Introduction

This book offers for the first time a comprehensive range of texts of myths of the classical Chinese tradition translated from the Chinese into English with an analysis of their context and significance. A representative corpus of over three hundred narratives has been selected from more than one hundred classical texts. These constitute the most authentic texts in the Chinese mythic tradition. The organizational principles are based on thematic categories and classes of motif familiar to mythologies worldwide. A perusal of the chapter headings in this book reveals the wide range of Chinese mythic themes: cosmogonic myths, creation myths, etiological myths, myths of divine birth, mythic metamorphoses, myths of strange places, peoples, plants, birds, and animals, myths of the primeval and the lesser gods, mythical figures, and myths of the semidivine heroes who founded their tribe, city, or dynasty at the dawn of history.

The narratives are mostly fragmentary texts, often written in a lapidary style in obscure language and meaning. The texts are therefore accompanied by discussions that explain and clarify the obscurities and difficult textual background. While these analyses are firmly based on the cultural traditions of classical China, the motifs and themes of the myths are also elucidated from the aspects of interdisciplinary studies and of comparative mythology. Thus significant research on a variety

of subjects is cited in order to highlight relevant aspects of archeology, anthropology, religion, sociology, and psychology, together with the application of works on mythologies worldwide.

Unlike late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies of Chinese myth, which incorporated late ethnographic or folkloristic material with ancient myth texts without due regard for chronological consistency, this book focuses primarily on mythology as a subject in its own right and with its own raison d'être apart from other disciplines. Thus ethnographic aspects are referred to but do not form a major part of the discussion. Similarly, non-Sinitic aspects of classical Chinese myth are not pursued at length, because of the special linguistic and historical problems that have yet to be adequately researched. Also excluded are the mythic systems of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, besides the network of local and regional cults. This, again, is partly for reasons of disciplinary integrity, mythology being separate from philosophy and religion, and partly because these systems of belief, of which Buddhism is comparatively late, spawned immensely complex mythologies and pantheons of their own, which would require a brave new generation of mythologists to assimilate, codify, and elucidate. Despite these large exclusions and minor emphases, however, the repertoire of classical Chinese myth which remains to be studied is still so extensive and complex that only a representative proportion of it can be offered here. Nevertheless, this basic repertoire constitutes a corpus of over three hundred texts of varying length, which are sufficient to introduce readers to the field. The material is presented in a form that makes it accessible to specialists in Chinese and nonspecialists alike, in the disciplines of Sinology, religion, history, anthropology, archeology, art history, and literature.

Definitions of Myth

The Chinese term for *myth*, *shen-hua*, almost exactly coincides with one of the many contemporary Western definitions of myth as sacred narrative. *Shen* means 'god', 'divine', 'holy'; *hua* means 'speech', 'oral account', 'tale', 'oral narrative'. In this respect, the second part of the Chinese term, *hua*, is equivalent to the original meaning of the word *mythology*: the root of the word *myth* begins with the Proto-Indo-European root **mu* 'to mutter or murmur', from which the Greek stem *my* and the noun *mythos*, meaning 'word' or 'story', are derived, while the Greek noun *logos* denotes 'word', 'ordered discourse,' or 'doctrine.'

Mythologists today are generally in agreement that the basic definition of *myth* is 'account', 'tale', 'story', or 'narrative'. There is considerable disagreement, however, whether myths are necessarily always sacred or limited to the gods and the divine. For it is clear from reading texts of mythologies from throughout the world that other elements, such as the supernatural, the folkloric, the strange and marvelous, natural phenomena, the inexplicable, and also basic concerns such as eating belong to the corpus of myth. As a definition, therefore, the terms *shen-hua* and *sacred narrative* are of limited use, since they exclude too much valuable material from the Chinese and other mythological traditions.

In a recent study of myth, William G. Doty recorded that he had collected over fifty different definitions and that a more rigorous search would have yielded many more (1986, 9). This embarrassment of riches can be explained in part by the fact that scholars from such diverse disciplines as religion, psychology, and anthropology, who have discovered in myth a rich vein of human knowledge and experience, have formulated different working definitions of the term based on the prerequisites of their own disciplines. In the nineteenth century universalistic theories of the nature myth school predominated, exemplified by the meteorological interpretations of myth by Friedrich Max Müller. For the evolutionist school of Edward B. Tylor, myth was an expression of primitive philosophy. There was also the etiological interpretation of myth as an explanation of origins characterized by the works of Andrew Lang. In the early twentieth century the myth-as-ritual school in Cambridge, led by Jane Ellen Harrison, defined myth thus: "The primary meaning of myth . . . is the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done" (1963, 328). For Franz Boas myth was a kind of autobiographical ethnography by which the culture of a primitive tribe could be deduced from an analysis of its myths. For Bronislaw Malinowski the function of myth was explained within its cultural context as a "sociological charter." Claude Lévi-Strauss has accepted Malinowski's definition that "myth is a charter for social action," but he develops the functionalism of Malinowski with a new theory that myth embodies the structure of mind and society in a given community. Central to the structural-analytical approach of Lévi-Strauss is his object of revealing the paradigms of binary oppositions in a mythic narrative to arrive at a deep stratum of meaning. From the standpoint of psychology, Freud held that myths were the reflections of an individual's unconscious fears and desires, whereas Jung defined myth as the expression of the "collective unconscious," developing the thesis of archetypal patterns

of thought and symbol. In recent times the late Joseph Campbell elaborated Jungian concepts of the archetype in myth. Mircea Eliade, who was influenced by the myth-as-ritual school of Cambridge and by the Jungian concept of archetypes, defined myth as the vital link between the ancient past and contemporary realities, while emphasizing its etiological characteristics.

