

A New Model in the Study of Chinese Mythology

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

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

Author: Sarah Allan

On August 5, 2015, Science published an article by Wu Qinglong and a team of distinguished archaeologists that reported on the discovery of evidence for a massive outburst flood in the upper reaches of the Yellow River c. 1920 BCE. The archaeologists identified this flood with the one brought under control by Yu 禹, who was traditionally regarded as the founder of the Xia dynasty. They further argue that since Erlitou culture originated around 1900 BCE, the coincidence of date serves to confirm the identification of Xia and Erlitou culture. This article argues against the historical interpretation of this evidence for an ancient flood. In the early texts, Yu did not control a flood along the Yellow River; he dug all the riverbeds throughout the

world so that the waters could flow into the sea. Moreover, the story of Yu controlling the waters and the foundation of the Xia dynasty were not linked in the earliest accounts. This story originated as part of a cosmogonic myth in which the world was made habitable and conducive to agriculture. Thus, it cannot be identified with any particular flood or used to date the foundation of the Xia. Finally, it argues that a great flood was more likely to have caused social disruption than the development of a new level of state power. However, this flood may have caused people from the Qijia culture, which was centered in the region of the flood and already had primitive bronze-casting technology, to flee to other regions including that dominated by Erlitou culture. This cultural interaction introduced metallurgy which was further developed in the context of Erlitou culture, thus spurring its development as a state-level society.

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A Discussion on the Concept of “Sacred Narrative”

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

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

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

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

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Constant interactions among cultures make it possible to conduct cross-cultural studies on the myth of the Queen Mother of the West 西王母. Since the original manuscript of the Classic of Mountains and Seas [Shanhaijing 山海經] served as the expository writing of the now lost Map of Mountains and Seas [Shanhaitu 山海圖], there is reason to believe that it contains information on early depictions of the goddess. By revealing the symbolism at work in those descriptions and by consulting

a wide range of ethnographic data, it becomes possible to reconstruct her primeval form. The Queen Mother of the West, once regarded as the Chinese version of the prehistoric Great Mother, was seen as the goddess embodying both death and regeneration. However, after the rise of the patriarchal system, the original Queen Mother of the West slowly fell into obscurity and was ultimately relegated to the subordinate status of a spouse for the Jade Emperor [yuhuang 玉皇].

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

Author: Hanmo Zhang

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

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Two Modes of Goddess Depictions in Early Medieval Chinese Literature

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Early medieval Chinese literature depicts two modes of goddesses, derived from the two masterpieces attributed to Song Yu, "Rhapsody on the Goddess" and "Rhapsody

on Gaotang.” Since Cao Zhi’s “Rhapsody on the Goddess” overshadowed other works among rhapsodies and poems, it appeared as if the influence of “Rhapsody on Gaotang” had stopped. This study reveals the two lineages of goddess depictions in medieval Chinese literature, showing that the “Goddess of Love” has never disappeared.

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