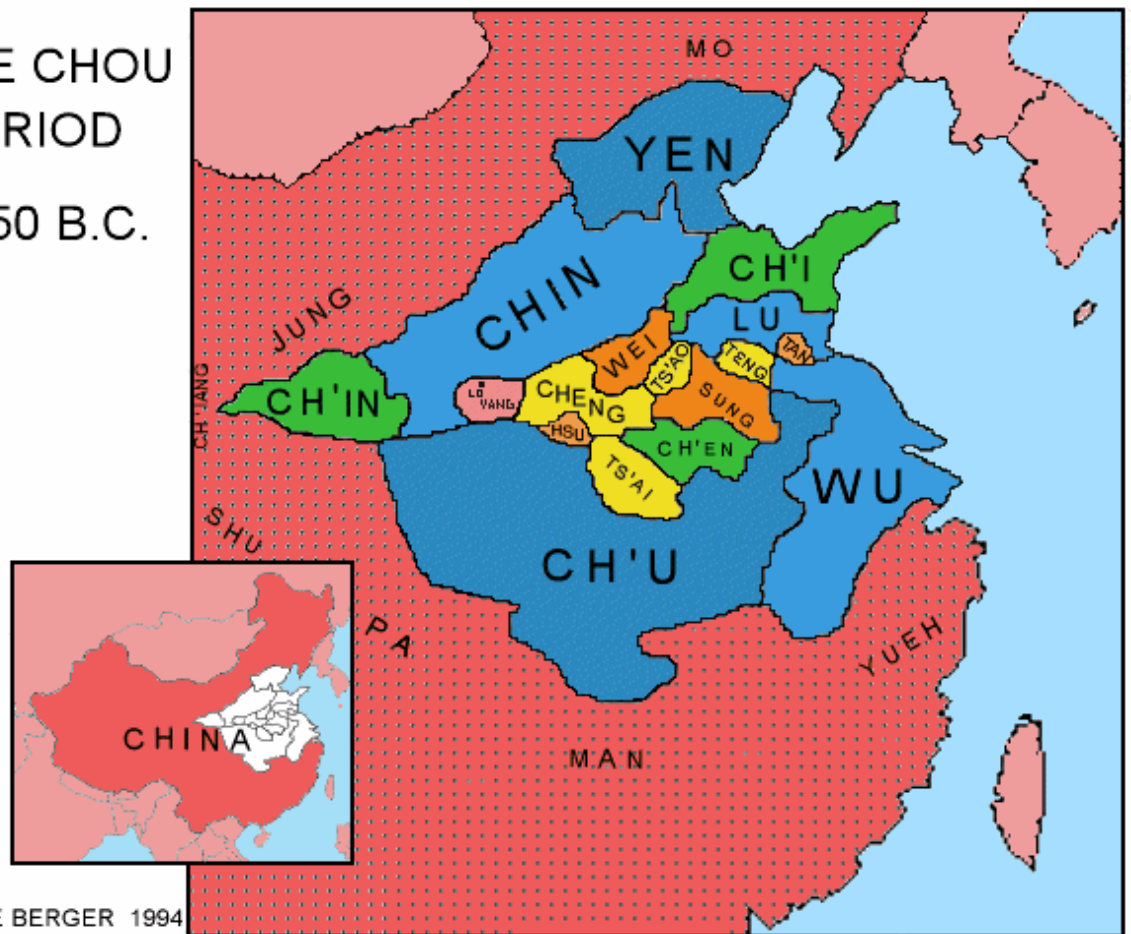
⁷Shun, also known as Ch'ung Hua, became the archetype of filial piety. Following the model of his mentor Yao, who made him heir over his own sons, Shun in turn passed over his sons for succession in favor of Yü (Birrell 1993: 74-77, 167- 169, 310). He was said to be extraordinarily intelligent and had double pupils in his eyes (Williams 1976: 359).

⁸Yü, the last of the three demi-god sage kings, was born miraculously from his father's belly. He controlled the devastating world flood, measured the world and divided it into Nine Provinces. He cast the Nine Cauldrons and called the first assembly of the gods. He killed many beasts as a warrior and then metamorphosed into a bear. Yü was also the founder of the Hsia Dynasty; he married the T'u-shan girl who gave him a son from her stone womb (Birrell 1993: 146-159, 315).

Hsia Dynasty	~1900 - 1766 BC		~2010 - 1324 BC
Shang Dynasty ⁹	~1766 - 1122 BC	~1722 - 1122 BC	~1460 - 1040 BC
W. Chou Dynasty	1115 - 722 BC	~1122 - 770 BC	
E. Chou Dynasty	722 - 221 BC	770 - 221 BC	
Warring States	403 - 221 BC		Barnes 1993
Ch'in Dynasty	221 - 207 BC		221 - 206 BC
Han Dynasty	202 BC - 220 AD		21 B.C. - 220 AD
3 Kingdoms, 6 Dynasties	220 - 589 AD		220 - 581 AD
Sui Dynasty	589 - 618 AD		589 - 618 AD
T'ang Dynasty	618 - 906 AD		

⁹The founding dates for the Shang taken from de Bary et al (1960) and Chang (1977) reflect an older view among some archeologists that the Hsia Dynasty should be understood as the earliest phase of the Shang.

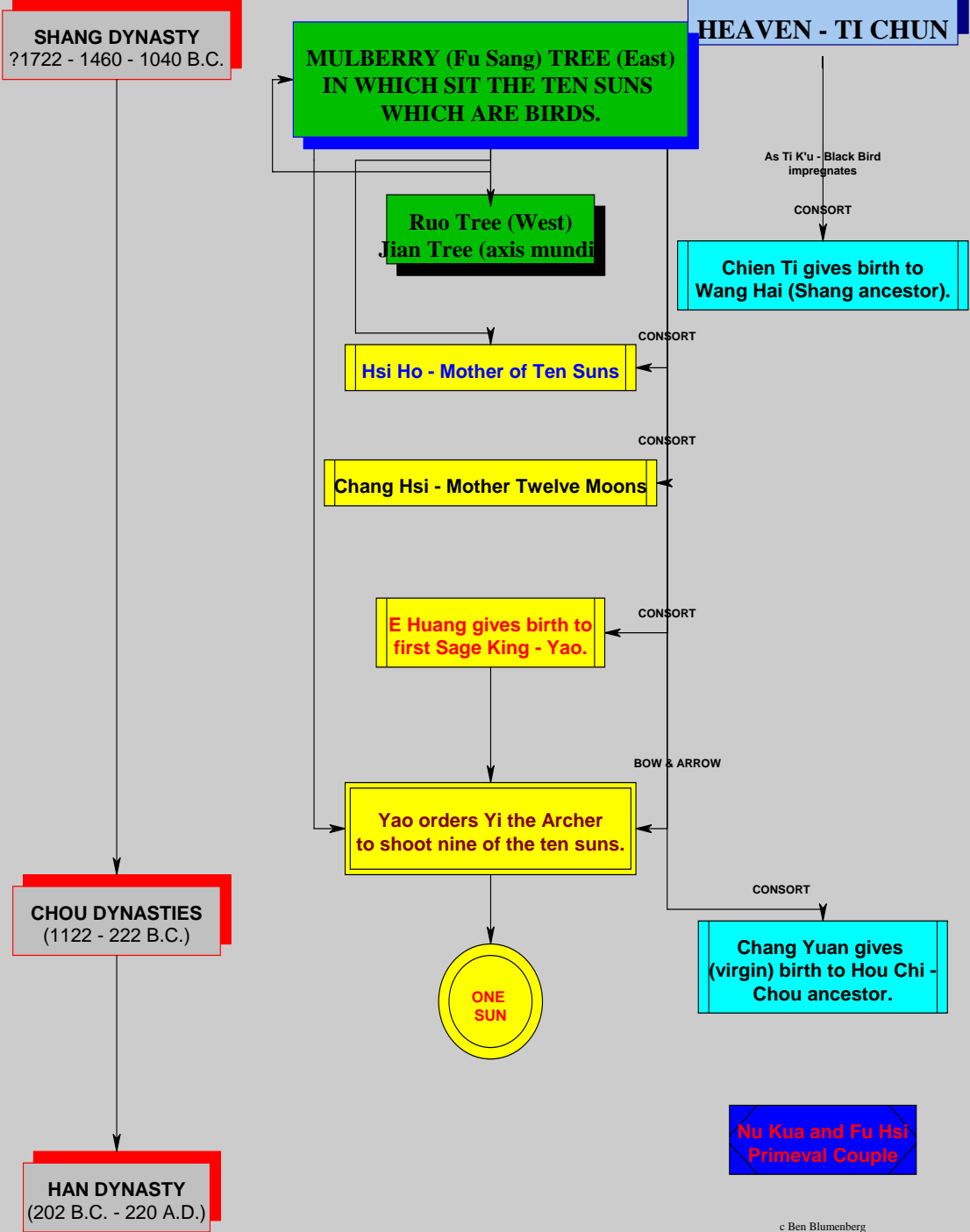
LATE CHOU
PERIOD
c. 550 B.C.



(c) LESLIE BERGER 1994

In the eighth century B.C., the Chou kings were weakened by constant civil strife and they moved their capital to Lo Yang which can be seen in the pink territory in the center of the map. Constant warfare between feudal states ensued until the fifth century when twenty powerful kingdoms emerged after the consolidation of more than a hundred warring feudal states. The surviving Chou royal domain was built from the states colored blue in this map. The homeland of the Shang lies within the state of Sung.

CHINESE MYTH



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July 19,1994

The Reality of Myth in China

"I ARGUE THAT BOTH THE MYTHS AND THE ART OF SUCH [MYTHOLOGICAL] SOCIETIES DERIVE DIRECTLY FROM THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE AND THAT BOTH NECESSARILY BREACH THE BOUNDS OF NATURAL REALITY AS A SIGN OF THEIR SACRED CHARACTER."¹⁰

"MYTHS ARE NOT ISOLATED PHENOMENA. THEY EXIST WITHIN A SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OUTSIDE OF WHICH THEY APPEAR INCOMPREHENSIBLE OR SIMPLY IRRATIONAL."¹¹

The viewpoint that China is strangely devoid of obvious myth has characterized much of the academic Western view of early Chinese religion for well over a century. Impressed by the *I Ching* and the philosophy of Confucius, as well as the absence of the long mythological narratives that are so characteristic of Classic civilizations in the West, Western scholars quickly identified the brilliance of the Chinese mind at creating succinct, abstract philosophy and finding essential, pragmatic truths in the world about us. Ubiquitous ancestor worship became the model for a tightly woven system of ethics and morality that was devoid of easily identifiable myth and it was applied both to the family, and the society at large, in the hands of Confucius.

Where were the Gods? Where was the Goddess? K'o (1993) sees three reasons why there is a widespread impression that China lacks a coherent mythology. 1) Historians cannot find in Chinese history the incredible bards and poets who populated most Western cultures and whose lives were devoted to the learning and then retelling and/or performing epic myths at a high level of literary modality. There are no counterparts in ancient Chinese society to such Western figures as Homer or Taliesin. Written Chinese myth is fragmented, truncated and condensed and appears in comparatively late texts. 2) Pictographic in origin, early Chinese script could not embrace the sophisticated metaphor of written myth and so mytho-poetics were 'restricted' to an oral tradition.¹² 3) Early Chinese scholars viewed myth through a negative lens, particularly if they were Confucianists. Determined to remain grounded in pragmatic reality, myths were viewed with prejudice and often dismissed as fanciful tales of little value that were unable to contain deep meaning. More often than not, myths were converted into 'history', a complicated process we shall explore below.¹³

The evidence of gods, narrative myth and, more specifically, the Goddess herself is hard to find in China and is unlike the encyclopedic data that

¹⁰Allen 1991: 18.

¹¹Allen 1991: 23

¹²This is hardly a good reason to believe myth cannot be found in ancient China, for such was the circumstance in Mycenae, Archaic Greece and early Germanic, early Scandinavian and Celtic society until the early Middle Ages, to name just a few cultures with a similar context.

¹³ The process of transforming an historical event or figure to 'myth' because of the extraordinary qualities inherent in the person or experience is fairly well known. That the reverse process is equally important to a history of mythology is not well understood.

exists in the West. " ... (W)hy is there so little myth in early Chinese texts ... ?" (Allen 1991: ix) From the Neolithic until this century, the focus of Chinese cult and ritual has been ancestor worship; people live on after death and will exercise power over the living. Deceased ancestors need food and provisions. Throughout the Neolithic in China, pottery vessels filled with grain were buried with the dead. The extraordinary bronze vessels of the Shang Dynasty were filled with food and buried in tombs. The elaborate and costly system of oracle bone divination supported by the court was used to determine the appropriate gifts to be made to the ancestors, in order to avoid their curses and make use of their powers to solve problems in this 'world'. While none of these premises is unknown in the West, the *degree to which it dominated Chinese ritual* was never equaled elsewhere and serves to place Chinese mytho-poetics in a unique position. "Within this system, the spirits were only important as they related to the living; they had no life of their own after death. There was no 'other', supernatural world of gods who were different in kind from human beings and interacted with one another" (Allen 1991: 19).

If we restrict the investigation to texts, it appears that the Chinese mind never contacted a pantheon of deities, each with complex lives, relationships and personal dramas; and from which follows an obligatory mutual relationship with 'the people of the world'. There could be no equivalent to the Greek pantheon situated on Mt. Olympus, the epic adventures of Odysseus or the great cycles of Celtic myth. Furthermore, the endless fascinating dalliance of gods with mortals, both within and without the bedchamber, so characteristic of the West is nearly absent in China. There was no First Eon in China when the gods inhabited the earth before they created mortals. The Chinese deities of early and Classic texts appear to be deceased mortals, ancestors who expanded their influence to include those not related to them.

Another feature of the early texts from the Chou and Han Dynasties, which has been recognized for nearly a century, is that they 1) do have a distinctly mythical aura; but 2) the buried mythical narratives, which are nearly invisible, appear to have been historicized for reasons that include the establishment of an imperial genealogy of impeccable credentials.¹⁴ Important texts in China were never viewed as the 'word of God' as is the Judeo-Christian Bible. They were living documents, one of the highest achievements of the human mind, and could be edited and altered by those competent to do so. This ongoing evolutionary process which characterizes the history of these texts makes their analysis extremely complicated (cf. Allen 1991: 19-23). The assumption that myth derives from history is no longer tenable as a starting assumption. Many examples of this principle *do* abound; perhaps the most famous in the West is the legend of King Arthur. Nonetheless, this premise should be taken as a working hypothesis to be corroborated with evidence, if possible, not as a fundamental premise about the direction of the mythic process.

The ancient Chinese world could be explained by the theory of *yin* and *yang*, without the intervention of any god or personal spirit. The reciprocal interaction of the two primordial substances which, in their transformations produced all things suffices to structure cosmology. Before these grand cosmic laws, universal and immutable, the divinities of the official pantheon cut a poor figure. The Lord on High could still save himself by becoming more and

¹⁴ Such a motive is widespread and may be found in cultures as diverse as Japan and Celtic Europe.

more depersonalized, thereby to become simple Heaven, *T'ien* - which is to say, the first and most general materialization of the *yang*; just as Sovereign Earth and, in general, all the gods of the soil became the materialization of the *yin*. But there was no place for the others. And as for the Lord on High himself, there was doubt that he could intervene in particular cases. When Prince Ching of Ch'i was ill and thought to immolate his praying priest so as to send him to Shang-ti to eulogize his lord, the minister Yen-tzu dissuaded him by saying: 'If the Lord on High is all-powerful, [your priest] will be unable to deceive him. If he is not all-powerful, the priest will serve no purpose!'

“ Likewise, with regard to the souls of the dead, although nothing was said flatly as to their existence, doubts were expressed about whether they had retained full consciousness; and the phrase 'if the dead possess consciousness' recurs frequently in the writings at the end of the Chou. This trend of thought resulted in a tendency to restrain, not the sacrifices and religious festivals themselves, but the conception people had of the role, always rather vague, which the gods and spirits played in the ceremonies of worship; and it tended to eliminate them from the philosophical interpretations regarding the efficacy of the sacrifice” (Maspero 1978: 164-165).

“ Altogether, from Chou times on, one sees manifested the characteristic attitude of the Chinese towards religious ideas and acts. Both were accepted (belief in the power of spirits and in the vengeance of ghosts, on the one hand, ritual acts and gestures, on the other) on the condition that they could be given a rationalistic explanation, bringing no religious agency into play. This attitude, in which various superstitious practices and a theoretical rationalism were mixed in varying degrees, has remained that of cultivated Chinese to our own day ...” (Maspero 1978: 168).

Our eyes and perceptions are just beginning to be attuned to the search for a rich mythology in China and the evidence is beginning to come in.

Several pioneer studies have laid the foundation for unveiling the gods and goddesses of ancient China. Giradot's (1983) breakthrough study of mysticism in early Taoism has firmly established the existence of complex mythological fragments in one of the earliest surviving Chinese texts. The gods are there, although in a disjointed and incomplete form. We can assume, I think correctly, that a corpus of full-fledged mythological narrative has been lost because it existed only in oral form and antedated the first written texts of the first millennium B.C. (Chou Dynasty). Birrell's (1993) masterful survey of Chinese mythology is the result of decades of study which included a deep immersion in Classical Chinese texts, most of which will never see an English translation. Allen's (1991) study of the artifacts and iconography of the Shang Dynasty also made masterful use of original language sources and the results are breathtaking. She has uncovered the narratives which formed the earliest known cosmological myths of China within a society that used writing only for the purpose of recording divination.

Did the Goddess Live in China?