These definitions by scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines have greatly enlarged the scope and content of myth. Yet in appropriating myth for its own purpose, each discipline or school remains jealous of its own concerns, aims, and methodology. In the end, myth is not anthropology, nor is it religion, or sociology, psychology, or literature. As Friedrich Schelling insisted as early as 1857, myth has its own autonomy; it is a human experience that must be understood on its own terms and in its own right. Any attempt to graft it onto another discipline will result in its diminution and loss (cited by Puhvel 1987, 12).

This brief review of the definitions of myth which have evolved over the past century and a half may now be usefully followed by Doty's eight ways of categorizing it in most interdisciplinary works on myth: (1) myth as aesthetic device, narrative, literary form; (2) myth containing subject matter having to do with the gods, the "other" world; (3) myth explaining origins (etiology); (4) myth as mistaken or primitive science; (5) myth as the text of a rite, or depending on ritual that it explains; (6) myth making universal truths or ideas concrete or intelligible; (7) myth explicating beliefs, collective experiences, or values; (8) myth constituting "spiritual" or "psychic" expression (Doty 1986, 9). Doty also provides a definitive statement of the significance, context, and function of myth:

> A mythological corpus consists of a usually complex network of myths that are culturally important imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation, the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind's roles and relative statuses within it.
>
> Mythologies may convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of suprahuman entities, as well as aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration,

the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy. (Ibid., 11)

While this working definition lacks the brevity of more traditional definitions, it has the virtue of constituting a comprehensive statement of the major components of myth. As such, it serves as a useful reference point for collating and evaluating cross-cultural mythic narratives.

It is pertinent here to note the distinction among myth, legend, and folk tale. The most convincing differentiation among these three forms of narrative has been proposed by William Bascom (Table 1). In order to draw distinctions among the three generic forms of myth, legend, and folk tale in the classical Chinese tradition, some classical myths are presented side by side with their legendary or folk tale versions.

Approaches to Chinese Myth

Of the remarkable variety of approaches to myth, the meteorological (naturist), the ethnographic, the myth-as-ritual, the sociological, and the etiological have most influenced Sinologists working on Chinese myth. Henri Maspero, in "Mythological Legends in the *Classic of*

Table 1. Formal Features of Prose Narratives

Form	Prose Narratives		
	Myth	*Legend*	*Folk Tale*
Conventional opening	None	None	Usually
Told after dark	No restrictions	No restrictions	Usually
Belief	Fact	Fact	Fiction
Setting	Some time and some place	Some time and some place	Timeless, placeless
Time	Remote past	Recent past	Any time
Place	Earlier or other world	World as it is today	Any place
Attitude	Sacred	Sacred or secular	Secular
Principal character	Nonhuman	Human	Human or nonhuman

Source: Based on Bascom 1984, 11, Table 2.

History" (1924), and Eduard Erkes, in "Parallels in Chinese and American Indian Myths" (1926), followed the nature myth school, itself influenced by nineteenth-century romanticism, in their research on Chinese solar myths. The monomythic definition and approach of the naturist school has long since been rejected, as is epitomized by the title of Richard M. Dorson's article "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology" (1955), and has been modified to take into account the polyfunctionality of myths within a culture. The ethnographic approach to the study of Chinese myth dominates the work of Marcel Granet (1959) and Wolfram Eberhard (1968). Granet, who was influenced by the sociological-anthropological school of Emile Durkheim, characterized his work *Dance and Legend in Ancient China* as "a sociological analysis" of myths derived from ritual drama and religious dance (Granet 1959, 1). The main value of his work today resides in his useful collation of mythic texts and his perceptive discussions of individual narratives. Eberhard's ethnographic study of the role of myth in the cultures of south and east China, *The Local Culture of South and East China,* attempts to identify specific Chinese subcultures with individual classical and traditional myths. Again, his research has yielded a valuable source of mythic narratives and the ways in which minority cultures in China have utilized them. The myth-as-ritual school, whose influence has now declined, is also represented in Sinology by Carl Hentze's study *Lunar Myths and Symbols* (1932). Hentze's aim was to reconstruct the meaning of lunar and stellar myths by the comparative method, interpreting narratives in terms of their ritual and symbolic meaning. Since Bernhard Karlgren's harsh attack on these early studies with their various approaches, few Sinologists have attempted to participate in the general academic discussion of approaches and methodology in mythic studies. Karlgren's own contribution to the study of Chinese myth, which ended with his critique of the work in this field by his European colleagues, is his monumental "Legends and Cults in Ancient China" (1946). This article is sociological in orientation, focusing on the relationship between both primal and evolved myth and the founding myths of clans in ancient Chinese society. This work remains a valuable source for its collation and analyses of mythic references and their later reworkings as fable and legend. His translations of texts are reliable, and his work is still a useful study.