Yes, she does exist in China, but finding her is difficult and involves questioning some basic assumptions about early Chinese philosophy and society. Pursuit of the Great Goddess in East Asia rests upon an important assumption. If her origins lie with the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic era (c.30,000-12,000 B.C.) (Gimbutas 1989; Marshak 1991), then she must have existed in the Neolithic of China (c.10,000-c.2,000 B.C.) and the succeeding Mesolithic and Classic Dynastic Periods. The presence of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers in China is beyond dispute. There is a great deal of fossil and archeological evidence from numerous sites (Chang 1977; Barnes 1993). Because the Goddess followed humanity into the Agricultural Revolution throughout Eurasia, there is no reason to suppose otherwise in East Asia. I have no wish to entertain unusual hypotheses for her post-glacial extinction in China. Nonetheless, this is what many historians of religion and mythology have done without acknowledging their own premises.

Some deny the very existence of mythology and the gods in China while others see the Goddess everywhere in East Asia. In their eyes, every Buddhist bodhisattva, every female Taoist immortal or shamaness becomes a manifestation of the Goddess. Either view is extreme. In the latter case, which is the particular affliction of a dominant fraction of the 'New Age' movement, every contact with the sacred that involves a female becomes a manifestation of the Goddess. Such a viewpoint speaks to a lack of respect and integrity, as well as an ignorance of the fundamental tenets of historical process and religious experience.

Although not concerned with East Asia, Gimbutas' (1989) study of the iconography of the Goddess in the Neolithic cultures of Neolithic Old Europe and Eurasia is a valuable comparative reference dictionary for this study. Drawing upon a vast collection of materials from Europe and the Near East, she has systematically catalogued the pictorial symbolism of the Western Great Goddess. She explores the connections with ritual, myth and folktale in forms that are both extinct and still extant. Gimbutas' (1989) well-organized schemata provides a 'field guide' with which to search elsewhere for the Goddess, assuming, of course, that her symbolism is archetypal and therefore a commonality worldwide. That assumption deserves to be seriously tested.

"There are fewer goddesses in the classical Chinese pantheon than gods, and, with a few exceptions, goddesses are not equal in importance to the gods in terms of function, cult or continuity of mythological tradition" (Birrell 1993: 160). One conclusion that emerges from this search is that we will never know the 'flesh and blood' Great Goddess in China to the extent that we know her in the West. Nonetheless, her presence is unmistakable. The similarities in her iconography and symbolism to that of her sister in Neolithic Old Europe and Eurasia (cf. Gimbutas 1989), speaks to a commonality of metaphor and archetype that transcends time and space. I will not explore the possibility that there was cultural diffusion and influence from Neolithic Old Europe into East Asia because aside from the circumstantial evidence of a commonality in iconography, there is no evidence for such movement of early populations. A scientific case for such cultural diffusion would require the discovery of artifacts with Old European symbolism at a number of sites along a likely trade route from Eastern Europe across Asia. However, Andersson (1973: 224, 334) believes these similarities in iconography are so strong

that they point to a long distance trade that connected Neolithic Europe and China in Yang Shao times via central Asia.¹⁵ The striking similarities in iconography and metaphor may, however, only speak to similar archetypal processes, perhaps partially based in genetics, within peoples separated and isolated by vast and distances.

The Goddess in Yang-shao and Dawenkou Culture

Chang (1977: 110-120) views the Yang-shao as the most important Neolithic culture of China for two important reasons. First, this culture is the direct ancestor of the Hsia, Shang and Chou Dynasties. Second among its accomplishments may be listed the domestication of the pig, millet and vegetables of the *Brassica* genus; timber and wattle-and-daub architecture; the use of hemp and silk for fabrics; tripods and steamers, which indicate the origins of a distinctive Chinese cuisine; and signs and symbols on pottery which are likely the precursors of the early Chinese script.

In Barnes (1993: 98) and Chang (1977: 124, 130), we see illustrations of Yang-shao pottery vessels. The majority contain decoration which is strikingly similar to primary motifs on artifacts from Neolithic Old Europe which speak to the cosmic life-giving waters of creation (Gimbutas 1989). Curvilinear designs suggest flowing water. Striated bands call to mind rain or a waterfall. Nets, lozenges and checkerboards may be found, which are symbols of rain streams. Tightly patterned nets framed by thick circles suggest the womb and egg. Tightly wound, thick spirals are a symbol of the cosmic snake of immortality. There are no obvious images of a Goddess but her life-giving waters and fertile womb are here. There may also be a reference to a Snake Goddess (see Nu Kūa below). There is a spectacular, painted Yang-shao bowl on which a face is surrounded by fish images. The net-like design of the fish scales is obvious. Is this a priest [or priestess] wearing a fish shaped headdress (Chang 1977: 110). Although there are no feminine features in the face, one is reminded of the Fish Goddess of Neolithic Old Europe (Gimbutas 1989: 258-263).

Three legged pottery vessels became common in the Dawenkou Culture of China's east coast. Many such vessels have legs with odd shapes which can only be described as teats. Their form is that of breasts filled with milk, either those of the Goddess and/or the full udder of a cow ready to be milked (Barnes 1993: 99). Such three legged pottery vessels were also made by the Hsintien Culture of the northern frontier during the first millennium B.C. (Chang 1977: 402). The breasts of the Goddess are an important symbol for her life-giving and nurturing in Neolithic Old Europe (Gimbutas 1989). Munsterberg (1986: 221) notes that the earliest Chinese pictograph for mother shows a woman with two large breasts and prominent nipples. "Another general remark concerns the apparent

¹⁵Andersson (1973) is a reprint of a book published in 1934.

likeness of nearly all the tripod legs to a woman's breast. This likeness can hardly be unintentional. ... it is interesting to note how the painted decor of the Hsin Tien urns includes some symbols of an agricultural fertility cult. According to the ways of sympathetic magic, symbols of woman's fecundity are often used to enhance the effect of symbols pertaining to the fertility of the fields or, *mutatis mutandis*, to the welfare of the dead: (Andersson 1943: 235, pls. 171-179).

Myth and the Goddess in Shang Culture

Until recently, it was very difficult to find scholars who would give credence to the existence of mythology in Shang Culture (Munsterberg, 1986: 19-34). We know that the morphology of early Chinese texts strongly suggests that early mythic narrative was transformed - historicized - by the literati of the Chou Dynasty. If so, then if we are to have any chance at finding recognizable myth, we must look at the one body of writing that has survived from the preceding Shang Dynasty, the oracle inscriptions on turtle plastrons and buffalo scapula. The early script employed in the Shang has been translated for numerous oracle bone inscriptions. Unfortunately for our quest, these inscriptions are about ritual propositions and the proper offerings to be made to ancestors and nature spirits in order to influence important events. There are no stories, no epics, no tales of love, war and peace. We can reconstruct an arcane ritual practice in considerable detail but we do not know who loved, cried, hated and fought for whatever rationale, be it petty or grand (cf. Allen 1991: 24). The only approach possible to finding the earliest, now almost invisible myth, of early China is to 1) examine the myth of the Ten Suns in Chou and Han Dynasty texts; 2) explore the myth of the origin of the Shang people and their relationship with the sacred Mulberry Tree; and then 3) look at the Shang oracle bone inscriptions for evidence of yet earlier myth.¹⁶

The Shang had a myth of the Ten Suns, who were birds, and their aristocracy was organized in a totemic relationship with these suns. When the Chou, who believed in one sun, conquered the Shang, the myth was forced into folk culture where the Ten Suns were believed to rise in sequence from the branches of the sacred Mulberry Tree. In the central states of China at this time, the Ten Suns were said to have been reduced to one by Archer Yi who shot down nine of them. By the time of the Chou, the myth of the Ten Suns had been lost. Origin myth, as found in late Chou texts, tells of a Goddess impregnated by eating an egg dropped by a Black Bird who is the God of Heaven Ti Chün, (Allen 1991: 25). Nonetheless, the myth of the Ten Suns survived in some circles because in the 1st century A.D., Wang Chong felt obliged to deny the possibility of the Ten Suns by noting that so many perching in a tree would burn it to cinders. He drew upon two earlier books, a compilation of mythical geographies from the Han Dynasty called *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and the *Huai-nan Tzu*, which is compilation of

¹⁶If the Goddess is present, this detective work should uncover her along with other deities and their myths. While we *assume* the Goddess is present because of a Western belief in the feminine eternal, it behooves us to actually *find* her and not avoid the work that a deliberate search demands.

various philosophical and Taoist texts, at least partially written by Liu An, a member of the Han royal family, c.139 A.D. (Birrell 1993: 302). The myth of the Ten Suns is also present in the *Songs of Chu*, "Questions of Heaven". Written in the 4th century B.C., it is an account of the main myths of the Ch'u in 186 verses.¹⁷ A complicated analysis of this circumstance suggests the myth of the Ten Suns originated in southern China (Allen 1991: 26).



The Mulberry Tree myth contains a number of motifs, one of which will lead us to the Goddess. It is best known in its late form which relates that one day all Ten Suns rose from Mulberry Tree and Yi the Archer shot down nine of them. Beyond the obvious point that we see here the final domination of the adherents of a single sun myth over those favoring ten, there is much beneath the surface. The Mulberry Tree is the Fu Sang Tree in the East at the foot of which is the Valley of the Sun which contains a pool of water in which the suns bathe. According to the *Shuo-wen chieh tzu - An Explication of Written Characters* - which was written by Hsu Shen c.100 A.D., the Fu Sang is a "spirit tree from which the suns go out."

¹⁷The extreme brevity of "Questions of Heaven" dramatically illustrates the condensation and truncation of narrative that exemplifies the literary record of Chinese myth. By contrast, one hardback edition of Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* is 376 pages.

The *sang* is the Mulberry which is depicted in oracle bone script as a tree with many mouths in its branches. *Fu* originally was a syllable which designated plants in general; i.e. a group name. The references to the Mulberry Tree in the three early texts mentioned in the preceding paragraph are in accord (Allen 1991: 27).

From *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (see Allen 1991: 28):

"Above the Tang Valley is the Fu Sang. [The Valley] is wherein the ten suns bathe. It is north of the Black Tooth Tribe. In the swirling water is a great tree. Nine suns dwell on its lower branches; one sun, on its uppermost branch."

"On the top of a mountain named Nieyaojundi is the Fu Tree. Although its trunk is three hundred li, its leaves are like those of mustard. The valley there is called the Warm Springs Valley (i.e. Tang Valley-Guo Pu). Above the Tang Valley is the Fu Tree. When one sun reaches it, another sun goes out; all of them carried by birds."

Corresponding to the Fu Sang in the east is the Ruo Tree in the west. The ten suns perch on it after their journey across the sky from the east. Furthermore, we encounter a third mythic tree, the Jian Tree which is an *axis mundi*, a connection between Heaven and Earth.

From the *Huai-nan Tzu* (see Allen 1991: 29):

"The Fu Tree is in Yang Zhou and that which the suns touch upon. The Jian Tree is in Du Guang and is that which the many spirits descend from above. ... The Ruo Tree is West of the Jian Tree. When the ten suns are on the tips of its branches, it illuminates the earth below."

The Kunlun mountains in the far west of China are the home of the Queen Mother of the West and may also been a doorway to the land of the dead.

At the foot of the Ruo Tree is the water filled Yu Yuan gorge which is the Feather Abyss where the sun-ravens shed their feathers when shot by Yi The Archer. The water at the foot of the Ruo Tree is the Ruo River which is "another name for the water underworld also known as the 'Yellow Spring' which ran everywhere beneath the earth and which came to the surface at the foot of the Fu Sang and Ruo Tree" (Allen 1991: 29). In Han Dynasty tomb art, the underworld is inhabited by turtles, dragons and large fish-like creatures; it is the land of the dead and all underground springs were believed to be branches of the Yellow Spring.

The Ten Suns which bathed in a pool of water at the foot of the Fu Sang and dwelt on its branches were birds. Although in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* the suns are described as carried by birds, in the *Han-nan Tzu* the birds are inside the suns. "Inside the sun(s), there are raven(s); in the moon(s), toad(s)." In Han tomb art, the sun is often shown with a bird inside it and the moon with a toad or hare and cassia tree.¹⁸ The association of the moon with a toad will be made clear below when the myth of Chang O is discussed. In Han tomb art it is not

¹⁸There is a Taoist legend that there is a supernatural hare on the moon who mixes drugs on behalf of the gods to make the Elixir of Life, that magical compound which produces gold and confers immortality (Williams 1976: 172).

clear whether the raven carries the sun, is in the sun, or is the sun but that clarity is not necessary. "Mythically, the suns and birds are the same ..." (Allen 1991: 31). In *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the raven in the sun is three legged, an image that has great antiquity and can be found on pottery of the Yang-shao Culture. In the early Han Dynasty, three was the *yang* number in *yin-yang* theory and so the number of the sun. Also the ten suns appear three times each month as the ten day week and 30 day month were basic calendric units carried on from the Shang Dynasty (Allen 1991: 32-33).

The choice of raven as opposed to some other bird species is not commented upon by Allen (1991). In Neolithic Old Europe, the raven was occasionally an epiphany of the Death Goddess (Gimbutas 1989: 189), and this association is dramatic in Iron Age Ireland with The Morrigan. If that symbolism has any relevance to Neolithic China, then Ti Chün, God of Heaven, appears to have swallowed the Death Goddess: indeed the two are fused although they retain their individual identities. The metaphor would not seem to be one of patriarchal dominance, but that of wholeness. Ti Chün is a Life Bringer and Ultimate Sovereign. He will later be called upon to empower the Emperor who will be called The Son of Heaven. By joining to the Death Goddess, the entirety of the 'world' is encompassed: life and death *do* go hand in hand. We see the same mythopoetic statement in the *yin-yang* symbol. Shang society is thus seen to rely upon a myth which emphasized the equality of the sexes and an equal balance of their powers. Fragmentary evidence for female shamans lends support to this proposal. Light and dark, life and death together form the reality of the 'world'. The assignment of the Death deity to a goddess is not pejorative or chauvinistic but archetypal. Because females give birth, they are closely associated with death in ways not approachable by males. While male deities often rule the Underworld, Death Gods are uncommon. The Grim Reaper of the Christian West may be properly viewed as the messenger of life's end rather than a God of Death, *per se*.

In *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the name of the bird in the sun is *jun* which means raven. Allen (1991: 31) believes *jun* is related to Di Jun (new script for Ti Chün), the father of the sun birds who in later myth is God in Heaven. Hsi-Ho is the Mother of the Ten Suns and the consort of Ti Chün, who in some ancient texts has an ambiguous gender. According to *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, Hsi-Ho gave birth to the Ten Suns and bathed them as well. "Beyond the South-eastern Sea amidst the Sweet Waters is the Tribe of Hsi-Ho. There is a woman named Hsi-Ho who regularly bathes the suns in Sweet Springs. Hsi-Ho is the wife of Ti Chün. It is she who gave birth to the ten suns" (Allen 1991: 33).

Guo Pu,¹⁹ who is a commentator of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* quotes from the *Gui zang*,²⁰ a text which presumably dated from the Shang Dynasty and which was already lost by Han times. "Behold their ascent to the sky! A time of brightness, then a time of darkness, as the sons of Hsi-Ho go out from Sun Valley" (Allen 1991: 33).

The Classic of Mountains and Seas also names two other wives of Ti Chün. Ch'ang-hsi is the Western equivalent of Hsi-Ho; she is the Mother of the

¹⁹New script.

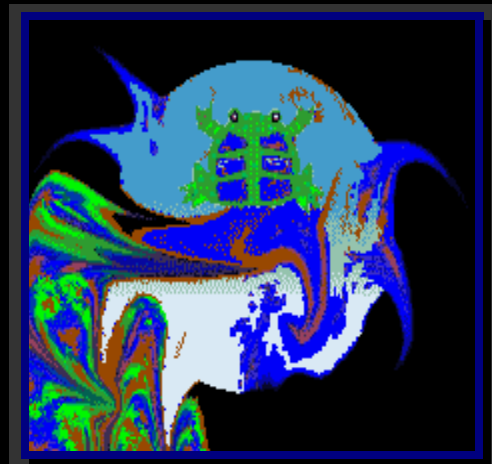
²⁰New script.

Twelve Moons whom she bathes in a pool of water at the foot of the Ruo Tree. In later mythology, she becomes identified with Chang O who stole the elixir of immortality from Yi the Archer (see below). The third wife is E Huang²¹ who gives birth to the Tribe of the Three Bodied People and she is also named as wife of the Sage King Shun. This latter relationship implies Ti Chün shared his wives. E Huang and the Three Bodied Tribe carry the surname of the first Sage King, Yao (Allen 1991: 34).

The elements of this Mulberry Tree myth are mentioned in texts believed to be earlier than *The Classic of Mountain and Seas* and the *Huai-nan Tzu*. In the *Songs of Chu*, is recorded a shamanic spirit journey in which the Mulberry Tree myth is important context. "I ordered the Mother of the Ten Suns to stop the passage of time. ... I watered my horses at the Valley of Warm Springs and tethered my horse to the Fu Sang. I broke a branch of the Ruo Tree with which to brush off the sun ..." In the *Bei hui feng*, we find similar reference: "I broke a branch from the Ruo Tree with which to screen the light" (see Allen 1991: 34-35).

In Chou texts, the Shang are consistently associated with the Mulberry Tree myth. The legendary first ancestor was born from the egg of a bird sent by Ti Chün who was also the husband of the Mother of The Ten Suns and father of the sun birds. When a drought occurred at the beginning of the Shang Dynasty, their founder Tang prayed at the Mulberry Grove. His minister was born from the Hollow Mulberry, a transformation of the Fu Sang. Tang is associated with the pool of water in the Valley of the Sun (Allen 1991: 45).

The myth of Yi the Archer shooting nine of the Ten Suns must come after that of the Mulberry Tree because it assumes the latter. It also is integrated into the legends of the three Sage Kings. According to the *Huai-nan Tzu*, during the time of Yao, the Ten Suns came out together causing a killing heat wave. Yi was sent by Yao to shoot the ten suns and destroy various monsters that had already appeared. He was successful and Yao became the first Sage King. Yi is associated with the West and was given the elixir of immortality by the Queen Mother of the West, only to have it stolen by his wife, Chang O, who fled with it to the moon. If Yi represents forces of the west and moon who are arrayed against those of the east and the sun as Allen (1991: 36-37) would have it, the results of his actions are difficult to interpret. He is successful in reducing the number of suns to one which comes out each day. But he loses the key to immortality because of the treachery of his wife. Are we seeing a Goddess assert her independence no matter what the consequences? After all, she is transformed into a toad on the moon. Then again, exactly what are the Ten Suns and why destroy nine of them? Allen (1991: 37) sees in this riddle a breach of ritual that must be punished. If the suns are birds which are goddesses, then do we have here an obscure myth about the reduction of the Goddess' presence in both cult and ritual? Should Yi be seen as moon god empowered by the Mother of the Twelve Moons? Are goddesses arrayed on both sides? Evidence for both solar



²¹New script.

gods and goddesses will be discussed below. Allen (1991: 38) quotes from obscure texts which indicate that the nine suns may have not been destroyed but only frightened into better behavior: they were henceforth not seen together on the same day although they did occasionally come out together in later times. The Mulberry Tree myth continued to be available during Chou and Han times even though it no longer was the dominant mytho-poetic.

Oracle Bone Inscriptions

The number of recovered Shang Dynasty oracle bones is enormous, well in excess of 100,000 (Chou 1979). The early script on the Shang oracle bones has been deciphered and many of the inscriptions translated. Well over 100 diviners are known by name (Kneightley 1978: 195). There are no myths or narratives of any kind in the inscriptions, only magic and divination are the subject of the oracular inscriptions. It was essential that the ancestor of a family was worshipped on the proper day. Details of the ceremony, particularly the number, sex and color of animal or human sacrifices were critical and important subjects for divination. Other inscriptions are concerned with worries about future misfortune or securing the blessings of the High Lord in Heaven for the harvest, hunt or weather. All of this concern became concentrated upon the king. The goal of the divination was to ascertain whether or not the king had obtained the favor of the spirits or High Lord.

In spite of this specialized focus, elements of the Mulberry Tree myth may be discerned in the oracle bone inscriptions. Mulberry itself is a place name in the eastern area of China. A belief in the Fu Sang tree is implied by a detailed analysis of the characters for east and west. "East", or **tung*, was explained by Hsu Shen in *An Explication of Written Characters*, which he wrote c.100 A.D., to be a tree and a sun, known as the Fu Sang tree (Allen 1991: 46-49). The character for "west" is a pictograph of a nest. If the Ten Suns are birds, then "west" is the nest or nests upon the Ruo Tree on which they roost when perched in the evening. The character for "last night" is a picture of a sun beneath water, strongly suggestive of a belief in the Yellow River or Ruo River (Allen 1991: 50).

The highest ancestor in the Shang oracle bone script is designated by a character best read as High Lord or Lord in Heaven. This is Ti Chün, the husband of the Mother of the Ten Suns and father of the sun birds in the Mulberry Tree. As Ti K'u, he also sent the Black Bird which gave birth to the Shang founder. The character *jun* in Shang script was the name of Ti Chün as Ti K'u. This character consists of a human with a head, which may or may not be turned and a leg or foot. The overall form of *jun* suggests a "bird-like gait or stance ..." (Allen 1991: 51).

There is a dedication to a Black Bird Lady on a Shang bronze vessel. This and the later text references to Shang era goddesses may originally have referred to women of the clan from whom Shang kings chose their queens. Another character implies the woman who was impregnated by the Black

Bird. (Allen 1991: 53). Wang Hai is father of the first of Shang kings to be identified by one of the ten cyclical characters (which designated the day of the ten day week on which they were to be worshipped) and his name is found on oracle bone inscriptions.²² A bird is drawn over his name: he is the offspring of the egg implanted in Chien Ti by the Black Bird: he is the Black King and the first ancestor of the Shang.

The Maiming of the King: Buskins and Partridges

The suggestion of a bird-like gait for a figure as important as the Shang dynastic ancestor is striking. Robert Graves (1966: 324-326) and others have discussed that sacred kings in some times and places “were not allowed to rest their heels on the ground but walked on their toes ...” There is evidence for this proposal in *Genesis XXXII* where the familiar story of Jacob wrestling with an angel sent by God is told. It is important to realize at the outset that the dynamics of Jacob’s encounter are not shamanic but speak to the conferring of divine status by a deity. Shamans were important to Shang society but the inference to be drawn in this discussion is about another category of mythic experience that serves to define divine kingship. Admittedly, the evidence for the crippling of the Shang ruler is very sparse, an observation about the form of the character for the Shang ancestor by one Chinese scholar, Wu Qichang (in Allen 1991). Nonetheless, pursuing this mystery is important even if a definitive conclusion cannot be reached. It tells us about the terrible price that may have been paid by a ruler who becomes a divine conduit in order to wield the greatest power for the maximum good of his people. Such a requirement also serves to weed out any but the strongest of heart and character.

So let us digress and look at ancient Israel and a well-known Bible story. Jacob is alone after calling upon God’s assistance as he prepares to meet his brother Esau, whose intentions he suspects to be aggressive. He has stripped himself of his wealth and sent his herds of animals with a servant to Esau.²³ His two wives and children are sent away to safety. Here is the story of Jacob from the *Book of Genesis*, chapter 32, verses 24-32.

“And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

“When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

²²The implication is that Shang kings were metaphorically born of the sun which appeared on the day of their birth and this correspondence is the basis of the ritual calendar (Allen 1991: 55-56).

²³ The major source of wealth in pastoral Indo-European societies was their herds of animals; in Jacob's case goats, donkeys, camels and cattle. Such animals functioned as monetary currency. If the size of his herds is not exaggerated, he was an important and powerful tribal chieftain. In spite of this evidence, Graves (1966: 325) believes Jacob to have been a member of a matriarchal society.

"Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

"And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

"Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

"Then Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him."

"So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

"The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh."

"Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh on the sinew of the hip."

This section of *Genesis* is clear in describing Jacob's injury by the angel of God as mark of divine favor. Jacob receives one of the highest marks that can be bestowed in order to recognize supreme accomplishment: a new name given by the deity. The angel blesses him and changes his name from Jacob to Israel. A dietary taboo passes into early Israelite society to forever mark the transformation of Jacob.

Jacob's injury results from the inward displacement of the hip caused by forcing the legs too widely apart. "The lengthening of the leg tightens the tendons in the thigh and the muscles go into spasm, which is presumably what is meant by the shrinking of the sinew in the hollow of the thigh" (Graves 1966: 325). The leg becomes abducted and rotated: Jacob would have been able to walk only with a lurching gait on his toes. Such a gait might have reminded some of the short bursts of rapid running characteristic of shore birds as they hunt for food at the water's edge on a beach.²⁴ This mincing gait of sacred kings, due either to a deliberate maiming or an imitative gait, was used by tragic actors on the Greek stage. This swaggering gait had an erotic connotation to the Greeks. Several ancient kings had the letters 'salm' in their names which suggests the word *saleuma* - a wraggling of the buttocks and a flaunting of sexual charms. Greek prostitutes were called Salmakides.

But wait, there is more. Plutarch asks the question, "Why do the women of Elis summon Dionysus to come to them with his bull foot?" This is an odd choice to symbolize a bull's power, as Graves notes. The answer seems to be that the sacred king of the mystery drama at Elis really had a bull foot. "... the dislocation of his thigh made one of his feet resemble that of a bull, with the heel as the fetlock, and that he hurried among them with a rush and clatter of buskins" (Graves 1966: 326). On the Pelasgian island of Tenedos, a sacred cow was kept in honor of Dionysus and treated like a pregnant woman. If she gave birth to a bull

²⁴Have you ever watched sandpipers on a sandy beach?

calf, it was put into buskins (a boot which was high and thick soled) before being sacrificed and thus we established the connection between bull's feet and buskins. Actors who performed Athenian tragedy in ancient Greece wore the *cothurnus* in honor of Dionysus (Graves 1966: 325-326). Buskin came to carry a connotation of tragedy in general and was used in this sense by both Spencer and Byron according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. How very odd unless one is aware of this particular ritual of maiming the king which goes back to Neolithic times.

Graves (1966: 327) continues and spins out a tale of the deification of Jacob and the particular bird that is ritually involved. As further evidence of the deification of the crippled Jacob, Graves undertakes an unusual interpretation of *I Kings, XVIII, 26*. Elijah finds Ahab and confronts the priests of Baal. He orders the priests to sacrifice a bull, but build no fire, and call upon the name of the God. Elijah will do likewise and whoever receives an answer will know they follow the true path. The priests of Baal were not answered. "So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us! But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made." 'Baal' is not a name per se, but a title that means 'lord'. Although the English translation tells us that the priests 'leaped', Graves believes that the original Hebrew is formed from a root better translated as 'to dance with a limp'. As the priests of Baal were Israelites who did not worship Yahweh, Graves speculates that the Lord in question is Jah Aceb or Jacob - the Heel God.²⁵ That speculation rests upon solid ground. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, which was published after Graves' death, translates the Hebrew 'Jacob' both 'heel grabber' and 'supplanter' (Achtmeier 1985: 443).

I quote here from *Genesis* chapter 25, verses 21 through 27:

"Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

"But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If all is well, why am I like this?' So she went to inquire of the Lord.

"And the Lord said to her: 'Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.'

"So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb.

"And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau.

²⁵Elijah repairs the altar of the Lord with twelve stones which symbolize the tribes that came from the twelve sons of Jacob. He prepares his bull for the evening sacrifice and calls to God to make himself known and recognize he - Elijah - as His servant. God's fire consumed the sacrifice and boiled the water in the surrounding trench. The contest was over and Elijah executed the priests of Baal. I disagree with Graves' interpretation of these sacrifices as representing a rite of renewal in the spring during which the corpse of the old year is burned. The bull was a favorite Indo-European symbol of power and virility and thus also the priority sacrificial animal in contests involving heavyweight political issues.

"Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

"So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents."

Joseph mourned for Jacob at the threshing floor of Atad. *Genesis* 50:11 explains, "And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, 'This is a deep mourning of the Egyptians' Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan." Epiphanius identifies Atad as 'The Shrine of the Hobbler' - Beth Hoglah - a place between Jericho and the Jordan south of Gilgal. Jerome identifies Atad with a round dance performed in honor of Talus the Cretan Sun God. Hesychius says that Talus means 'Sun' to whom the partridge was sacred (Graves 1966: 327). Therefore, we come to the particular bird of the 'bird-like gait' of the crippled king.

Talus was thrown down by Daedalus from a cliff and turned into a partridge. The Arabic word for 'hobble', which gives its name to Beth Hoglah, is derived from the word for partridge. The inference is that the dance performed there was characterized by a hobbling gait. The partridge is a spring migrant and sacred to the Love Goddess because of its reputation for lasciviousness, according to Aristotle and Pliny. Like the wood cock, its mating dance is performed for an audience of hens. The cock flutters in circles in a hobbling gait, one heel held high to strike whatever rival appears. Partridges become so absorbed in their mating ritual that nothing can deter them. In ancient times a decoy cock was put in a cage at the end of a long brushwood tunnel. Its call attracted not only the hens but other cocks as well. The decoy male was one that had dislocated its leg in attempting to escape a horse hare snare. As with the lame sacred king, it was an honored prisoner and fattened gloriously (Graves 1966: 327-328). It is just possible that kings of the Shang dynasty were maimed so as to hobble with a bird-like (partridge) gait as a sign that Ti Chün had chosen them as his representative on earth. Such were the privileges of power and the price to pay for becoming the Son of Heaven. The character *jun* with which we began this excursion is used on Shang oracle bone inscriptions to refer to an animal caught or netted by hunters, the name of which may be a homonym of the Shang ancestor. Was this first ancestor deified as a Partridge god, as was Talus in ancient Athens and Jacob in ancient Israel?

Although the myth and parable of the maimed king were largely lost in Christian times, it is just possible that William Shakespeare knew the tragedy of the semi-divine maimed king (L. Blumenberg, personal communication). In *Richard III*, he portrays the king as crippled and a hunchback when there is not the slightest historical evidence to substantiate such a physique for King Richard III and indeed much to contradict it. Richard III as a hunchback is an invention of Thomas More as Potter (1983: 136-144) demonstrates and he believes Shakespeare plagiarized this fiction about the unloved king. Richard III may be guilty of nothing more than poor statecraft and placing his trust in malicious and traitorous advisors. His real character was pious, philanthropic, brave, honest, generous, impulsive and introverted. In Shakespeare's time, it was impossible to give the last Plantagenet ruler a fair hearing considering the politics of the day. There is no need to speculate that Shakespeare had any other motives in mind than gaining theatrical popularity by indulging in the popular sport of 'Plantagenet bashing.'

But I wonder still ... *If* Shakespeare knew of Richard's true nature, he *deliberately* transformed Richard III, who in real life was an ordinary, not overly intelligent man, unprepared for the extraordinary demands of his office, into an awesome nearly mythic figure. Shakespeare's Richard III is not cut from everyday cloth. He is powerful, charismatic, intelligent, and supremely evil. It is not required that the semi-divine consort of the Goddess be a good, wise and kind king, however much we may wish for that. It is only necessary that he wield great power whose attributes speak to the gods. The historical King Richard is hardly that, but Shakespeare's Richard III leaves an unmistakable impression that he is more than human in both thoughts and deeds. And so without a shred of good historical evidence, I wonder ...

Myth and Iconography on Shang Bronzes

As Giradot (1983: ch. 8) discusses, primordial couples are frequent vehicles of creation in early Chinese texts and are often an incestuous brother-sister pair, 'Father Heaven - Mother Earth'. Chapter 7 of the *Huai Nan Tzu* speaks of two deities identified with *yin-yang* who were chaotically born. Fu-hsi and Nü-kua are usually presented as male, unrelated, culture heroes who exemplify the pre-civilized paradise time (cosmic egg-gourd) out of which is established feudal civilization via the deluge and the creation of man: see the writings of Chuang Tzu. Such a myth represents the 'artificial historization of mythology'. However, possibly in early Neolithic times, these deities were the divine couple of the deluge and the creation. Later, they might be portrayed as emperor and wife. Still later, perhaps in the first millennium B.C., they both had become male heroes.

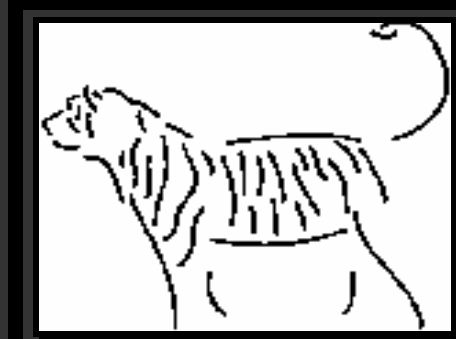
Originally, they were consanguineous animal deities, especially of serpent form associated with water and thunder. Nü-kua was a serpent or snail goddess. The *Lieh Tzu* (2nd c. B.C. - 3rd c. A.D.) states that Fu-hsi, Nü-kua, Shen-nung and emperors of the Hsia Dynasty had snake bodies, human faces and heads of oxen with tiger snouts. Interlocking serpents are known on lacquer ware taken from a late Chou tomb (Chang 1977: 374). Han iconography depicts Fu-hsi and Nü-kua as half human with intertwined serpent tails.

The most valuable document for the study of Chinese mythology is chapter 3 of the *Songs of Ch'u*, "Questions of Heaven". Written in the 4th century B.C., it is an account of the main myths of the Ch'u in 186 verses. Within these verses are the earliest known written examples of virtually all the major myths and many minor ones as well. As might be expected, there is a progression from the creation of the 'world' to the deeds of gods and supra-humans which are followed by accounts of mythical figures of prehistory that lead into biographies of historical persons including the kings of Ch'u in the 6th century B.C.. The format of the "Questions of Heaven" is a series of questions written in a dense, arcane style which assume previous, and as yet unknown to us, mythic knowledge. We are left dangling without context, *the most precarious position of all for a mythographer.* Birrell

(1993: 26) likens the "Questions of Heaven" to series of sacred riddles.²⁶ Written answers are nowhere to be found and were presumably fixed in the oral tradition. The purpose of the "Questions of Heaven" is also difficult to deduce but may well have been to engrain in the oral tradition, which still held supremacy, the most important examples of mythic poetry (cf. Birrell 1993: 27). Scholars agree on a single author for the "Questions of Heaven" whose identity in the Ch'u court is unknown. The goddess Nü Kua is the subject of two sacred riddles in the "Questions of Heaven". "How was Nü Kua's body made? How did she ascend when she rose on high and became empress" (Birrell 1993: 35). No answers are possible in this day and age.