The etiological approach is exemplified by Derk Bodde's "Myths of Ancient China" (1961). Within its brief confines, this essay covers, in an intelligent, well-organized way, the major creation myths, solar

myths, and flood myths of early China. Despite its brevity, it offers a study that is rigorous and scholarly in its methodology, questioning traditional concepts of prehistory, and applying, where relevant, the findings of comparative mythology. Bodde has made an important contribution to Chinese ethnographic and ritual studies in his more recent work *Festivals in Classical China* (1975). In this pioneering study his subsidiary aim of tracing certain Han rituals to their mythic counterparts by means of textual and iconographic documentation is of major importance for the study of the evolution of Chinese myth. Combining the data of iconographic records with the disciplinary approaches of history and archeology, Michael Loewe has examined mythic motifs attached to the mythologem of immortality as it is manifested in the mythical figure of the Queen Mother of the West in *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (1979).

The younger generation of Sinologists has also begun to develop studies in this emerging field. Sarah Allan has applied the methodology of Lévi-Strauss, especially his concept of transformations, in her examination of the succession myths and foundation myths of the protohistorical and historical dynasties of archaic China, and she has successfully utilized the Lévi-Straussian theory of binary opposition in her counterpointing of the sage-king and negative or subordinate mythical figures (Allan 1981). William G. Boltz has conducted research on the figure of Kung Kung with illuminating insights and has explained in the clearest terms the long-term misunderstanding of many Sinologists in applying the term *euhemerization* to Chinese mythical figures (1981). Mark E. Lewis has focused on the theme of violence in classical China, proposing the thesis that some forms of aggression in this period found their archetypal pattern in sacred narrative and so came to be sanctioned by the authority of myth (1990). Wolfgang Münke has adopted a more general approach in a work that constitutes a dictionary of Chinese myth (in German). For the most part, he refers to, but does not translate, the classical sources. His introductory essay deals with some important issues, such as the Chinese terms for God. In the text of his dictionary he also discusses a variety of problematic questions, such as the gender of the earth deity Hou-t'u. Occasionally, his discussions are marred by value-laden epithets, such as "Satan," in respect of the God of War, Ch'ih Yu, and of the god, Kung Kung (Münke 1976, 5–28, 142–43, 71, 219). The French Sinologist Rémi Mathieu has produced two significant works on classical Chinese mythology. The first is his two-volume annotated translation of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* a

major repository of mythic narratives (1983). In his introductory essay, Mathieu states that he follows the comparative method in mythology and that he particularly acknowledges his debt to Georges Dumézil in reconstituting the historical and ethnological elements of the origin of the primitive peoples of Central Asia and East Siberia and minority nationalities of China (1983, 1:xxvii). His copious annotations of this classical text, translated *in toto,* reveal his special interest in the ethnographic and socioreligious approaches to myth. More recently, Mathieu has published a source book of Chinese myth (in French) with briefer annotation but very little discussion of the myths themselves. His selection follows the textual research work of Yuan K'o, which he has supplemented with his own collation of texts. The texts are organized into thematic categories (Mathieu 1989). Sarah Allan has utilized a recognized approach in comparative studies of myth, although this is limited to the methodology of Lévi-Strauss. Her more recent work does not reveal a comparativist approach (1991). It is generally true to say that most Sinological work on myth has been conducted without serious reference to comparative mythology.

A number of general books have been published on Chinese mythology which have achieved some sort of status in the field by reason of the dearth of scholarly publications for the general reader, or even the specialist. These books are not useful for the purposes of this study, for several reasons. They indiscriminately assemble and confuse the myths of quite separate mythological traditions of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, local hero cults, and regional cults, so that the lay reader is unable to distinguish their lines of demarcation or chronology. Moreover, instead of translating the texts, they paraphrase the myth, without indicating their sources. Worse still, they tend to use strands from several, often contradictory narratives, so that they end up by creating virtually new mythic narratives. In many cases these writers are not Sinologists, or even specialists in myth, and they rely on the older myth material that happens to have been translated into English rather than researching the subject using classical and modern Chinese sources.

Insofar as this study is concerned, I have utilized a number of different disciplinary approaches rather than adhering to one individual theory or definition. The etiological approach is evident in the first chapters on the origin of the universe, the creation of humankind, and the origin of cultural benefits having to do with food, tools and weapons, hunting, the domestication of animals, and medicinal plants (chaps.

1 and 2). Etiological myths are also evident in narratives of the foundation of a tribe, people, city, or dynasty (chaps. 5 and 16). Another important influence has been Raglan's approach to myth, that is, the delineation of the characteristics of the mythical figure as hero, based on Raglan's formulation of twenty-two stereotypical features of the hero to be found in the biographies of major Indo-European and Semitic heroes (1937). Raglan's work followed on from the studies of Otto Rank in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1959) and was developed by Joseph Campbell, with the influence of Jungian archetypes, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968). The use of Raglan's hero pattern is evident in my study in the patterns of miraculous birth, the pattern of the savior figure, and the mythology of divine heroes such as the Yellow Emperor, Yi the Archer, and the semidivine figure Yü the Great (chaps. 3, 5, 6–8, and 13).

At a more complex level, certain approaches to Chinese myth have been used to interpret opaque, fragmentary, or corrupt mythic narratives that express a surface meaning but also convey a deeper underlying reality. Often in such cases the most fruitful approach has been that pioneered by Malinowski, who suggested that some myths contain the vestige of a social or communal practice that may or may not still be followed. Two of his statements on this concept are particularly relevant:

> Myth serves principally to establish a sociological charter, or a retrospective moral pattern of behavior. . . .
>
> Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilizations; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (Malinowski 1954, 144, 101)

Several Chinese myths lend themselves to Malinowski's interpretation of myth as a sociological, or pragmatic, charter. I have applied it to the myth of the virgin brides and the river god and the myth of Yao's son, Tan Chu, to show that beneath their surface meaning lies a more powerful layer of mythic significance (chaps. 3 and 11).