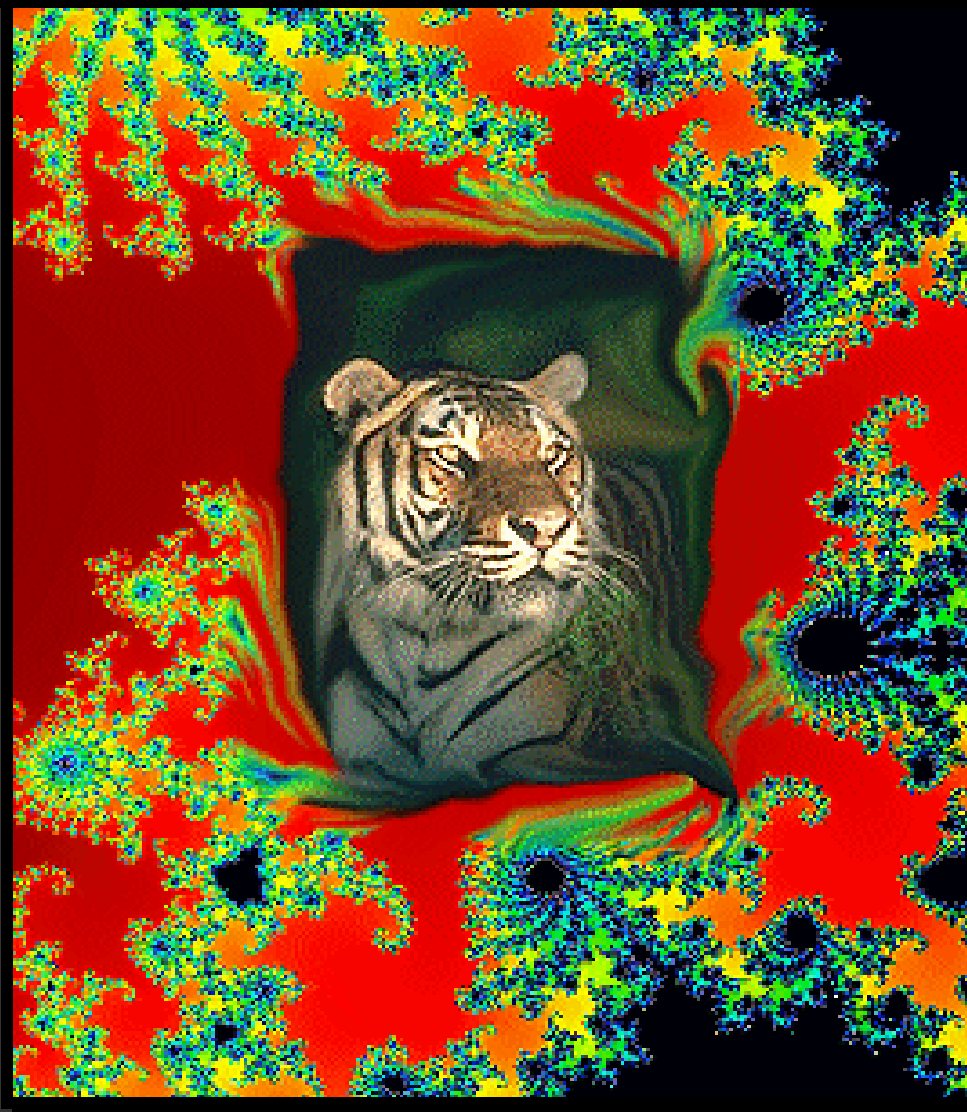
Shang bronzes were ritual vessels which contained grain, wine, and animal or human sacrifices that were offered to the spirits. "... THEIR PURPOSE WAS A SINGULAR ONE, TO FEED THE SPIRITS. THEY WERE THUS DECORATED IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT WORLD SO THAT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD MIGHT BE CROSSED AND THE SACRIFICE BE RECEIVED BY THOSE FOR WHOM IT WAS INTENDED" (Allen 1991: 130, emphasis mine).

Munsterberg (1986: 81-84, fig. 21-23) describes what may be the earliest depiction of Nü Kua and Fu Hsi: their imagery is that of serpent deities. A spectacular Shang *kuang* has human figures on two of the legs in which either the lower body is that of a serpent or it is the human body with a snake coiled around it. Two other Shang bronzes show snake ornaments covering the legs of a man who on one bronze is hugged with affection, not aggression, by a tiger (or tigress?) and on the other is emerging from the mouth of tiger with an obvious look of serenity (Munsterberg 1986: 76-81). Munsterberg believes that a Shang origin myth is depicted in which the ancestors are emerging from the sacred earth which is depicted as a tiger. Unfortunately, there are no texts or other evidence to support this idea and it is not clear why a sacred earth deity who gives rise to the 'people' would be depicted as a tiger.²⁷ Nor can I imagine what myth might account for the association between this ancient pair of consanguineous water/thunder deities with a mythic tiger, nor their obvious subordination to the mythical tiger. Perhaps the power and grace of the tiger served to elevate it into mythic realms and the image of a tigress suckling her cubs became a powerful metaphor for mythic fecundity (L. Blumenberg, personal communication).



²⁶Sacred riddles have a long tradition in the training of mystics and spiritual adepts. They were employed in druidic education and alive and well today in the koans of Zen Buddhism.

²⁷In traditional Chinese folklore and mythology, the tiger was the 'king of beasts', powerful and the scourge of demons. The tiger is the third of the Twelve Terrestrial Branches (Williams 1976: 399-400).



This speculation aside, a formidable research problem remains in that the ancient texts and Shang oracle bone inscriptions so meticulously researched by Allen (1991) and others do not even hint at a mythic tiger deity who gives rise to the first ancestor. What does not seem controversial, however, is the depiction of the earliest forms of Nü Kua and Fu Hsi: "... the human figures with the snake body on the Shang kuang in the Freer Gallery or the human figures with snake designs on their feet on the famous tiger vessels in the Sumitomo and the Cernuschi collections. The iconography of these Shang works is very similar to that found on the Wu Liang-tzu reliefs which show the divine ancestors, Nü Kua and Fu Hsi, as half human and half snake. It is true that this legend can only be traced back to Han texts, but the idea of connecting ancestors with some sacred totem is a very ancient concept ..." (Munsterberg 1986: 173).

The end of the Shang era was the Anyang Period (1300-1030 B.C.) and there is tantalizing evidence for the presence of the Goddess on many bronzes if we use Gimbutas (1989) as a reference 'field guide' with which

to identify and interpret symbolism. Compressed and interconnected spirals are everywhere and they indicate the cosmic snake with its dynamic, endless, renewing life force. The triangle, a primary symbol of water, is also common, frequently with an interior space filled with spirals and compressed patterns of flowing water. This symbolism speaks to the metaphors of the ever dynamic, creative cosmic water and the snake as a symbol of the regeneration of life. There are occasional Shang bronze vessels which continue the Neolithic tradition of sculpting legs as female breasts. Nipples are seen on bronze vessels as well, often in combination with a diamond or square in which case they nearly duplicate the pictograph for mother (Munsterberg 1986: 226-227). Andersson (1973: 304-306) believes the cowry shell, which is prominent in royal tombs and as a decorative image on jars symbolizes the vulva (female fertility): it is also found covering the limbs of mythic birds and tigers. Although there is no depiction of an anthropomorphized Goddess, she is present as the Goddess of Fertility and Fecundity.

Judging from the Paleolithic evidence, the First Deity was often conceptualized as androgynous, in part because of a belief in the unity and self containment of the First Cause. The offspring which then follow to become the first generation of deities present no biological mystery; parthenogenesis by a male-female being should follow naturally. Primal androgyny is clearly depicted on early Chinese bulbous vessels with breast-legs and projecting spouts shaped like erect phalli. This form has its origin in Neolithic clay vessels but the most striking example is a Shang bronze *li-ho*, which also has a cover that resembles the buttocks and a triangular incision beneath the spout which indicates the female vulva (Munsterberg 1986: 229; pl. 81).

A square wine vessel found at Ningxiang in the Hunan Province is decorated with images that deserve careful scrutiny. Four rams encircle the stem, above which four horned dragons are coiled.²⁸ Unless we wish to dismiss the choice of animals as merely serving the concerns of artistic design, it behooves us to think a moment. Why rams, why dragons and what is the nature of the exquisitely detailed ornamentation? Are the interconnected spirals only meant to represent the ram's curly fleece? The bodies of the rams are everywhere covered with an interlaced pattern of tightly connected spirals which form a motif of tall crested birds. Tall crested birds are almost always wading birds such as herons, egrets and cranes that feed in shallow water. Such water birds are an epiphany of the Bird Goddess who in her return each spring heralds the renewal of life force and new growth. The dragon is the cosmic serpent, in some instances born from a fusion of bird and snake (Bird and Snake Goddess).²⁹ In Neolithic Old Europe, the ram was sacred to the Bird and Snake Goddess, his horns were spiraled in the same way as the body of the cosmic snake. The ram carried the same connotation of dynamic

²⁸Metropolitan Museum of Art 1980: fig. 20.

²⁹Understand that my interpretation of the dragon in China is unusual and is deliberately using Old European metaphor. In traditional Chinese mythology, the dragon is always male and when emerging in the spring after a winter hibernation is the agent that awakens Nature's fecundity particularly that of life-giving rain. The Chinese dragon is a rain and storm god who lives in the sky. His claws are in storm lightening and his voice is in the cyclone. The dragon is the spirit of change, full of goodness and strength. He is also vigilant and guards fabulous treasure. Since early in the Han Dynasty, the dragon has been the symbol of imperial power. The dragon is the fifth of the Twelve Terrestrial Branches and the symbol *chen* in the *I Ching* is synonymous with the dragon. (Williams 1976: 132-141).

ever-renewing life energy and was often sacrificed to the Goddess. Aries, the Ram, is the astrological sign in the West for the beginning of spring (March 21 to April 19). This wine vessel, as are many Chinese bronzes, is a technical and design *tour de force* but is also a highly sophisticated mytho-poetic statement.

The Owl (Death) Goddess is sculpted on a three legged vessel from the Anyang Period found in a grave at Ningxiang, Hunan Province.³⁰

Compressed patterns of flowing water and interconnected spirals fill the decorative surface. Munsterberg (1986: 92) finds that the owl and the pheasant are the two most common birds in Shang art and depicts several striking examples. Two bronze *yu* in the form of owls (Munsterberg 1986: fig. 27, 28) are covered with the familiar water symbolism of spirals. Owls decorate a stone coffin platform at the Hou Chuang Cemetery. Owls ride on the back of tortoises on a famous funeral banner found in a Han Dynasty tomb. The owl (Owl Goddess) protected loved ones who died and now resided in the darkness of a tomb. Today in China, the owl is believed an evil omen whose cry foretells death (Munsterberg 1986: 95-98). Munsterberg (1986: 104-109) proposes that the original bird in the Ten Suns of the Mulberry Myth was the pheasant which is a symbol of light and the sun. He is, however, unable to explain why a raven should have been substituted for the pheasant as the myth evolved. He also associates the pheasant with the South and the wind. Most researchers make these associations with the phoenix which Munsterberg believes is a Western fantasy: he seems not to fully understand the coexistence of the miraculous and the 'real' in all mythic systems.

The royal tomb of Fu Hao, the consort of Wu Ting the fourth Shang king to rule at Anyang was discovered intact and undisturbed in 1976. The dates of Wu Ting are uncertain, possibly one of the following three periods: 1339 to 1281 B.C., 1324 to 1266 B.C. or 1239 to 1180 B.C. (Kneightley 1978: 226). Fu Hao was a woman of extraordinary character and strength. She led military expeditions on behalf of Wu Ting and occasionally presided at state sacrifices. A number of Shang oracle bones are known of divinations which were undertaken on her behalf. Questions were asked about child birth, rituals and her military expeditions. Some of the inscriptions refer to her as royal consort or feudal vassal but other describe her as a military commander with the title of general. On one turtle plastron oracle bone, Fu Hao is mentioned as commanding a column of 3,000 soldiers alongside a general who led 10,000 as they fought a regional enemy. More than 440 bronze objects were found in her tomb, including 16 human sacrifices, more than 500 carved pieces of stone and jade, 400 bone carvings, tools, mirrors, bronze weapons and 200 bronze vessels. Fu Hao is not unique. More than 100 women are mentioned on Shang oracle bone inscriptions as taking an active part in religious, political and military activities (Chou 1979: 149).

Shang women who were members of the aristocracy enjoyed a high status which would disappear in the succeeding Chou Dynasty under the influence of Confucianism and Taoism. This equality of the sexes and the presence of women in positions of political and military power is characteristic of societies in which the Goddess is prominent, if not dominant. Some of these reveal the presence of the Goddess. Indeed, the few facts we know about the life of Fu Hao suggest that she was an incarnation of the Goddess of Sovereignty.

³⁰Metropolitan Museum of Art 1980: fig. 26.

A covered wine vessel is a composite beast, the front half of which is a ram while the feathered rear half is that of an owl.³¹ The ram was sacred to the Goddess because its spiral horns captured the essence of dynamic, cyclic, cosmic energy as does the coiled snake (Gimbutas 1989: 75-80). The Owl Goddess is one manifestation of the Death Goddess. Once again, compressed spirals are everywhere in the ornamentation. See also (Barnes 1993: 123 and plates 21-29).

The Hu-shu Culture in the lower Yangtze River valley of southern China was contemporary with the Shang in the north. Impressed designs on pottery are designated geometric by archeologists and feature striations and net patterns which symbolize life-giving cosmic water. Compressed but angular spirals suggest the cosmic snake which was a symbol of life and immortality: see Chang 1977: 413-414).

Goddess Fragments in Early Taoism

This discussion is at first abstract then to proceed along more concrete lines. Taoism could not be more unlike Confucianism. Taoism took form several centuries before Confucius lived (551-479 B.C.), the exact date is impossible to determine. It probably arose before 1000 B.C. when Chinese script had not yet been invented and thus, its origins, now so difficult to discern, lie in the Shang Dynasty. Taoism believes in a single underlying cosmic unity of indescribable nature, yet endlessly creative (much like the Void or Great Bliss of Buddhism). The goal of Taoist practice is mystical: contact the 'One' and become greatly enriched. As in Buddhism, the gods can be of great help in such an endeavor.

By the time of the Eastern Chou Dynasty (770-450 B.C.), mythological lore is apparent and a central cosmogonic theme can be discerned. In the beginning, the cosmos was dark and without boundary or structure. Mythic themes cluster into two categories. The first category is the separation of chaos into two primal elements ('heaven' and 'earth'), which leads to the primordial couple, from whose procreation comes the 'one'; the cosmic egg or gourd which evolves into the cosmic fool, who then metamorphoses into the lame king.³² The second category is concerned with the transformation of the bodily parts of mythical creatures into natural elements. Such mythical creatures are the creation deities, Chu-yin (snake) and Hun-tun (emperor), among others. These two traditions coalesced into one interpretative pattern by the Chou and Han Dynasties (Giradot 1983).

³¹Metropolitan Museum of Art 1980: fig. 30.

³²From c.600 B.C. I quote the first few lines of an ancient 'song'. "The young gourds spread and spread./ The people after they were first brought into being/From the River Tu went to the Ch'i" (Walley 1960: 247).

In the *Chang Tzu*, written during the Eastern Chou Dynasty, literary use was made of mythologically based fragments. The well-known *Lao Tzu* and *Tao te Ching* are of the same period but are devoid of narrative or proper names. The earliest Taoist texts do not tell coherent myths or use a narrative form. Yet early Taoist thought *is* mythic, for it is a creative literary and religious interpretation of mythological themes. Chinese literature 'reduced' myth to a formal, highly structured cosmological classification. Implied and lurking behind it, is an archetypal ritualistic logic, often binary in nature as in the familiar *yin-yang* metaphor.

Early Taoist Myth

RELIGION: CREATION LEADS TO THE FALL AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN.

RITUAL: WITHDRAWAL LEADS TO TRANSITION WHICH ALLOWS REINCORPORATION.

COSMOLOGY: '1' LEADS TO THE '2' WHICH ALLOWS FOR '3'.

MYSTICISM: ALL DISTINCTIONS COLLAPSE.

(ALCHEMY)

THE DISTINCTIVE CHINESE PARADIGM IS THAT CREATION DOES NOT INVOLVE THE EPIC CONQUEST OF AN EXISTENTIAL, CHAOTIC FOE. NO HEROES ALLOWED! A TAOIST CONQUERS LIFE, NOT TO WIN SALVATION, BUT TO YIELD TO THE ETERNAL RETURN OF THINGS. SPONTANEOUS SELF-CREATION AND RETURN IS ETERNAL. CREATION IS NOT THE HEROIC ACT OF A CREATOR OUTSIDE TIME AND SPACE. THE 'SALVATION' OF MAN AND SOCIETY IS TO RESYNCHRONIZE HUMAN PERIODICITY WITH THE CYCLES OF COSMIC TIME (GIRADOT 1983: 12 ff). THERE IS NO CONCEPT OF SALVATION FROM SIN, AS IN CHRISTIANITY.

Fragments of the Goddess may be discerned in these early Taoist texts. During the nodal period of the fifth month in ancient South China, owl broth was eaten on the fifth or fifteenth day of the fifth month. The Owl was a *hun-tun* chaos creature linked with darkness, thunder, metallurgy, the moon, drum making and eclipses. The Owl was an adversary of the sun who devoured light and therefore the Owl must be devoured in turn. The Owl was also considered unfilial, barbarian and uncivilized (but were these imposed Confucian values?). Sacrificing and eating the Goddess' sacred bird is an act of obeisance and a respectful ritual. The fifth moon month required exorcist rites and a sacrifice that may have been human, for it was the insecure time of the summer solstice, with risks of heat, drought or ill health due to the powers unleashed at this time. Devouring a chaos symbol at a nodal seasonal transition time suggests a creative struggle between the chaos dragon and a culture hero, analogous to the battles between Apollo and Python, Zeus and Typhon, and Marduk and Tiamat (Giradot 1983: 34). Alternatively, I suggest that the attributes of chaos, such as the eternal,

endlessly creative, regenerative void are, except for the void, all fundamental characteristics of the Great Goddess. Perhaps the ancient Chinese were also appealing to the Goddess of Fertility to protect them and ensure good crops during a dangerous nodal time.