Another valuable approach to the interpretation of obscure or ambiguous Chinese mythic narratives has been Eliade's concept of archetypes, derived from the Jungian mode. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

(1971), Eliade discussed the concepts of "the symbolism of the Center," "celestial archetypes of cities and temples," and "the Sacred Mountain" as an *axis mundi*. These concepts have provided illuminating insights into the Chinese motifs of the world-tree, such as the Chien-mu and Leaning Mulberry, the sacred K'un-lun mountains, and so forth. Moreover, pivotal to an understanding of the juxtaposition in mythic narratives of clashing opposites has been the fruitful concept of binary opposition proposed by the structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. This concept has been particularly rewarding in discussing symbolic opposites, such as Ch'ih Yu and the Yellow Emperor, or the failed hero, Kun, and his successful son, the hero Yü the Great. One of the seminal theories of Georges Dumézil on dual sovereignty or joint rule (1940) has been helpful in recognizing and elucidating the complex myth of the divine (half-)brothers, the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor, who each ruled half the world but who later fought for total supremacy.

The Comparative Method
in the Study of Chinese Myth

The fertile theories of the productive scholar Georges Dumézil are synonymous with modern methods of comparative methodology. In introducing the work of Dumézil in *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* (Littleton 1973), C. Scott Littleton proposed the following useful definition of the term *comparative mythology:* "Comparative mythology refers to the systematic comparison of myths and mythic themes drawn from a wide variety of cultures and involves attempts to abstract common underlying themes, to relate these themes to a common symbolic representation (e.g., the forces of nature, fertility, or . . . social organization) and/ or to reconstruct one or more protomythologies" (ibid., 32).

The comparativist approach has resulted in a major contribution to the study of mythologies. This new science was generated two hundred years ago during the Enlightenment, when the idea of universal human progress was prevalent. Those eighteenth-century scholars who studied myth, religion, and ritual included in their research the oriental myths and rituals of ancient India and Persia. In the nineteenth century, the rise of romanticism and philosophical idealism, together with a pantheistic view of nature, further inspired studies of myth, especially in Germany, as is exemplified by theories on naturism put forward by Friedrich Max Müller. Initially, comparative mythology was domi-

nated by the discipline of philology, but it gradually moved toward the analysis of mythic type and motif. In the early twentieth century, the theories and theses of the anthropologist Sir James Frazer had a profound influence on scholarship in many fields, especially his concept of the "dying god," epitomized by his reconstruction of the myth of the sacred grove at Nemi. Frazer's comparative method was exhaustive: he collated every known manifestation of a motif in mythologies throughout the world and recorded them in voluminous publications. Nowadays his magnum opus, the thirteen-volume *Golden Bough,* with *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species,* rank as the three outstanding *unread* works of the nineteenth century.

There are several reasons why Frazer's work is not so influential, or fashionable, today. His method of documenting examples of mythic motifs resulted in their being presented without a textual or historical context, thus robbing them of their ethnographic relevance and their chronological significance. Frazer also based his research on the late nineteenth-century concept of unilineal evolutionism, derived from the Darwinian model, that all societies evolve along the same linear path from "savagery" and "barbarism" to civilization; that myths belong to the initial period of "savagery"; and that as society develops from the primitive to the civilized, so myths gradually decline until only their vestiges remain. Finally, Frazer's work is often dismissed today as "armchair anthropology" by those who favor ethnographic fieldwork with firsthand documentation by the scholar, or scientist, living among the community under study.

Nevertheless, it would be absurd to reject Frazer's work in its entirety, and many of his findings have provided me with valuable insights into the workings of early Chinese myth. For example, the moon goddess, Ch'ang O, has hitherto been viewed in a limited way in the contexts of immortality and lunar iconography. But Frazer's study of the Coyote Indian trickster figure prompts the realization that Ch'ang O possesses the typical features of the trickster figure in myth and folklore. Similarly, other rewarding parallels have been suggested by the work of mythologists on other myth systems, such as Doty and Bruce Lincoln. For example, the P'an Ku myth has up till now been read as an etiological myth on the origin of the cosmos. But from Doty has been borrowed the useful term *the cosmological human body* to advance our understanding of this important myth, while from Lincoln the terms *homologic sets* and *alloforms* have been applied to demonstrate that it is much more than a cosmogonic myth. The value of Lincoln's method

lies in his systematic tracing, through narratives preserved in the ancient literatures of Indo-European language groups, of the mythic motif of the dying god whose body creates the universe (1986, 1–40). Moreover, Lincoln's discussion of myths relating to food and eating, for which he coins the term *sitiogonic* to mean 'explaining the origin of food', has also been applied to interpret the underlying significance of some Chinese myths, such as the conflict between the Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt River (ibid., 65–86).

A major Chinese mythic motif, the separation of sky and earth, has also been explicated in the light of comparative mythology. The Chinese narratives of this motif are extremely resistant to comprehension today because early on in the classical tradition, the root mythic motif became inextricably entangled with sociopolitical and ethical theories, with the result that the motif became almost unrecognizable in its extant form. In fact, Derk Bodde was the first to read the obscure Chinese mythic narratives relevant to this motif as the myth of the separation of the sky and earth (1961, 389–92). I have developed his interpretation in the light of the cross-cultural study of this motif by the mythologist K. Numazawa, "The Cultural-Historical Background of Myths on the Separation of Sky and Earth" and by means of the study of Sándor Erdész, "The World Conception of Lajos Ámi, Storyteller" (1984, 183–92; 316–35). To clarify this motif, reference has been made to the pertinent reminder of the classicist G. S. Kirk that it is linked to the idea of a Golden Age and that it has as much to do with the relationship between gods and humans as with the physical aspects of sky and earth in a purely cosmogonic myth (1970, 209, 226–38).

One of the most valuable works I have used to interpret Chinese myth has been the recent study by Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (1987). With its judicious use of descriptive terminology, its concepts informed by extensive reading, and its organizing principle of thematic categories, this seminal work examines in an instructive manner the myths of India, Iran, Greece and Rome, the Celts, Germans, Scandinavians, and Slavs. Puhvel's descriptive term *ornithomorphous hierogamy* in his illuminating discussion of bird motifs in myth provided a key to understanding the significance of recurring Chinese myths of divine conception through eating a bird's egg, which in turn forms the basis of a major Chinese myth of dynastic foundation. My indebtedness to Puhvel's work is testified to by my application of several of his analyses of motifs, especially mythic geography, world measuring, animal features of the gods, polycephality in gods, bestiovestism, the berserk warrior-god,

and antithetical archetypes, such as fire and water. Because of his comparativist study, several Chinese mythic motifs that might otherwise have passed unnoticed have been discovered, identified, and clarified.

In any discussion of comparative mythology, Greco-Roman parallels predominate, of course, and since the myths of Greece and Rome are so familiar, it has seemed natural and helpful to draw some parallels in this book. But this has not been done to the exclusion of parallels with other cultures, particularly Indian, Iranian, and Scandinavian. Moreover, the temptation to label Chinese mythical figures as "the Chinese Orpheus," "the Chinese Odin," or "the Chinese Prometheus" has been resisted in order to keep the cross-cultural parallels from converging on the line of inquiry and so endangering the authenticity and integrity of Chinese myth.

Modern Chinese and Japanese Studies of Chinese Myth

In a study of Chinese myth, William G. Boltz has reiterated a basic problem confronting Western Sinologists specializing in Chinese myth, namely, that for over two thousand years "the Chinese historized their mythology" (1981, 142). In fact, it was only as late as the 1920s that Chinese historians grasped the nettle of their traditional mode of historiography and historical method. The eventual process of disentangling the mythical era from the historical period was primarily due to the open-minded approach and clarity of vision of the young historian Ku Chieh-kang and other scholars, including Yang K'uan, in the decade and a half after 1926. (For a study of Ku's life and thought, see Schneider 1971.) Ku Chieh-kang has rightly been termed the "founder of modern mythological studies in China" (Mitarai 1984, 5). Ku, however, aroused considerable controversy between 1926 and 1941 when he published his views on the demarcation between history and mythology in a seven-volume collection of essays by himself and others, *Critiques of Ancient [Chinese] History*. Some of his ideas and methodology, such as the rigid dating of myth according to the known date of its textual *locus classicus,* have long since been rejected. But Ku's scholarly method of separating mythical figures from historical personages and of detaching the mythical age from the historical era constitutes a major contribution to the modern study of Chinese history, and especially to the study of Chinese myth, since he was the first to establish this as an independent discipline. Yang K'uan developed these ideas into recognizably mythologi-

cal formulations. For example, he reordered traditional "emperors" of antiquity into various categories of god, such as supreme being, earth deity, and so forth (K. C. Chang 1976, 169, citing Yang K'uan's preface to "A Discussion of Ancient Chinese History" [1941], in *Critiques of Ancient [Chinese] History,* vol. 7).

At the same time as Ku's monumental historical research appeared, other Chinese writers and scholars began to publish work on Chinese mythology which clearly acknowledged their debt to Western studies of myth. The most notable Western influences were Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* in 1871, Andrew Lang's *Myth, Ritual and Religion* in 1887, N. B. Dennys's *Folk-Lore of China . . .* in 1876, and Edward T. C. Werner's *Myths and Legends of China* in 1922. Dennys and Werner properly demarcated the line between history and other specialist disciplines, though they did not always make a sharp distinction between mythology and religion. It is significant that the work of Tylor and Lang, besides many other Western research works on myth, had a major impact on Chinese authors and writers of fiction in the 1920s and 1930s. The earliest of these was the novelist and short story writer Shen Yen-ping, or Shen Ping, otherwise known by his nom de plume of Mao Tun. In two essays on myth published in 1925 and 1929, he classified Chinese myth on thematic lines, such as cosmogony, nature myths, the origin of nature, the wars of the gods, myths of darkness, and metamorphoses. In his 1929 work, in particular, he drew on resources of comparative mythology, citing mythic narratives of the Australian aborigines and North American Indians, and of ancient Greece and India and Northern Europe. In 1928 another writer, Hsuan Chu, classified Chinese myth on a regional basis—those of North, Central, and South China—noting that most extant mythic texts derived from Central China. Hsuan Chu also organized myths into thematic categories under the general rubric of "Worldview," under which he listed motifs such as cosmogony, creation of humankind, giants, nature gods, heroic deities, monsters, and culture gods. His contribution is distinguished by the comparative method, and he was one of the first to introduce the myths of other cultures to Chinese readers.