As Giradot (1983: ch. 2) discusses, the *Tao te Ching* seems to equate the Tao with the Great Goddess as Mother of All. The Tao Mother of the World precedes the creation of duality.

"There was something chaotic, yet complete,
Which existed before the creation of heaven and earth,
Without sound and formless,
It stands alone and does not change.
It pervades all and is free from danger.
It can be regarded then as the mother of the world.
I do not know its proper name, but will call it Tao..."
(Giradot 1983: 49)

Tao is the primordial source principle, or 'thing' which controls the creation of heaven and earth first, then the primordial world. It was a perfect, total or complete fusion of all things: a cosmic totality - "a chaotically complete one body" (Shao Po-wen 1057-1134 A.D.). Cosmic totality is *hun-ch'eng*, which may be a corruption of an interpolation for *hun-tun*, 'Primal Chaos Creatress'!

The Tao is called mother (*mu*) in chapters 1, 20, 25, 52 and 59 of the *Tao te Ching*. Close to the Tao intention is a primal, ancestral bird, snake or fish (which are all epiphanies of the western Great Goddess) who lays a cosmic egg which splits open and gives rise to the dual principles of the cosmos.

"The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal/constant Tao [*ch'ang-tao*].

The name that can be named [*ming*] is not the eternal name.

The nameless [*wu-ming*] is the origin of heaven and earth.

The named [*yu-ming*] is the mother of the Ten Thousand things [the phenomenal world].

These [*wub and yua*] proceed from the same source, yet have different names.

Both together [*t'unga*, the unity of *wub* and *yua*] are called the dark [*hsuan*].

Dark and even darker,
It is the gate of all hidden wonders [*miao*]."

(Giradot 1983: 51-52)

The creative stages before the appearance of the phenomenal world are several and partake of that which is whole or chaotically complete. Heaven and earth were once harmoniously fused. The fusion of the nameless (*wu*) and the named (*yu*) produces the dark (*hsuan*), which internally generates creative movement. Dark imagery is linked with the moon, water, caves and death. The

appearance of heaven and earth signify the creation of 'two' from 'one', but when they are chaotically blended they are still representative of 'one'. Their harmonious union (i.e., heaven and earth with Tao) is the condition of 'three', the state of paradise.

The primordial Tao-ch'ung is described in language suggesting flowing water, bubbly water and the process to clash against. The original substances of creation, heaven and earth as 'three' are separated by a chaotic void which is alive with invisible life force - *ch'ia*. *Ch'ia* is the active force of the center (emptiness) that links the 'two' into a form equivalent to the original state of unity. In other expressions, the original substance of creation is a cosmic embryo - sack, seed, gourd, egg - which undergoes a spontaneous process of internal reorganization that produces the dual principles of the world, yet leaves a central hollow infused with invisible breath. Such is the perfect cosmos (Giradot 1983: ch 2).

"This paradise condition of total harmony cyclically ordering the interaction and synthesis of the dual principles (*yin, yang*) through a continued process of going out (rising, swelling, expansion) and returning (contraction, coagulation, lowering) mediated by the 'emptiness' of the center that ...primordial principle called *ch'ia* that constantly connects all phenomenal forms with the Mother It is the empty gap of the center that allows for the original movement, sound, or flow of the life principle." (Giradot 1983: 61).

Giradot (1983: 64) believes that in Chapter 42 of the *Tao te Ching*, "*Hun-tun* must be identified with the symbolism of a female creatress perhaps the diving bird in Shan Hai-Ching and also with her offspring (embryo, egg, seed, gourd, drum, cocoon, sack, bellows)". The practicing Taoist is hoping to embrace Tao so as to be renewed by experiencing the condition of 'three' - dualities informed by *ch'ia*. He is feeding from the primal Mother of All Things. The condition achieved is childlike or womb-like (Giradot 1983: 74).

Chou Dynasty Bronzes

The Chou Dynasty followed the Shang around 1100 B.C. and was at first known as the Western Chou Period because the royal capitals were located in the Wei-shui valley of Shensi. Dragons are common on Western Chou (Zhou) bronzes and although they could be interpreted as a hybrid mythical beast that is a fusion of the Snake and Bird Goddesses. Such an interpretation may be a misapplication of the iconography of Neolithic Old Europe, however, see footnote 28.

In October, 1991, my wife Leslie and I visited the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution complex in Washington D.C. It was late afternoon and we were tired but determined to squeeze the last hour of museum field work out of the day. This day, the meander forms that dominated the decoration on the majority of Chou Dynasty bronzes took on a new aspect. Bird faces and iconography were familiar, the iconography resembled that of Old Europe.

The Goddess was present in Neolithic China and it seems that few have noticed. Most art historians and archeologists who specialize in Shang and Chou art see only trends in decorative form and leave most of the symbolic interpretation to others. Few scholars familiar with ancient mythology and ritual have examined these bronzes, although a few tentative comments may be found in Lawton (1991) and Munsterberg (1986). (The Chou Culture, to which this book refers, is specifically that of the Eastern Zhou (Chou) Period. About 770 B.C. the royal capital was changed to An-yang in western Hunan and the Eastern Chou Period was initiated, lasting until about 450 B.C. (Chang, 1977: 296).)

In the article by Xueqin (1991), a number of photographs of Chou bronzes show the Goddess iconography clearly. A *lei*³³ shows the meander forms of the coiled Snake Goddess as does the *jue*³⁴ and the *zun*³⁵, which are also decorated with bird sculptures suggestive of ducks. The Snake and Bird Goddess here merge as they did in many local styles of decorative arts. Most spectacular is a bronze drum on a stand³⁶, covered with this symbol of the Snake Goddess. Yet the context is shamanic and abounds with meanders.³⁷ Two axes³⁸ are covered with tri-lines (the 'power of three') and a rain motif. A third example³⁹ contains water and rain motifs of some sort. Figure 35 in Xueqin (1991) is a drawing of the decoration on Figure 32 which emphasizes the interlaced coiled serpent: water forms surround unmistakable frog, lizard and snake figures. As with many modern day archeologists, Xueqin does not interpret any of the symbolism on these bronzes.

As documented at great length by Gimbutas (1989), the Bird Goddess usually manifested as a water bird. Additional Chou examples are presented by Mackenzie (1991). On a four-ram *zun*, there is depiction of a long necked bird whose body form is covered with serpent meanders.⁴⁰ From a strictly ornithological point of view, the only long necked birds are water birds and cranes of various species. Long necked creatures are commonly found among these bronzes but they are often of indeterminate morphology, possessing the characteristics of both birds and dragons.⁴¹ It is quite possible that the origin of the dragon lies with the fusion of the Bird and Snake Goddess, as suggested for Neolithic of Old Europe by Gimbutas (1989). A dragon is, after all, a winged serpent with feathers or scales. In some cases, the appearance of scales may only be an illusion

³³Xueqin 1991: fig. 3.

³⁴Xueqin 1991: fig. 6.

³⁵Xueqin 1991: fig. 7.

³⁶Xueqin 1991: fig. 9.

³⁷Xueqin 1991: fig. 20.

³⁸Xueqin 1991: fig. 31 & 32.

³⁹Xueqin 1991: fig. 29.

⁴⁰Mackenzie 1991: fig. 49.

⁴¹Mackenzie 1991: fig. 51.

caused by the patterning of certain types of feathering. Mackenzie (1991) also depicts another bronze drum covered by serpent meanders⁴² (see also the jade *bi*⁴³).

The apparently ubiquitous presence of these symbolic elements serves to establish the presence of the Great Goddess within an iconography whose style is quickly recognizable to someone familiar with the imagery from Neolithic Old Europe. There are anthropomorphic images that bespeak of a metaphoric system considerably more sophisticated than that of hunter-gatherer shamanism. Several *li* show the typical form of three legged, open pots with a curious anthropomorphic sculptural quality to the legs, whose form suggests the buttocks of the Goddess or perhaps those of a pig or bear.⁴⁴ The creatures that form the handles of a *hu*⁴⁵ are quite complex, although their overall form suggests dragons with seahorse-like tails. A long necked water bird with antlers found in a tomb⁴⁶ suggests a shamanic figure, as does another⁴⁷ that depicts a long necked water bird astride a tiger with wings that are decidedly antler-like.

The case for shamanic ritual in Chou Culture is strong. Here we have an apparent conflation of the Deer and Bird Goddess in an epiphany that emphasizes the Goddess' powers of flight when she brings ecological renewal in the spring and promotes the next cycle of fertility in both plants and animals. Antlers alone and elaborately carved antler stands have been found in several tombs.⁴⁸ Mackenzie believes the water birds to be cranes, which were a common epiphany of the Bird Goddess in Old Europe. The *zun*, which fascinated Xueqin (1991), likewise caught the eye of Mackenzie and he illustrates it in his article as well. Most striking is a lacquered wooden box in the form of a duck that was found in a tomb.⁴⁹ Here we see a Bird Goddess covered with intertwined serpent forms and zigzags within which are parallel rows of dots, suggesting rain, and triangles, and a pair joined at the apex, to form a butterfly icon. Spectacular and mysterious is a drawing contained within a square outline that depicts a shamanic figure with tentacles for arms (octopus?, plant?) whose body is penetrated by a spear. This figure faces an animal standing on hind legs holding two batons in its hands. Between the two is a drum on a pole penetrated by an arrow. At the base of the pole on the ground is a creature with a serpent-like body but long duck-like beak, an unusual depiction of a hybrid Bird and Snake Goddess. Overall, the scene seems to be decidedly shamanic, and it depicts a soul journey of the shaman to an animal spirit using a sacred drum for transport. The Great Goddess, who is at the feet of both and within whom the experience takes place, is the context and 'container' allowing the experience to happen. A rubbing of

⁴²Mackenzie 1991: fig. 53.

⁴³Mackenzie 1991: fig. 67.

⁴⁴Mackenzie: 1991: fig. 8 & 9.

⁴⁵Mackenzie 1991: fig. 11.

⁴⁶MacKenzie 1991: fig. 47.

⁴⁷MacKenzie 1991: fig. 48.

⁴⁸MacKenzie 1991: fig. 44, 45 & 46.

⁴⁹Mackenzie 1991: fig. 76.

the decoration on a Chou drum⁵⁰ reveals an image with tightly coiled, snake meander forms dominated by a face that may be wearing a horned headdress. Mackenzie interprets this as a priest or shaman but I see a skull-like head that might represent the Death Goddess. The decoration on a lacquered wood coffin found in a tomb⁵¹ is covered with images of the hybrid Bird-Snake Goddess. Dozens of small serpents with bird heads and limbs ending in avian talons cover the coffin and most are intertwined or depicted in opposing pairs ('the power of two'). At least two full face figures of the Goddess are present. On one, arms are snake-like wings and on the other her lower limbs are snakes. The Snake Goddess as the cosmic serpent of life's renewal was always important to shamanism.

We must remember that shamanism is not a religion, per se. It is a methodology, a technique of ecstasy as Eliade (1964) eloquently explains. Shamanism allows those initiated and capable individuals the experience of soul journeys to the Dreamtime where knowledge that can be obtained in no other manner is available for the spiritual enhancement of the community and the healing of illness. The Great Goddess was first accessed during Upper Paleolithic times (Blumenberg 1993, Gimbutas 1989, Marshak 1991) and thereafter was central to the mythology and ritual of tribal, hunting peoples who practiced shamanism.

Excavated in 1978, the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi at Leigudun, Suizhou, Hubei Province, is the most important Eastern Chou Dynasty tomb, in part because it can be precisely dated to 433 B.C., according to an inscription on a bell found within (Thote 1991). The outer coffin is covered with tightly coiled serpent meanders contained within rectangular panels, six on a side.⁵² The inner coffin has a bottom border of this symbolism and two panels in each upper corner.⁵³ Most important, however, are the Goddess figures on the inner coffin that closely resemble those on the wood coffin discussed above in Mackenzie's article. Very similar intertwined Snake-Bird Goddess images are present, as is a single Bird Goddess depicted as a duck, and several anthropomorphic representations of the Snake-Bird Goddess with avian or snake limbs sprouting not only from the torso, but the head as well.⁵⁴ Thote (1991) attempts no interpretation beyond recognizing birds, snakes and dragons alone and hybridized to form new 'species'.

During the Warring States era, designs composed of intertwined snakes, compressed spirals and patterns of flowing water are common (Lawton 1982). A gold and silver inlaid design on a bronze mirror that features six sinuous dragons is very beautiful depiction of the dynamic, creative energy of the cosmic serpent.⁵⁵ A striking bronze garment hook in the shape of a dragon has a compressed interlaced design composed of pairs of dragons, a motif that seems

⁵⁰Mackenzie 1991: fig. 71.

⁵¹MacKenzie 1991: fig. 64.

⁵²Thote 1991: fig. 1.

⁵³Thote 1991: fig. 2.

⁵⁴Thote 1991: fig. 13, 18, 19 & 21.

⁵⁵Lawton 1982: fig. 38.

ready to explode with uncontainable energy.⁵⁶ A jade plaque has been published that is carved in the shape of a serpentine creature with both scales and fur that seems to be composed of a mysterious viscous substance as well. The cosmic serpent who dwells in the ever fructifying water of the Goddess here takes form from the creative ground itself.⁵⁷ Vestiges of the Goddess' symbolism can be discerned on some Han Dynasty artifacts⁵⁸ but Taoism and Confucianism now dominate the culture and the metaphors of artistic creativity. Interestingly, heaven is pictured on Han funerary banners as a golden crow inside the sun, and a toad and white rabbit on the moon (Wang 1982: 181; fig, 276, 277).

The Goddess *can* be found in ancient China *if* we take Gimbutas' (1989) report as a handbook of symbolism that has trans continental validity.

However, a striking difference remains that serves to separate the mythopoetics of East Asia from that of Neolithic Old Europe. The Goddess dominated symbolism in Old Europe and images of male gods were rare. The Goddess does not dominate the Neolithic mytho-poetics of China and Japan. She is only found on a minority of artifacts. It is likely that ritual and ceremony were dominated by an ancestor worship that did not require an ever-present God or Goddess.

The Quest for Immortality: The Queen Mother of the West

The name Queen Mother of the West is first found inscribed on oracle bones during the Shang Dynasty c.13th century B.C. (Allen 1991: 52). The Queen Mother of the West is mentioned in the 4th century B.C. *Chang Tzu*. She is not described again until *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* where several readings which date from the 3rd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D. amplify her portrait. She is a wild and unkempt Goddess who rules a mountain kingdom in the West and she bears a strong resemblance to the Greek Artemis. The Queen Mother of the West has a panther's tail and tiger's fangs. Wild beasts and birds bring her messages and food. Her sacred mountain range is K'un-lun which is an *axis mundi*, a sacred nodal place that links Heaven and Earth. It is a paradise where mortals who are favored become immortal and can communicate with the gods. Like Artemis, she is an avenging Goddess and can bring the plague; in this latter aspect she also resembles the Goddess of Disease in India and Tibet. By later Han times, as with nearly all the gods and goddess, she has been refined, secularized and demythologized. In the Han Dynasty fictional romance *The Chronicle of the Emperor Mu* (3rd or 4th century A.D.), she is a beautiful and cultured queen as she exchanges gifts and politics with Emperor Mu and refers to herself as the daughter of the God of Heaven.

⁵⁶Lawton 1982: fig. 54.

⁵⁷Lawton 1982: fig. 97.

⁵⁸Wang 1982: fig, 95, 96, 142, 188-190.



The major attribute of the Queen Mother of the West is her power to confer immortality. After her iconography became fixed in post-Han times, she was pictured holding a basket of the peaches of immortality which only ripened once every three thousand years. The peach tree itself was a sky ladder upon which the gods could descend to earth.⁵⁹ The earliest reference to her power of immortality is in the *Huai-nan Tzu*, which reports how the trickster Moon Goddess stole the elixir of immortality from Yi The Archer and was punished by being transformed into a toad (Birrell 1993: 171-176).⁶⁰

Nu Kua as Primal Creatrix

In the *Huai-nan Tzu*, which was written about 100 A.D. during the Han Dynasty (200 B.C.-300 A.D.), Nü Kua is linked with the Yellow Emperor as the great transformer. "Nü Kua made seventy transformations." This could be a reference to her power to change and renew the universe and/or to her own transformational shape shifting. She is also the repairer of heaven and earth with multicolored stones after the catastrophe (flood). ('Flood' may be a metaphor for lewd, incestuous behavior.) In the *Shan Hai Ching*, her intestines are transformed into deities.

In the later Han text *Feng Su T'ung* compiled by Ying Shao (c.140 - 206 A.D.), Nü Kua creates mankind by patting yellow earth together and dragging string through the mud. However, all are not equal and the ruling Han aristocracy are accorded a preferential birth. No wonder the Chinese came to call themselves Han - 'People of the Yellow Earth'. This primary mythological attribution illustrates the importance of tracing Han ancestry to the primary creation by Nü Kua.

By the T'ang Dynasty, the primordial couple had re-emerged but in a less than god-like form. In *A Treatise on Extraordinary and Strange Things* by Li Jung (c.846-874 A.D.), Nü Kua is no longer a deity but is presented as the first mortal, subservient to the God in Heaven.⁶¹ She and her brother become the first married couple and progenitors of humankind.

⁵⁹Peaches were first domesticated in China c.6000 B.C. (Bunch and Hellemans 1993: 21). They are a symbol of marriage, immortality and spring. The peach tree of the gods blossomed only once in 3,000 years and its fruit of eternal life took another 3,000 years to ripen. Branches of the peach tree expel fever. Taoists believe the wood protects against demons and use it to make seals. Above all, its fruit conferred immortality upon the Immortals and is one of the key ingredients in the Elixir of Life. The God of Longevity is often pictured emerging from a peach and peach stones protect against death (Williams 1976: 316).

⁶⁰ The *Huai-nan Tzu* is a philosophical and mythological text of mainly Taoist viewpoints which was compiled by Liu An who was King of Huai-nan c.139 B.C..

⁶¹ Long before the T'ang, the emperor was defined as the 'Son of Heaven'; i.e. the son of the God T'ien K'u who reigned over all in Heaven.

“ Long ago, when the world first began, there were two people, Nü Kua and her older brother. They lived on Mount K’un-lun. And there were not yet any ordinary people in the world. They talked about becoming husband and wife, but they felt ashamed. So the brother at once went with his sister up Mount K’un-lun and made this prayer:

‘Oh, Heaven, if Thou wouldst send us two forth as man and wife,
then make all the misty vapor gather.
If not, then make all the misty vapor disperse.’

At this, the misty vapor immediately gathered. When the sister became intimate with her brother, they plaited some grass to make a fan to screen their faces” (Birrell 1993: 35).

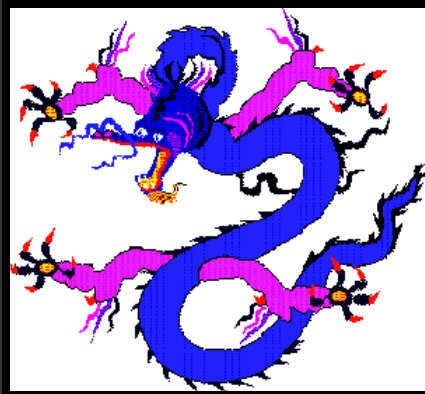
There are some interesting parallels in this theme with the Adam and Eve encounter in *Genesis*. Shame and guilt at sexual intercourse are present in both. Incest is strongly implied and here, unlike in *Genesis*, it is condoned (Birrell 1993: 35). Yet there is a mystical and profound Taoist theme lurking underneath this tale of the first couple. Thus, the ‘two’ of creation time return to the chaos state and enter into a union which is a perfect ‘chaotic’ blending of dualities, the essential prelude to creative transformation ... the marriage of Fu-hsi (the brother) and Nü Kua harbors a metaphysical idea upon which the creation and the endurance of the world depends, as well as the salvation of society and man (Giradot 1983).

“ Nu-kua’s creative activity most ordinarily comes after the origin of heaven and earth, the time of the secondary creation of the human world after a deluge or some other catastrophe that ends the paradise world. Like P’an Ku, she is primarily associated with the idea of transformation or the continuous creation and regeneration of the world” (Giradot 1983: 204). P’an Ku is a great Titan of a later creation myth whose body mites become humans after his death. His origin is in southwest China and likely among a non-Chinese people (Birrell 1993: 307). It is important to realize that Nü Kua predates P’an Ku by at least six centuries. **The Goddess is the first source creatrix in China as in the West.** As Plauks (1976) remarks, “The marriage of Nü Kua and Fu-hsi emerges as a metaphysical one, not only for providing for a contract of cooperation and a promise of continued creation, but in effect embodying the very structural and functional principles of an orderly universe.”

What may be the oldest representation of the primal creative couple is highlighted by Campbell (1988: fig. 134). In a small chamber, within the large cavern of Tuc d’Audoubert in the French Pyrenees that dates from the Magdalenian Culture of c.14,000 B.C., there is a well-known pair of clay relief sculptures that depict bison, perhaps male and female. The primal couple that spawns the ‘world’ is a widespread myth in both time and place that certainly deserves to be called an archetype in the Jungian sense. These bison may be the oldest surviving representation of this theme and, if so, they give us a metaphysical connection that transcends the time and space of late Neolithic China. True archetypes continually re-emerge from the human mind and do not require the stimulation of cultural influence from the outside to be expressed. They are psychically (and perhaps genetically as well) embedded and are passed on from generation to generation to continually re-emerge when humankind probes the

metaphysics of the cosmos. In the Neolithic, could Nü Kua, create parthenogenetically? Does the story of Fu-Hsi and Nü Kua represent a myth of later generations in which the requirements of Tao must be met, for example, that a chaotic blending of dualities is an essential prelude to the creation of the 'ten thousand things'?

There is a second major myth of Nü Kua to be found during the Han Dynasty. The *Huai-nan Tzu* is compilation of various philosophical and Taoist texts at least partially written by Liu An, a member of the Han royal family, c.139 A.D. (Birrell 1993: 302). A cosmic disaster has occurred due to the collision of a titan, Kung Kung, with a mountain named Pu-chou during a fight with the god Chuan Hsu. The four supports on earth that hold up the sky have collapsed; they are variously depicted as pillars, poles or mountains. Fires raged across the earth, devastating floods occurred and fierce beasts and birds of prey terrorized the Han people. "Then Nü Kua smelted five-color stones to mend the blue sky. She severed the feet of a giant sea turtle to support the four poles and killed a black dragon to save the region of Chi. And she piled up the ashes from burned reeds to dam the surging waters."⁶² The blue sky was mended. The four poles were set right" (Birrell 1993: 71). The floods subsided and the fierce predators died. Although Nü Kua rides in a thunder chariot drawn by dragons, the final picture we have of her is an ascent to Heaven with the attributes of a Taoist immortal. She comes to rest silently below the High Ancestor and has lost the status of an independent primeval deity: her demythologization is underway (Birrell 1993: 71).



On Han stone reliefs, Nü Kua is shown with a human head and upper torso but the lower body of a serpent: the iconographic metaphor being that of a Creator Goddess (Allen 1991: 105).

Schwartz (1985: 26) noted that in later Chinese high culture, origin myths, whether referring to the cosmos or humankind, emphasize a metaphor of procreation and giving birth, rather than creating or fashioning. Schwartz wonders at the influence of ancient ancestor worship here but I prefer to see a feminine context and the last residue of the Goddess Creatrix.

⁶²The round, domed, upper shell and flat under shell (plastron) of the turtle are a metaphor for ancient Chinese cosmology in which there is a round domed sky and flat earth.

The Goddess of Sovereignty

The ruling peoples of both the Shang and Chou Dynasties traced their origins to a major goddess. The *Shih chi* or *Records of the Historian* was begun by Ssu-ma T'an (d.110 B.C.), who was Grand Historian in the court of the great Han Emperor Wu, and was finished by his son Ssu-ma Ch'ien (c.145 - 90 B.C.) who held the same post. The *Records of the Historian* was the first comprehensive history of the Chinese nation and comprised 130 chapters (De Bary et al 1960: 230). Unlike Nü Kua, these goddesses of the *Records of the Historian* are self-contained, independent and omnipotent. Rather like most Greek goddesses and others elsewhere, they are the consorts/wives of Heaven, who in China is the male deity Ti Chün. In the *Records of the Historian*, we find an origin myth for the Shang Dynasty. The goddess Chien T'i is the second concubine of Ti K'u and the mother of Yin Hsieh, the founder of the Shang. While bathing with Ti K'u and her mother, she swallows an egg dropped by a Black Bird (Ti Chün) and is thereby made pregnant by the god.⁶³ She gave birth to Ch'i who helped the Sage King Yü to control the great floods. Emperor Shun gave him the Shang fiefdom and conferred upon him a new surname as well. The style of the *Records of the Historian* appears deliberately contrived to convert myth into history, diminish the sacred and bring it into accord with a society dominated by filial piety and Confucian values (Birrell 1993: 116-116, 256).

Ti K'u's other consort is the goddess Chiang Yuan who gives birth to Hou Chi, the founder of the Chou whose name means 'Lord Millet' (Walley 1960: 241). The earliest accounts of this virgin birth are to be found in two hymns written about c.600 B.C.. Chiang Yuan is portrayed as skilled in performing sacrifices and becomes pregnant by stepping in Ti Chün's footprints. Her birthing was painless and the miraculous child survives three trials which prove his divine ancestry. At the Chou court, and that of the state of Lu as well, there was a Closed Palace raised to Chiang Yuan as the mother of the First Ancestor. Because she had no husband, this special temple was raised to her and it always remained closed. On festival days, sacrifices were made there and the *ta-hu* dance performed in her honor (Maspero 1978: 157). Here is part of the myth of Chiang Yuan and her child, the First Ancestor, as translated from the *Songs of Chu* by Walley (1960: 241)

"She who in the beginning gave birth to the people,
This was Chian Yuan.
How did she give birth to the people?
Well she sacrificed and prayed
That she might no longer be childless.
She trod on the big toe of God's footprint,
Was accepted and got what she desired.
Then in reverence, then in awe
She gave birth, she nurtured;
And this was Hou Chi."

⁶³A detailed analysis of the hymns of the Shang rulers was passed down to their descendants during the Chou Dynasty and it suggests that this Black Bird is the bird in the Suns of the Mulberry Tree myth (Allen 1991: 39-41). A very similar origin myth was found among the Ch'in, who came from eastern China; the Manchu and the Koreans as well (Walley 1960: 275).

"Indeed, she fulfilled her months,
And her first-born came like a lamb
With no bursting or rending,
With no hurt or harm.
To make manifest His magic power
God on high gave her ease.
So blessed were her sacrifice and prayer
That easily she bore her child."

"Indeed, they⁶⁴ put it in a narrow lane;
But oxen and sheep tenderly cherished it.
Indeed they put it in a far-off wood;
But it chanced that woodcutters came to this wood.
Indeed, they put it on the cold ice;
But the birds covered it with their wings.
The birds at last went away,
And Hou Chi began to wail."

...

Hou Chi was exceptionally skilled in agriculture and he was suitably rewarded by the Sage King Emperor Shun (Birrell 1993: 116-117, 258-259). *When the Chin Dynasty succeeded that of the Chou in 221 B.C., mythic origins are no longer traced to the Goddess. It appears that as Indo-European myth gradually obliterated the Great Goddess in Eurasia, so did the maturation of Tao and Confucianism do likewise in China.*

Yet the Goddess does not entirely disappear. We meet her again as the Goddess of Sovereignty in a much later text, *A Record of Immortals, Compiled in Yung-ch'eng* by Tu Kuang-t'ing (850-933 A.D.). The Goddess Yao-chi, the Jasper Lady, is derived from Taoist epithets about jade, the purest and most refined of mundane substances. Yet within her myth are ancient archetypal currents of the Goddess of Sovereignty as she empowers the Sage King Yü who was helpless before great floods. She gives him the *Book of Rules and Orders* for demons and spirits and orders her spirits to help Yü shape rocks to control currents and dredge blocked riverbeds. She also presents a priceless document to him so that he could know about the Way. The Jasper Lady is guarded by lions, dragons and lightning animals. She is a feminine deity of power equal to the highest of male gods, indeed the horses of Ti, God of Heaven, make way for her. She also possessed extraordinary shape shifting powers so that she can accommodate her form to whatever being she is visiting: "Hers is not a body that dwelt naturally in the womb but it is the vapor from the pale shadow of West Hua ..." (Birrell 1993: 176-178).



⁶⁴Differing traditions identify the mother or husband as the person who exposed the baby (Walley 1960: 241).

The Temple of the Goddess of Orchid Fragrance

"Year after year the ancient spring endures,
An idle green caressed by the warm clouds.
Scent of pines and evening blossoms flying,
As willow islands cherish the darkling sun.
The sandy steps are filled with fallen reds,
Round stony springs wild celery is growing.
Lonely bamboos are adorned with new powder,
Moth-green mountains bar her gates at dawn.
Fragile orchids cannot bear the dew,
Mountain flowers grieving in desolate spring.
Her dancing pendants clipped from simurgh's wings,
Trailing sashes lightly streaked with silver.
Orchid and cinnamon breathe their heady perfume,
Water-chestnut, lotus-root heaped as offering
Gazing at the rain, she meets Jade Lady,
Borne in her boat, encounters the River Lord.
Playing her flute and drunk with wine,
She knots a girdle round her gold-thread skirt.
Roaming the heavens, she chides at her white deer,
Wandering the waters, whips her bright-scaled steed.
Thick hair flies from her empty headdress,
Flower-tints blended on her glistening cheeks.
Caves of pearl beside her coiling tresses,
Delicate lips framed by her dark brows.
A fluttering butterfly her graceful beauty,
Wind and sun shrink from her slender body.
In secluded curtains, golden ducks grow cold,
On her vanity mirror, a lonely simurgh gathers dust.
Treading the mist, she's borne home on the breeze,
Her tinkling jades heard on the mountain-top."⁶⁵
(Li He 790-816 A.D.)

⁶⁵Frodsham 1983, p. 83. This goddess was the spirit of Mount Shen. The Jade Lady was the spirit of Mount Wu. The River Lord was the husband of the Ladies of the Xiang. The Fairy, Wei Shu-qing, used to ride a white deer, while Qin Gao rode a red bream. The ducks are an incense burner which has grown cold (Frodsham 1983: note 145). A 'bream' is a freshwater fish of the Carp family that inhabits deep water. It has silvery, yellowish sides and a highly arched back. The 'simurgh' is a monstrous, legendary bird, which is rational, has the power of speech and is very old.

We Have Chosen a Timely Day

One of the songs in *Songs for Suburban Sacrifice in 19 Parts* is the hymn used as the centerpiece for a seasonal rite to celebrate the earth's regeneration as designed by Emperor Wu. If the Goddess was present during his reign, she must be manifest during such a ceremony. It is difficult to conceive of a ritual celebrating the earth's renewal in secular terms and Emperor Wu was committed to emphasizing an energetic religiosity at his court and throughout the empire. Some of his activity involved a direct acknowledgment of the Goddess as noted above. Nonetheless, the refinement and literary subtlety of Chinese poetry is extreme and the influence of Confucianism, which is a secularized, system of ethics was very deep. Can we find the Goddess in this hymn? The fundamental creative principal is feminine, of course, but were court poets of the Han Dynasty open to that inspiration and able to consciously acknowledge the Goddess?

"We have chosen a timely day,
We wait with hope,
Burning fat and artemisia
To welcome the Four Directions.
Nine fold doors open
To the God's banners.
They send down sweet grace,
Bounteous good fortune,
The chariot of the Gods
"Is hitched to dark clouds,
Yoked to flying dragons,
Feather pennants amassed.
The coming down of the Gods
Is like wind-driven horses;
On the left turquoise dragon,
On the right white tiger.

"The coming of the Gods
Is divine! What a drenching!
First bringing rain
Which spreads in sheets.

"The arrival of the Gods
Is lucky shade within shade.
All seems confused,
Making hearts tremble.

"The Gods are now enthroned,
The Five Tones harmonize.
Happy till the dawn
We offer the Gods pleasure.

"Cusps of ritual beasts swelling.
Vessels of millet sweet,

Goblets of cassia wine,
We host the Eight Quarters.

“The Gods serenely linger,
We chant ‘Green’ and ‘Yellow’.
All round mediate on this,
Gaze at the green jade hall.
A crowd of beauty gathers,
Refined, perfect loveliness:
Faces like flowering rush,
Rivals in dazzling glamour,
Wearing flowerly patterns,
Interwoven misty silks,
With trains of white voile,
Girdles of pearl and jade.
They hear Blissful-night and Flag-orchid,
Iris and orchid perfumed.
Calm and peaceful
We offer up the chalice.”

It appears that the the Goddess is invisible in this hymn. However, “the phrase ‘shade within shade’ is the binome *yin-yin*, which suggests mysterious darkness and the female cosmic principle, complementing the male *yang* principle in a dual system of cyclical renewal” (Birrell 1988: 35). I have made a case for the dragon as a fusion of the Snake and Bird Goddesses and throughout Chinese mythology the dragon brings the rains essential for agriculture. Both the Bird and Snake Goddess are manifestations that refer to the indestructibility of Life. The Bird Goddess heralds the return of spring and the season conducive to agriculture. The Snake Goddess contains the dynamic cosmic energy that is ever-renewing: such is the metaphor behind the sloughing off of the reptile’s skin as it grows.

In spite of the Chinese dragon’s association with fertile rain, I cannot find any historical reference that refers to it as feminine: the dragon is always distinctly masculine (Williams 1976: 132-141). The ritual described in this hymn is believed to be that which was actually performed in the open air outside the city. ‘Green’ and ‘Yellow’ refer to hymns which were sung by a chorus. Green is symbolic of spring and yellow, had just been decreed the imperial color by Emperor Wu, and is symbolic of earth. As the chanting ended, worshippers gazed toward an altar (in the ‘green jade hall’) where the statues of the gods are enthroned. Female dancers in gorgeous robes decorated with jewels performed a sacred dance and wafted perfume into the air. The ceremony closed with worshippers offering the libation cup (Birrell 1988: 35).