In the 1930s a valuable research work on myth was published by Lin Hui-hsiang. In his *Mythology,* Lin presented the significant Western approaches to myth and offered a critical overview of the major specialists, notably F. Max Müller and Andrew Lang (Allen, 1982, 145–46). In 1932, Cheng Te-k'un made an important methodological advance by focusing attention on the myths of one classical text, *The Classic of Moun-*

tains and Seas. His system of classification was based not on thematic principles but on disciplinary or subject categories, namely, philosophy, science, religion, history, and sociology (1932, 127). For example, he subsumed myths on primal matter, cosmogony, and the creation of humans under the category of philosophy, and celestial and meteorological myths under science. But when he subsumed myths of divine beings and divine culture bearers under the category of history, he appeared to have disregarded Ku Chieh-kang's reconstruction of mythology and ancient history. Another important methodological advance was the publication of an article by K. C. Chang in which he showed the value of applying comparative approaches to the analysis of Chinese creation myths, citing the major authors in the discipline: Durkheim, Boas, Eliade, Bascom, Leach, Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski, Raglan, and Thompson (K. C. Chang 1959, 47–79). In a later study, in English, a chapter entitled "A Classification of Shang and Chou Myths," he usefully discussed the sources of Chinese myths and organized the classical narratives into a five-part typology including the separation of gods and heroes, natural calamities and human saviors, and heroes and their descents (K. C. Chang 1976, 149–73).

The novelist Chou Tso-jen was also influenced by Western mythology, especially the writings of Andrew Lang and Jane Ellen Harrison, and by anthropological and psychological studies. He argued (1950) for the authenticity and autonomy of myth as a subject in its own right and was instrumental in introducing Chinese readers to the mythical figures of ancient Greece (C. H. Wang 1977, 5–28).

One of the major writers and scholars who specialized in the study of Chinese myth in the 1930s and 1940s was Wen Yi-to. Basing his research on the classics, especially the *Songs of Ch'u, The Classic of Change,* and *The Classic of Poetry,* he attempted to combine the philological method of Müller with the anthropological approach of Lang. Wen's main contribution resides in two methodological approaches. First, he singled out an individual classic as a special focus for studies of myth, as Cheng Te-k'un had already done, instead of ranging across the broad spectrum of classical texts. Second, he devoted individual monographs to specific motifs, such as the fish motif (Wen Yi-to 1948, 1:117–38). Nevertheless, Chinese and Western scholars have criticized Wen's philological method as idiosyncratic and unscientific. His overeager tendency to identify totems such as the dragon or the snake with mythical figures has also been questioned on the grounds of a lack of evidence. Despite these drawbacks, Wen Yi-to ranks as the foremost

exponent of Chinese myth in the first half of this century (Allen 1982, 146–58).

Japanese researchers into Chinese myth, such as Izushi Yoshihiko in 1943, have generally followed the thematic principle of classification. In 1944, Mori Mikisaburō developed a more sophisticated classification system with a four-part division into the gods, ancestral myths, nature myths, and minor deities. More recently, Mitarai Masaru has devoted a monograph, *The Deities of Early China* (1984), to a variety of problems relating to Chinese myth. Like many Japanese research works, Mitarai's monograph is a valuable source of new research data, and it contains a thorough survey of traditional and modern problems in this field. His methodological approach, however, makes his otherwise useful work difficult to assimilate. He proposes the thesis that the foundation of China's protohistoric and historical dynasties may be identified with primeval gods and suprahuman figures who came to be associated with the emergence of the most important clans in antiquity. Interspersed uneasily among the discussions of this central thesis are fundamental cosmological myths and numerous important others, which, because of their artificial linkage to dynasties and clans of remote antiquity, are diminished in terms of their authenticity, narrative content, and mythic significance. Also published in 1984, Kominami Ichirō's *Chinese Myths and Tales* usefully discusses sources of myth in the post-Han era, besides the meaning of specific mythic themes.

A number of recent Chinese scholars have published impressive work in the field of comparative mythology, for example, Hsiao Ping, Ho Hsin, Tu Erh-wei, and Wang Hsiao-lien. They have produced a wealth of new data, but their work is not without its problems. Ho Hsin, for example, bases his work on myth on the outdated theory of solar myth propounded by Müller (1891) and deploys a dubious phonological argument for the primacy of a sun god in China and the worship of solar deities (1986). Similarly, Tu Erh-wei places undue emphasis on the lunar theory of myth, now equally outmoded as a monomythic approach. With little substantive evidence, he postulates the existence of numerous moon deities in the Chinese mythic tradition and argues for a lunar significance in narratives where none is to be found (Tu Erh-wei 1977). Hsiao Ping has written a monumental study of the myths relating to the classic *Songs of Ch'u* using a multidisciplinary approach with an emphasis on ethnology. The value of his work lies in his skill, convincingly backed by textual and ethnographic evidence, in tracing the living elements of myth motifs that have their origin in classical

myths. These vestiges are to be found in the minority peoples of China, and Hsiao Ping has produced impressive charts showing the recurring elements of vestigial myth in the present-day cultures of twenty-five different Chinese nationality groups (1986, 108–11). Today in China, research on mythology maintains an ideological stance based on the outmoded writings of Hegel, Marx, and Engels. At the same time, there is a marked difference between the readiness of pre-1950 Chinese writers to incorporate the findings of Western mythologists in their work on Chinese myth and the reluctance of post-1950 Chinese specialists to assimilate the developments in mythic studies throughout the world over the past few decades. The career and publications of Wang Hsiao-lien are an exception here. He has relied heavily on Japanese research on myth to develop his ideas and methodology. He has translated numerous Japanese articles and books into Chinese. In 1983 he translated Shirakawa Shizuka's (1975) *Chinese Mythology* into Chinese, and he has published a valuable survey of twenty-three Japanese specialists on Chinese myth (1977, 273–97).