Solar Gods, Solar Goddesses

The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* is a compilation of late Chou and Han Dynasty natural history and myth (c. 3rd century B.C. to 1st century A.D.)

which exists in several versions and is considered a primary reference for historians. Unlike *Questions of Heaven*, it does not reflect a single belief system. In *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, we find three shadowy deities who appear to be primal gods of a distant age now rendered shadowy as they struggle to survive within Han culture, whose priority was Confucian philosophy and the historization of myth. The god Ti Chün is linked to the solar and lunar myths of the birth of the Ten Suns; he gave Yi the Archer the vermilion bow and arrows to shoot down the Ten Suns. Ti Chün is also connected to the birth of the Twelve Moons through his two consorts. These myths recount virgin births. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* is the only early text to mention Ti Chün (Yuan K'o 1980) and Birrell (1993: 124) suggests that he may be the major deity of a mythological tradition distinct from that headed by the God of Heaven (Ti K'u), a circumstance that reflects not greater antiquity but regional cultural variation.

One of Ti Chün's consorts in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* is Hsi-Ho, who is portrayed as the Mother of the Ten Suns who looks after them as they journey across the sky. The *Yaodian (Annals of Yao)* is the first chapter of the *Shang shu* and is written in an archaic language. It certainly dates from the Chou Dynasty but whether c.800 B.C. or c.300 B.C. is the correct date is at this time an unresolved problem. In the *Yaodian* the second section concerns the heavens and the calendar. The Mother of the Ten Suns is ordered by Ti Chü to 'calculate and delineate the sun, the moon and (the other) heavenly bodies and respectfully give the people the seasons' (Allen 1991: 59-60). The Shang used a calendar with repeating cycles of 60 days, six weeks of 10 days each. The use of 60 as a fundamental number suggests Babylonian influence. In China 60 is the smallest number that is divisible by 10, the number of 'heavenly stems' (*t'ei-kan'*) and 12, the number of 'earthly branches' (*ti-chih*) (Chou 1979: 142).⁶⁶

However, Hsi-Ho's true job description and gender are nearly impossible to decipher because this deity has four other identifications to be found in other texts. *The Classic of History*⁶⁷ describes Hsi-Ho as a male astronomer and cult master in charge of the calendar and solar divination. Other texts present Hsi and Ho as two males, the eldest brothers of two separate families who were astronomy cult masters. There is yet another tradition derived from *Songs of Ch'u*⁶⁸ that refers to Hsi-Ho as the charioteer of the sun, sex unspecified. There is no counterpart in the Western world to the goddess Hsi-Ho but there is a faint resemblance to the Japanese Sun Goddess Amaterasu (Birrell 1993: 124-125) who

⁶⁶The Ten Celestial Stems are not plants but the masculine signs in the Cycle of Sixty each of which has an 'affinity', such as trees, lightening, salt water, etc., an association with one of the Twelve Earthly Branches and a correspondence with one of the archetypal five elements of antiquity (wood, fire, earth, metal and water). This system was applied to the numbering of hours, days, months and by the Han Dynasty to the recording of years as well. There are 60 different combinations of the Ten Celestial Stems and the Twelve Earthly Branches. (Remember the Ten Suns and the Twelve Moons of the Shang Dynasty Mulberry Tree myth.) The Twelve Terrestrial Branches are the feminine symbols of the Cycle of Sixty and they are associated with the twelve signs of the Zodiac and their symbolic animals, hours of the day and points of the compass. The twelve symbolic animals may have originated with the Turks and entered China in the 1st century A.D. (Williams 1976: 391, 411-412).

⁶⁷*The Classic of History* records the speeches and acts of the Sage Kings of the Golden Age. Some of the text is authentic Chou Dynasty material (Birrell 1993: 297-8).

⁶⁸*The Songs of Ch'u* is a collection of 17 poems compiled in the 2nd c. A.D.. The earliest poems date from the late Chou Dynasty in the 4th c. B.C. (Birrell 1993: 311).

evolved from an important *kami* of early Shinto). Sun goddesses are not common in China, the solar deity myth is usually masculine. The full implications of the Sun Goddess as a major deity will be discussed elsewhere.⁶⁹

The other consort of Ti Chün is Ch'ang-hsi who is variously identified as 1) the male Shang Yi, the astronomer and cult master who divined by the moon (*Annals of Master Lü*); or 2) The Mother of the Twelve Moons who cares for them after their passage across the nocturnal world (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*) - Birrell (1993: 124-125). There are several Moon Goddesses in western mythology: Phoebe, Diana and Luna.

There are two myths of Woman Ch'ou in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, one of which suggested to Mathieu (1989: 49 n.1) that shamanesses were sacrificed to the Sun deity (god or goddess?).

" There was person who wore green clothes and hid her face with her sleeve. Her name was Woman Ch'ou Corpse."

" **W**oman Ch'ou Corpse was born, but the Suns scorched her to death. That was north of the Land of Men. She screened her face with her right hand. Where the Ten Suns are up above, Woman Ch'ou lived there on the top of the mountain."

Birrell (1993: 170) suggests that Woman Ch'ou (or her shamanic incarnation?) countered the life threatening effects of drought by self-immolation which disfigured but did not kill. Scorched but not killed by the Sun, she hides her scarred faced with her right hand. Both her rebirth and that of the environment are symbolized by green.

Female Shamans and Sorceresses

Unlike the historical information for Japan, references to female shamans or sorceresses in ancient China are hard to find. In Western sources, only Maspero (1978) seems to go beyond a brief discussion of the myth of Woman Ch'ou. Most of what follows should be located in the Chou Dynasty and earlier.

Sorcerers (*hsi*) and sorceresses (*wu*) are referred to as the "other clergy", markedly different from the official priests who served the aristocracy. Chosen by the deity, they came from all social classes. By the Han Dynasty, some of these "other clergy" were organized into colleges such as the colleges of priestesses of the Count of the River at Yeh or at Lin-chin. Some were connected with one particular god but most communed with the souls of the dead and several deities as well.

⁶⁹Blumenberg, B. 1994; 2006.

"They were, it seems, distinguished less by their divinity than by the power they possessed. There were the simple mediums, *chu-tzu*, the commonest of all; the doctors, *yi*; the rain-makers; the exorcists, *fang-hsiang*, who warded off evil influences; and so on" (Maspero 1978: 116). The Ten Immortal Sorcerers who collected herbs on the Mount of Sorcerers, Wu-shan, beyond the Four Seas were the founders of the various branches of sorcery. One of these Ten Immortals, Yang, was the patroness of the sorceresses who communicated with spirits in dreams - a classic shamanic experience. Sorcerers and sorceresses had protective spirits, who might be male or female and whose names varied from place to place, who aided them in their dangerous business of contacting the gods. Sorcerers and sorceresses became spirit possessed (*ling-pao*); the deity entered into them, spoke through their mouths and also might control their body movements as well. The relationship between the sorceress and her god was hardly political. Eroticism and love were key ingredients. "It was the beauty of the sorceress which attracted the god and made him choose her" (Maspero 1978: 117).

One of China's greatest poets was a 'barbarian' from Ch'u for whom Chinese would have been a second language. Yüan of Ch'ü (who was also called P'ing of Ch'ü, Cheng-tse and Ling-chün) belonged to one of the aristocratic families of the kingdom of Ch'u and was descended from King Wu. His time is that of the Eastern Chou Dynasty and he was born c.350 B.C. and died c.285 B.C.. Yüan of Ch'ü held one of the highest posts at the Eastern Chou court, that of Director of the Multitude under King Huai (ruled 328-299 B.C.). Court intrigue deprived him of his post and he was sent on a fruitless diplomatic mission to the King of Ch'i whom Ch'u needed in an alliance against the neighboring kingdom of Ch'in. Finally in 297 B.C. he was permanently banished from the Eastern Chou court because of a satire he had written against the kings Huai and Ch'ing-hsiang. He retired to one of his family's estates south of the Yangtze River and lived out his last years in obscurity.

Yüan of Ch'ü's literary fame rests upon his creation of a genre then new to China: long personal poems with a very free rhythm. Of great interest to this discussion, however, is his *Chiu ko (Nine Hymns)*, a collection of eleven religious poems for ceremonies in which sorceresses address various deities. Several of the deities mentioned by Maspero are female: the Princess of the East (?Hsi-ho, Mother of the Ten Suns); Goddess of the Sun (?Hsi-ho, Mother of the Ten Suns); and the goddesses of the Rivers Yangtze and Hsiang. We are not examining a situation where female oracles were possessed and dominated by male deities. Yüan of Ch'ü lets the sorceresses speak in these poems and they may be taken as accurate descriptions of many ritual specifics the sorceress engaged in to prepare herself to receive the divinity (Maspero 1978: 367-368).

The sorceress began her preparation by using a purifying water face wash in which orchids had been boiled. She then washed her body with water perfumed with irises and donned robes carrying the symbols of the deity to be invoked. When the sacrifices were ready, the sorceress sent her soul on a journey to find the deity and bring him/her back to her in order to take part in the rituals. Although Maspero (1978: 116-119) never refers to shamanism in his discussion of 'sorcery', he is describing the typical out-of-body soul journey which shamans undertake when they wish to travel to the realm of gods or spirits.

"On this great day, at this auspicious hour,
it is my respectful wish to please the Supreme Ruler;
I am wearing the long sword with its jade hilt,

my pendants go tinkling *lin-lang* [as I walk],
my hair is plaited with jewels, my ornaments are of jade,
I shall use the perfume of *ch'iuung*,
a mixture seasoned with wild orchids on a mat of orchids,
I offer up a cup of spiced wine and broth seasoned with pepper.
Raise your drumsticks and beat the drums;
cease beating time with them and play a quiet air instead;
prepare the lutes and flutes to sing nobly.
The sorceress dances decked out in her finery;
marvelous is the great hall filled with guests;
the five tones blend harmoniously;
the lord is happy, the music delights him"

(Maspero 1978: 117).

Loud drum beats and fast flute music prepared the sorceresses to go into a trance while holding either an orchid (spring) or chrysanthemum (autumn), depending upon the season. When the first sorceress fell back exhausted, she passed her flower to another who continued. These rituals were loud and disorderly and fell into increasing disfavor with the literati who much preferred the strict decorum of official worship.

"Strike the lutes, beat the drums, [let] the bells in their jade ornamented stands [resound] to the notes of the trumpets, let the flutes sing! Blow the hautboys!⁷⁰ This sorceress is clever and beautiful, like a kingfisher in her whirling flight, she rises up, her dance follows the rhythm of the verse, her steps respond to the notes" (Maspero 1978: 118).

The deity entered the body of the sorceress, accepted the offerings, danced and sometimes spoke through the sorceress. At the end of the ceremony, the deity left the human body it had briefly inhabited and returned home. The exhausted sorceress would summon their own souls, *li-huan*, to enter their body and their state of transcendent ecstasy would be broken.

As with tribal shamans, the people wished the sorceresses to utilize their ability to communicate with deities for pragmatic ends principally to heal the sick and dispel evil influences, be they personal or impersonal. Three times a year, exorcists (*fang-hsiang*) drove away evil spirits in the countryside or in homes. They were also employed in funeral ceremonies, often by the upper classes, to drive away evil emanations from the corpse by sweeping with the branch of a peach tree. In funeral processions, an exorcist would march before the coffin and brandish his staff to the four corners of the globe before the coffin was lowered into the grave. Drought was apparently viewed as the failure of sorcerers or sorceresses to drive away a major evil and they would be made to dance in the sun in order to bring rain. In extreme cases, they would be burned alive on a bright torrid day in order to relieve the crisis (Maspero 1978: 118-119).⁷¹

⁷⁰The translators choice of the term 'hautboy' is unfortunate. The hautboy was a wooden, double reed instrument of the European Renaissance with a high pitch related to the bassoon. We do not have a good description of the Chinese instruments used in these rituals.

The Goddess of War

In Celtic and Indian ritual mythology, the arts of war are often conveyed to a hero by a Goddess but such circumstances are rare elsewhere.⁷² Athena's expertise in martial arts plays an important role in Greek mythic epics. There is one reference to the Yellow Emperor being trained by a Goddess of War, which has been dismissed by scholars as another in a long series of events, often deliberately conceived by Taoists, to demythologize the sacred (Birrell 1993: 137). If a Goddess of War has her own powerful identity with which she can aid a hero (i.e., consort) on his quest and/or assist a good ruler to maintain his kingdom, then these critics have missed the point. This single passage from the 4th or 5th century which was preserved in a Sung Dynasty encyclopedia may be very important evidence for the existence of a Goddess of War in ancient China.

"The Yellow Emperor and Ch'ih Yu fought nine times, but for nine times there was no winner. The Yellow Emperor returned to T'ai Mountain for three days and three nights. It was foggy and dim. There was a woman with a human head and bird's body. The Yellow Emperor kowtowed, bowed twice, and prostrated himself, not daring to stand up. The woman said, "I am the Dark Lady. What do you want to ask me about?" The Yellow Emperor said, 'Your humble servant wishes to question you about the myriad attacks, the myriad victories.: Then he received the art of war from her" (Birrell 1993: 137).

The Goddess as Weaver of Fate

As discussed above, the sacred Mulberry Tree of Shang mythology is the Fu Sang Tree in the East at the foot of which is the Valley of the Sun which contains a pool of water in which the suns bathe. Silkworms grow and feed upon the mulberry tree and as everyone knows, they were first domesticated to produce silk in China. The extraordinary quality of silk fabric quickly became legendary and it became *the* most desired Chinese export at least as early as the Chou Dynasty. Silk acquired a prestige and value equaled only by the rarest of spices, valuable jewels or gold. By the Han dynasty, it was worth its weight in gold

⁷¹At other times, cripples or hunchbacks were substituted for the sorcerer or sorceress because they were considered as blessed and chosen by the gods. Enlightened people began to condemn these rituals at the end of the Chou Dynasty (Maspero 1978: 142).

⁷²The Morrigan, who was a War Goddess, in her maternal aspect underlies the two powerful women under whom the Irish hero Cú Chulainn had trained in martial arts in Britain.

and to practice its cultivation, or simply possess it, were marks of aristocracy. (Schulthess 1966: fig. 9).

The Chinese began to produce silk in the Neolithic and the weaving of silk has always been viewed as women's work. Clayre (1985: xi) in a table of Chinese history gives the first appearance of silk as c.4800 B.C. but there is no discussion of what archeological evidence to which this date might refer. Li (1983: 36-37) reports the earliest evidence for the domestication of the silk worm as one half of a cocoon unearthed at Hsi-yin, Hsia-hsien in southern Shansi dated to 2600-2300 B.C.. He also notes that mulberry and silk are referred to on the Shang Dynasty oracle bone inscriptions, which date to the end of the second millennium B.C., and that remnants of textiles found on Shang bronzes have been identified as silk. Bunch and Hellemans (1993: 47) date the first appearance of silk in the archeological record to the early Chou Dynasty. Silk fibers, believed imported from China by way of Persia, have been found in the hair of Egyptian mummies which date to c.1,000 B.C.. Schulthess (1966: fig. 9) mentions a legend that does not appear in Birrell (1993). In 2640 B.C., the mythological Empress Hsi Ling-shih discovered silk, personally cared for the cultivation of silkworms, encouraged the planting of mulberry trees and invented the loom. Empress Hsi Ling-shih has the attributes of a first rate culture hero as do the legendary Sage Kings. It is also worth noting that one of the substances which could produce the Elixir of Gold, that mythical compound by which Taoist alchemists could make gold and confer immortality, was the ash of a burned mulberry tree (Williams 1976: 171).

These historical and legendary circumstances establish a good foundation for according the Chinese Goddess as Weaver of Fate considerable importance (L. Blumenberg, personal communication). But where is she? She is not named in the Mulberry Tree myth. Is Hsi-Ho, the Mother of the Ten Suns who dwelt on the branches of the sacred Mulberry Tree (and bathed in the pool beneath), a heavily disguised Goddess of Fate? Are the Ten Suns, the 'first' silkworm cocoons, which Hsi-Ho carefully nurtures?

The Goddess as Weaver of Fate appears at least twice in ancient Chinese texts. There is a 6th century A.D. courtly narrative about the love of the goddess Huang O and the Son of the White Emperor which is based on the 4th century A.D. book *Researches into Lost Records* by Wang Chia. Huang O is mentioned twice as weaving on her loom at night (Birrell 1993: 207-209).

From *The Treatise on Research into Nature* (pre 6th century A.D.) comes the myth of Draught Ox and Weaver Maid.

"East of Sky River is Weaver Maid, the daughter of God in Heaven. Year by year she toils and slaves with loom and shuttle till she finishes weaving a celestial robe of cloudy silk. God in Heaven pitied her living alone, and allowed her to marry Draught Ox west of the river. After they married she neglected her weaving work. God in Heaven grew angry and punished her by ordering her to return to the east of the river, letting her make one crossing each year to be with Draught Ox" (Birrell 1993: 206).

The love motif here which interested Birrell, may be of little importance. The importance of the Goddess as Weaver of Fate to Ti, God in Heaven, is clear, as is her subordinate role to him. Once again we see the Goddess as diminished in stature and no longer a primary archetypal deity. More mysterious is

the apparent necessity of her living a chaste life, with one annual exception, in order to be able to weave (Fate?). Was there a Neolithic cult of the Weaver Maid that was served by virgin priestesses? Or is the weaving of Weaver Maid a heavily veiled metaphor for a sacred fertility ceremony which occurred in late winter or early spring and took place between a high priestess (who wove on a sacred loom) and the emperor-king as the Goddess' consort-on-earth? Notice that the Goddess of Fate as the Weaver Maid is weaving silk, which many centuries prior to this text had acquired an extraordinary value and status. Although not mentioned in either *The Treatise on Research into Nature* or Birrell's discussion, we must remember that **if the Goddess of Fate ceases to weave, the annual renewal of the king's empowerment might be set aside and then humankind will have no destiny.** Whether we make recourse to rare and valuable manufactures or to one of the deepest premises of myth, there is no possibility that the primal deities would allow the Weaver Maid stop weaving.