For the past forty years the doyen of Chinese mythology has been Yuan K'o, a scholar at the Szechwan Academy of Social Sciences in Ch'eng-tu. Of his numerous contributions to the field, his two source books (1980.2; 1985) and his annotated critical edition of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (1980.1) constitute a foundation for the development of the subject. I am indebted to the pioneering research of this dedicated scholar whose work is acknowledged by the international community of Sinologists as an outstanding contribution to the emerging discipline of Chinese myth studies.

The Nature of Chinese Mythic Narratives

The piecemeal way in which mythic narratives were recorded in classical texts is compensated for by the inclusion of these texts, for the most part, in the body of canonical literature which scholars and aristocratic families in the period between the fourth century B.C. and third century A.D. sought assiduously to preserve and maintain. The mythic narratives have remained preserved in amber, in their original contexts of works on history, philosophy, literature, political theory, and various treatises and miscellaneous works, for over two millennia. Thus readers today can evaluate them in their earliest recorded form, in their original written context, and in all the variety of versions from one text to another. Because China lacked a Homer or a Hesiod, a Herodotus or

an Ovid, who recounted myth and shaped its content and style, early Chinese myth existed as an amorphous, untidy congeries of archaic expression. So, to the extent that it was not reworked and extrapolated from early texts into an *Iliad,* an *Odyssey,* or a *Metamorphoses,* it retained a measure of authenticity.

On the other hand, as Rémi Mathieu and others have pointed out, early Chinese writers of different intellectual persuasions who used myth may have distorted it in order to make better use of it in their works (1989, 12). Another major disadvantage of the manner of their preservation in various classical texts is that mythic narratives were deployed by writers of different persuasions to illustrate this or that point of view, and as a consequence the narratives often remained tied to and, to some extent, colored by that viewpoint. This is particularly noticeable in the philosophical work *Chuang Tzu,* dating from the fourth century B.C. For example, it is the sole source that preserved the myth of the P'eng bird, which metamorphosed from a monster fish, yet the reason for the recounting of that myth was to explain complex ideas of relativity and objectivity which were central to early Taoist thought. Similarly, the mythical figure of Shun in *Mencius* is identified with the ethical principle of filial piety, central to the humanistic doctrines of Confucianism, yet other mythic narratives in several classical texts relate contradictory aspects of this figure. The very existence of these variant versions is rewarding for the modern mythographer, since it permits a comparison of different modes of narrative and, in some cases, allows of a piecing together of a composite myth from overlapping fragments of the same textual period. It is because the corpus of Chinese myth is so rich in variant forms, perhaps uniquely so in respect of other mythological traditions, that in this book multiforms of a myth are presented together wherever possible, in order to give the reader an idea of the range, variety, and vitality of mythic expression.

The texts of the mythic narratives presented in this book may be classified into three main periods. The first is the pre-Han or early classical era from the middle to late Chou dynasty, that is, circa 600 B.C. to 221 B.C. Although the earliest written records date from circa 1300 B.C., discovered at the site of the Shang dynasty capital, Yin, near Anyang in Honan province, these texts, in the form of oracle bones, are mainly divinatory and are to do with religion, ritual, and mundane affairs. No myths are recorded among these oracle bones. Although no mythological texts from the archaic or historical Shang period exist, there is the

possibility that fragments of Shang mythic narratives have been preserved in the texts of the Chou period.

The main period for early classical mythic narratives is the Eastern Chou era, circa 450 to 221 B.C., and this late dynastic era is rich in texts. It is important to note that while it is true to say that myths preserved in the late Chou period constitute the earliest extant recorded version, this is not the same as their earlier pristine, or pure version, which cannot be known.

The second period of mythic texts is the late classical and postclassical eras of the Ch'in, Han, and post-Han periods, from circa 221 B.C. to the fifth century A.D. A textual problem immediately confronts us here because several important texts containing mythic material are of uncertain date in terms of the original compilation, and many such texts contain mythic material that belongs to a much earlier period than the conventional date of the text as a whole. It is safe to conclude that such texts represent a transitional phase between the late Chou and the Ch'in and early Han eras, in terms of much of their material if not of the biographical date of their author or compiler.

Texts dating from the Han proper and post-Han periods, between the first century B.C. and fifth century A.D., mark a sharp break from the earlier classical era because writers were beginning to modify, codify, distort, embroider, and erroneously explain early mythic narratives to such an extent that their mythopoeia created an alternative body of myth. Moreover, as Mathieu observes, one direct result of the unification of feudal states into one empire during the Ch'in and early Han eras was that a process of homogenization of local mythological traditions occurred (1989, 10). This mythopoeic and homogenizing trend is noticeable in several important texts of the period. In "Genealogy of the Gods," chapter 63 of *The Elder Tai's Record of Ritual* by Tai Te (first century B.C.) and in "Basic Annals of the Gods," the first chapter of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's monumental *Historical Records* (late second century B.C.) are to be found pseudobiographical data for the shadowy figures of the primeval gods of the early classical era.

Mythopoeia was not confined to the fabrication of biographies of the gods. Ssu-ma Ch'ien's history, the first history of the Chinese empire, records a pentad of gods, which in fact constitutes a new pantheon that differs fundamentally from the older pantheons. The Yellow Emperor, who was a latecomer to the primeval pantheons of the Chou mythologies, stands preeminent as the first and foremost god, the foun-

tainhead of Chinese civilization and cultural history. His new preeminence is due to the adoption of this deity by the Taoist philosophers whose doctrines were finding favor among the rulers of the empire. Although the mythic texts of this second period have to be approached with caution because of this mythopoeic tendency, they are invaluable for the way they demonstrate how mythologies evolve to meet the exigencies of social, intellectual, and political life. They are also important documents insofar as they contain surviving mythic narratives that do not appear in the Chou classical texts, or offer variant versions. For example, the eclectic writer Wang Ch'ung, of the first century A.D., alluded to a great number of fragments of myth for which his work *Disquisitions* is the *locus classicus*, and in some cases these fragments may be presumed to long predate their author (Huang Hui 1938).

The third period may be termed the traditional era of Chinese mythic narratives, that is, from the Sui-T'ang to the Ming dynasty, from the sixth to the early seventeenth century. The most valuable repository for this material is the Sung encyclopedias, which usually cite early texts verbatim. Another source is the commentaries of scholars from the seventh century and later, which cite authors several centuries earlier whose work has not survived. Whereas the texts of the first period are to be found in works of moral philosophy, political theory, and literature, the texts of the two later periods are much more general, ranging from commentaries on the classics, to alchemical handbooks, botanical treatises, local gazettes, geographical tracts, and ethnographic studies. Mythology, however, does not allow of classification into overly neat periods and all manner of "awkward" materials will be found obtruding from this tripartite time scale.

The Polyfunctionality of Myth
as an Organizing Principle

One of the major characteristics of myths worldwide is their polyfunctionality. That is, a mythic narrative may be read in many different ways and at several levels. For example, the myth of the Chinese deity Hou Chi may be viewed as a myth of the grain god, of the miraculous birth of a god, of the child hero overcoming attempts on his life, or of the inauguration of temple sacrifice to the grain god, and again as the foundation myth of the Chou people. Similarly, myths of the Yellow Emperor may be interpreted as facets of his contradictory roles of warrior-god, bringer of cultural benefits, peacemaker, avenging god, or,

later in the mythological tradition, the supreme deity of the Taoist pantheon, and yet again as the amalgam of homogenized local mythic traditions.

It is partly because of the polyfunctionality of myth that this book has been organized into chapters marked by thematic categories that underscore major worldwide motifs, such as cosmogony, the creation of humankind, etiological myths of culture and civilization, foundation myths, and so forth. In order to highlight the way in which myths may serve several functions, some narratives have been repeated within different thematic chapters to reveal their rich aspectual multiplicity. This scheme will be found to be not too different from the arrangements of motifs devised by Stith Thompson in *Motif-Index* (1955, 1:61–345).

Future Research on Chinese Myth: A New Dimension

This book offers a foundation in basic readings in mythic narratives, together with explications of the texts in the light of traditional Chinese scholarship and from the perspective of major developments in mythic studies worldwide and comparative mythology. Though I hope that this book will pave the way to a deeper understanding of and a wider acquaintance with the content and nature of Chinese myth, much research remains to be done. In fact, a supplementary volume of readings and analyses now waits to be compiled on additional versions of myths, minor mythical figures, and fugitive fragments, still within the confines of classical mythic texts.

Another rewarding line of inquiry, following on from the research of Wen Yi-to and others, would be to study the myths within individual classical texts and to compare them with other textual versions. Some major repositories, such as the *Huai-nan Tzu*, still await a full, annotated translation in the style of recent classical translations by Rémi Mathieu (1983) and Roger Greatrex (1987). Monographs could also be written on primary motifs, such as the flood, with all its ramifications of mythical figures, themes, and comparative elements. Mythic motifs or mythical figures might be examined from a diachronic and synchronic perspective to demonstrate the potency of a myth within a society over a historical period. The mythic traditions of the major belief systems of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism should be studied separately in orderly sequences of historical period, not lumped

together in a confusing hodgepodge. Thereafter the interplay among the three mythological systems could be explored.

At a more complex level, researchers equipped with linguistic expertise in the languages of non-Sinitic peoples along China's historical frontiers will be able to analyze myths preserved in Chinese texts from the aspect of non-Sinitic influences, or even origins. Technical monographs on the phonological elements of mythic narratives will no doubt throw light on the interrelationships among mythical place-names, plant names, and the singular or multiple names of deities. The important areas of Sinological ethnography, already under way in China with a new generation of scholars, will be vitalized by further interaction in the international sphere, especially with the translation of the best Chinese and Western monographs in this field. Studies on local and regional cults, peripheral to but dependent upon the main belief systems in traditional China, will add to our understanding of how religious belief functions in a specific community in a given historical period. Japanese monographs, too, which are continuing to make important contributions to the fields of anthropology, ethnography, archeology, and mythic studies, should be translated and discussed in an international academic forum. In taking up these essential areas of research, the next generation of scholars will be exploring new frontiers in this developing field of humanistic scholarship.