Lo! Holy Creator

"Lo! Holy Creator is adored.
Old Goddess is richly endowed.
Warp and woof of Heaven and Earth
Create the four seasons
Their essence established sun and moon,
Constellations are regulated and ordered.
They cause Yin, Yang, and the Five Elements
To revolve and begin anew,
Make clouds, wind, thunder, lightning
Fall as sweet dew and rain.
They let the Hundred Names breed and bear,
All tracing the right line;
Continuing their line they are dutiful,
They conform to the Emperor's virtue.
Phoenix carriage with dragon, unicorn,
There is nothing not duly a designed.
Blessed offertory baskets are ranged in rows
That the festive gifts may be accepted.
Then calamity will be wiped out,
Our exploits will race to the Eight Wilds.
Bell, drum, pipe, reed-organ,
The 'Cloud' dance soaring, soaring.
The Chao-yao Star banner of the Gods!
The Nine Yi tribes will come in surrender."
(Han Dynasty, China c.114 B.C.)

This poem is taken from Birrell (1988: 38-39) and it resides within a complex cultural context. Emperor Wu (141-87 B.C.) was a long lived, powerful ruler with a deep interest in the arts and religion. He personally

intervened at the highest policy levels to impose his taste upon literary, musical and liturgical forms. Like the founding emperor of the Han Dynasty, Kao-tsu, Emperor Wu was not prejudiced and had little interest in aristocracy or class for their own sake. He patronized the finest artists with little regard for either their family background or resume. His consort, Empress Wei, was originally a lower class singer, who had been employed in the household of the emperor's sister. His Master of Music, Li Yen-niun, was also lower class and earlier in life had been convicted of a crime, castrated and then employed in the Imperial Kennels!

Emperor Wu had a deep, eclectic interest in religion and he was both open-minded and gullible. He was tolerant of all and patronized shamanesses, sorcerers, illusionists, alchemists and mediums alongside his serious religious exploration. He must have had an intuitive relationship with the Goddess because in 114 B.C., he initiated the Cult of Hou-t'u, or Empress Earth.⁷³ In 113 B.C. he established devotion to T'ai-i, Great Unity in the winter solstice of 113 B.C. and also the honoring of a Spirit Mistress in the imperial park. He founded and introduced many cults and rituals during these two years and personally attended worship at major ceremonies. Hymns for religious rituals were put into a framework of contemporary music and dance.

One set of such hymns has survived from the reign of Emperor Wu, although we do not have the music. There is also an earlier set also from the reign of the founder of the Han Dynasty Emperor Kao-tsu (c.200 B.C.). These earlier hymns had been set to music by a consort of Emperor Kao-tsu, Lady T'ang, who was skilled in Ch'u music. There are 17 hymns in the earlier set which was titled *Songs to Set the World at Ease, for Private Performance*. They recited the ethical values of Confucianism and were performed at both rites of worship for the imperial ancestors and court banquets. The set of hymns we have from the reign of Emperor Wu is called *Songs for Suburban Sacrifice, in 19 Parts* and reveals that a radically different focus had evolved in less than a century. Some of the songs praise deities associated with the seasonal cycle and others celebrate contemporary 'historical' miracles.

In *'Lo! Holy Creator'*, we find two deities - Holy Creator (T'ai-yuan) and Old Goddess, or Wen-shen the Earth Goddess who is elsewhere called the 'rich Old Woman'. Holy Creator is First Cause, a remote primal deity who presides over the cosmic hierarchy. The emperor acts as an intermediary for mankind between Heaven and Earth and the virtue of his rule determines the prosperity of his people and mandates that they fulfill their proper role as ordained by the natural order (Birrell 1988: 29-40). We have here another rare literary glimpse of the Goddess in ancient China.

⁷³In contrast to the situation in Old Europe, Maspero (1978: 413, n.18) believes that the Chinese Earth Goddess is no older than the Han Dynasty. Emperor Wu's initiation of her cult may represent her debut.

The Death of the Goddess

Although we have seen the strength of the Jasper Lady during the T'ang Dynasty, the submission of the Goddess in China is prefigured in the myth of The Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt River as told in *The Origin of Hereditary Families*, from the 3rd century A.D..

“So they unanimously made him their chieftain. He became the Lord of the Granary. Now he sailed the earthenware boat from Yi River to Yen-yang. At Salt River there is a goddess. She said to the Lord of the Granary. ‘This land is vast, and there is all the fish and salt that come from it. I wish you would stay here and live among us. The Lord of the Granary refused. At nightfall the Salt Goddess suddenly came to sleep with him. At dawn she turned into a flying insect and flew in a swarm with other insects. They blotted out the sunlight and the world grew pitch black for more than ten days in a row. The Lord of the Granary could make not out which was east or west for seven days and seven nights. He ordered someone to hold a green silk cord and present it to the Salt Goddess. He said to her, ‘This will suit you if you wear it as a fringed belt. If we are to live together, then please accept it from me.’ The Salt Goddess accepted it and wore it as a fringed belt. At once the Lord of the Granary stood on a sunlit rock, and aiming at the green cord she wore, he shot arrows at her. He hit her and the Salt Goddess died. Then the sky cleared far and wide” (Birrell 1993: 205).

Although she identifies important motifs, I believe Birrell (1993: 204-205) has missed a central theme of this myth. Birrell sees a trickster figure in the Goddess of Salt River and a major theme of sexual play in which the Lord of the Granary outwits the Goddess. More to the point perhaps is Birrell's identification of a vestige of the Goddess. The Goddess of Salt has the power to block out the sun. Birrell sees the theme of gender competition as possibly indicating “an evolving contest for supremacy between a matriarchal and patriarchal society.” Some contest! It is extremely difficult to identify any period of Chinese society after the Shang Dynasty in which powerful, accomplished women were numerous and prominent. In this myth we have a strong statement about male supremacy in both society and religion. The defeat of the Goddess is so complete that she not only loses the contest, she loses her life in stark and unambiguous terms. Furthermore, her death did not precipitate any catastrophe or problems. In fact, it promoted a major positive change: “the sky cleared far and wide.”

There are yet other aspects to consider. The Goddess of Salt holds the power of life and death. Too much salt in the soil, particularly in times of drought, will ruin its fertility. The Goddess of Salt can also turn into an insect and call upon an insect swarm (presumably locusts) that will block out the sun and devour the crops. Once again, agriculture is ruined and the people starve. At the bottom line, the battle between the Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt may be one between cosmic good and evil in which the sex of the protagonists is not important but the specific powers they wield is very critical. The Lord of the Granary defeats and kills the Goddess of Salt in order to save the harvest and thereby prevent mass starvation. She must die in order that the ‘world’ be saved. No reason is given for her unleashing massive destruction except anger at being rejected by the

Lord of the Granary. A petulant and dangerous goddess, isn't she? She certainly has the right to be angry, but why take it out on 'the people of the world' who played no role in her rejection? The Goddess of Salt reveals herself as inherently evil and dangerous to the very survival of the 'world' by her decision to blot out the sun as a demonstration of her power, without for a moment considering the consequences. The Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt engage in a mythic power contest between complementary forces and in that sense, anticipate *yin-yang* theory of later times (L. Blumenberg, personal communication). Remember that *yin* is feminine and is a force of power, darkness, mystery and soil fertility. Is the Goddess of Salt a goddess of soil fertility gone bad who must be destroyed in order to save agriculture and farming? Early Chinese philosophy was dualistic and *yin* and *yang* were not combined into a unity of complementary forces necessary to achieve a whole until the work of Tsou Yen who lived from 305 to 240 B.C. (Chan 1963: 244-245).

Shamans in the Ming Dynasty

Kao Ch'i (1336 - 1374 A.D.) was a well known poet of the Ming Dynasty who was executed at the age of 38 by the emperor who wished to intimidate political dissidents. His poem "Ballad of the Neighborhood Shaman" establishes that shamanism still survived in China, having gone 'underground' in urban neighborhoods and rural villages.

"If people in this neighborhood get sick, they'll never take a drug;
As soon as His Lordship God arrives the demon of sickness leaves.
They run to welcome the old shaman who brings the god at night,
then white sheep and red carp in profusion are offered up to him."

"A man and woman earnestly bow before the altar:
'Our family is poor and has no meat, oh god please take no offense!'
The old shaman beats the drum, dances now and sings;
paper money swishing, swishing in the burgeoning dark wind.
The shaman proclaims, 'Originally, your life was to run out here,
but the god, mindful of your devotion, has postponed your death!'
The shaman escorts the god to his horse, and walks out of the door;
the family climb up on the roof, and cry to the soul to return."

(Chaves 1986: 136)

Goddesses in Shamanic Myths of the Manchu

The Manchu people of China are descendants of the nomadic Jurchens, who had both male and female shamans. They first impact the recorded history of China when they conquered portions of the northeast and established the Jin Dynasty in 1115 A.D. The earliest reference to Manchu shamanism was made by Xu Mengshen in his book *San Caho Bei Meng Hui Bian*, written in the twelfth century. He wrote that "The Jurchen shamans are like *wunju* (sorceresses). They can transform their shapes and perform magic" (Kun 1991:24). Manchu society eventually became chauvinistic and paternalistic under the influence of the surrounding Han culture and female shamans gradually disappeared. Manchu shamanism incorporated many deity and spirit names from Buddhist Lamaism, as did many cultures that practiced shamanism across Central Asia. The Jin Dynasty collapsed in 1234 and the Jurchen script began to disappear. In 1599, a Jurchen chieftain, Nurhachi, had the Manchu script redesigned in a form based on Mongolian for his Churchen people, and it was solidified into its present form in 1632.

During the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty (1644-1911), the Manchu were at the height of their power, for they conquered and ruled a unified China. "In 1747, under the guise of standardizing 'correct' forms and rituals of shamanism, Emperor Qianlong issued the six volume *Hesei Toktobuha Manjusei Wecere Kooli Bithe* (*Book of Laws for Manchu Sacrifices and Offerings Established by Imperial Command*). This book was, in fact, an attempt to eliminate many independent shamanic practices, such as magical healing and wild spirit worship. It sought to strengthen imperial power by promoting the official worship of a supreme deity and the Han Chinese "Mandate of Heaven" concept that vested power in the emperor. Under Qianlong, the Manchu introduced the role of professional shamans, built great temples and incorporated Buddhist idols into their shrines. Some traditional practices were outlawed and others were adapted to fit Han traditions" (Kun 1991: 24).

Today, remote Manchu communities in northeastern China retain some of their original culture. The Manchu language is still in use and the old script is used by elders and shamans. Fire walking and shamanic healing remain alive in some clans (Kun 1991). The multiple manifestations of the Goddess figure prominently in Manchu shamanism and the first information available in English has been published (Yuguang and Honggang, 1991).

"The goddess scratched a piece of the blue sky to make a drum and removed a mountain to make a drum whip. When the sky and mountain crashed into each other, out of the Earth-shaking drumming came the first man and woman and other living things on Earth." (Tale from the Guar'jia clan in Yuguang and Honggang, 1991).

Over 300 separate goddesses have been identified in the Manchu pantheon and they can be organized into a relatively small number of groups: creators, nature deities, fertility keepers, cultural heroines, warriors, shamanesses, guardians, etc. The most important goddesses are three creators: the Sky Mother (Abkai Hehe); the Earth Mother, (Bana-jiermu); and the Cosmological

Mother (Wolado Mama). Abkai Hehe gave birth to the Universe and continues to control it; she also created the first shaman, the famous Nisan Shamaness (Yinjiang). The Sky Mother is a guardian for humans because she saved people and animals from a great flood. She also taught us mortals about *wuchun* spirit/ritual songs) and all the various crafts and trades. The Earth Mother with huge belly and breasts, is the Goddess as Life Giver and Fertility. Dirt and hair from her body turned into mountains, forests and the sea; and her sweat became rivers and creeks.

This is an archetypal creation model found in many cultures throughout the world both past and present. Earth Mother also taught humankind hunting and gathering. The Earth Mother does not, however, encompass all of nature for there are many nature goddesses: Sun Goddess, Moon Goddess, Cloud Goddess, Rock Goddess, Hot Spring Goddess and Sea-Soul Goddess. The Cosmological Goddess (Star-Planting Goddess), has white wings and always travels through the sky with a bag of stars. She created the constellations so that people could tell time, navigate and predict the weather. Most importantly, she built the star bridge used by shamans to ascend to the upper world.

During the endless dark winter (a reference to the original home of the nomadic Jurchens in the Arctic regions when they were shamanic hunter/gatherers), Tuoyalaha stole fire from the Fire God, Abkai-enduri, and carried it in her mouth to humans. Nine campfires are built in her memory, for Tuoyalaha brought spring to the world and thus saved all living things. During her rituals, shamans will put burning coals in their mouths. The Snow Mountain Goddess, Chimoni Mama, nurtures life with her milky waters but when she wakes up and looks to the south, she creates blizzards. Shamanesses performed the rituals of the Deriks, who have human bodies but the heads of fishes, and safeguard the offspring of the earliest ancestor couple, as well as bring peace and prosperity. Fuduo Mama is a fertility goddess who was one of the principal deities of the Jurchen people. There are also many shamans and shamanesses who have become deified and have become clan guardians or purveyors of supernatural power. (Yuguang and Honggang, 1991).

This is a brief survey of a long list of goddesses, which serves to illustrate the vital reality of the Great Goddesses who chose to manifest in many, many spheres of influence in a fashion reminiscent of what has been reconstructed for Old Europe by Gimbutas (1989). The vast number of goddesses appears to represent the plethora of epiphanies that the Great Goddess chose, and indeed *required*, in every culture in which she was present. Such is the only way to manifest omnipotence and embrace the multitude of realms in which she exercised power. Such is the explanation of the seemingly overwhelming diversity of the Buddhist pantheon: the One has an almost infinite variety in expression. It seems incredible, and invigorating, that Manchu culture and some aspects of shamanism have survived the turmoil that has characterized China since the end of the last dynasty in 1912, the Communist Revolution of 1948 and the Cultural Revolution of 1959. Such survival is a testimony to the geographic isolation and poverty that remains in China, as well as the spiritual strength embedded in the tribal and peasant culture of the Manchu. The brief myth from the Guar'jia cited above certainly establishes the Goddess as the Great Goddess, who is the primal creatrix and Earth Goddess.

In June of 1988, Shi Kun, a Chinese folklorist, attended the first seminar on shamanism ever presented in the Peoples Republic of China and met Fu

Yuguang, a Manchu scholar with a particular specialty in shamanism. Shi Kun learned that Manchu shamanism, although diluted and unavoidably influenced by the modern world, was still alive and practiced in the northeastern province of Jilin. In December of 1988, he was able to visit Jilin at a time that coincided with the annual ancestral offering rituals of the Guar'jia clan, which are presided over by clan shamans (Shi Kun 1991b).

The Guar'jia have resided in their current territory for over three hundred years. There are about 9.9 million Manchu living in three northeastern provinces with more scattered throughout Chinese cities elsewhere. Exclusively hunters and herders until their first migrations into China in the eleventh century A.D. (see above), they are now farmers or city dwellers. After 1747 and the standardization of shamanic practice by the Emperor Qinalong, they abandoned their ritual offerings to wild spirits but have continued the ancestral offering rituals for each clan family (Shi Kun 1991b).

"The offering rituals have four parts - offerings to the deities of agriculture, hunting, darkness and the sky pole. Before each family's annual offering ritual, the clan chief and the master shaman are invited to open the clan's ancestral box - a wooden trunk that contains genealogical records, idols of clan deities (often mythologized ancestors), and other ritual items. This sacred box is said to be the residence of the clan ancestors and guardian spirits above the ninth heaven ... Every four years (in the traditional Zodiac years of the Dragon, Tiger and Rat), the clan chief conducts a ceremony to add deceased clan members' names to the genealogical records which are kept in the ancestral box and displayed at the annual offering rituals. During this ceremony, an election is held for the position of clan chief, traditional laws and honor codes are recited for the benefit of all clan members and myths and legends are passed on to the younger generations" (Shi Kun 1991b: 25).

The ritual Shi Kun observed was led by a highly respected master shaman, Guang Borong (Guang is Mandarin for Guar'jia). The ceremony followed an archetypal shamanic ritual pattern whose common elements form a single recognizable paradigm worldwide (Eliade 1964). I will not discuss here the many events that do not concern the Goddess directly. However, she is explicitly present in a central and important role. The second invocation by Guang Borong at the opening of the ceremonies invokes the Goddess. "Among countless clans like willow leaves on Earth, the Guar'jia clan is one of the most prestigious. The great shamaness created the ancient scriptures, and I am selected as a shaman to serve the deities ..." (Shi Kun 1991: 25). In the evening, Guang Borong, asked for the protection of the deities in charge of light and darkness, most of whom are goddesses.

On the second day following the sky pole offering (the *axis mundi* that unites 'heaven' and 'earth'), the Goddess of Fertility. Fuduo Mama is honored. She is in charge of pregnancy and infant health. Offerings are hung on a willow tree, symbolic of fertility, and women try to grab the food as a symbolic blessing from the Goddess. Colorful threads are tied to the hands of children which represent lucky talismans from Fuduo Mama. The ceremony concludes thereafter with the scattering of the bones of the sacrificial pig into a river or upon a mountain top (Shi Kun 1991b: 26). Shi Kun (1991b: 29) determined that the current process that selects shamans once again gives equal opportunity to women, a circumstance that reflects the original tradition and recognizes the primary epiphany available to the Guar'jia of the Goddess on Earth.

THUS DOES THE GODDESS HOLD COURT IN CHINA TODAY.

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