5

Miraculous Birth

An important mythologem is the manner of birth of mythical characters. The narratives relate many different forms of miraculous birth, such as the virgin birth of the divine founders of the Shang and Chou people. There are several accounts of birth from a divinely bestowed egg, a form of ornithomorphous hierogamy, as in the case of the founders of the Shang and Ch'in people, and also King Yen of Hsu. It is noteworthy that although there are numerous accounts of virgin births, the offspring are always male, which perhaps suggests that by the time the myths were recorded, they were cast in the idiom of a patriarchal society. The Country of Women is the only myth that narrates the survival of female infants, the males being left to die in infancy. Although the miraculous conception through a bird's egg is a recurring motif, gods and heroes are born from other things, for example, Ch'i, the son of Yü, who was born from a mother metamorphosed into a stone, and Yi Yin who was born from a dead mother metamorphosed into a hollow mulberry tree. Besides myths of virgin birth, there are mythical accounts of men born from a male, as in the case of Yü, who was born from his father's corpse, and the Country of Men, whose inhabitants give birth to male children through the center of their body. Another birth motif is the miraculous conception through bathing in a sacred pool, as with Chien Ti and the Country of Women.

Mythologists posit several theories for the multiplicity of miraculous birth in myth narratives. Certainly, the major factor would seem to be gender competition in accounts of the founding of a people, a family line, a cult, or a dynasty (Doty 1986, 126). Another factor is Raglan's hero pattern, in which the hero possesses several attributes, such as divine birth, survival of exposure as an infant, and the aid of the natural or supernatural worlds (Puhvel 1987, 162, citing Raglan 1937). The mythologem of miraculous birth has also attracted the attention of Freudian theorists, such as Otto Rank, who argued that these accounts often represent the hero's revolt against his father's domination, or the hero's revenge and retaliation against his parents (Rank 1909 as cited in Doty 1986, 144). The mythic narratives in this chapter cover a wide range of variants in motif, which often find parallels in mythologies worldwide.

Ti K'u

There are many radical differences between gods of Indo-European and Chinese mythologies, but none is so striking as in the matter of divine sexuality. Gods of the Indo-European tradition, such as the sky god, Zeus, had innumerable loves and children, and this love was not of the decorous kind pictured in late Western classical art but a savage lust inspired by demonic energy. The loves of Zeus are exemplified by his desire for Europa, whom he captivated and carried away by approaching her from the sea in the shape of a mild and playful bull; similar was his desire for Leda, whom he approached in the shape of a swan. By Zeus, Europa and Leda had Minos, Rhadamanthys, Sarpedon, Helen, and Polydeuces. By contrast, the gods of the Chinese tradition, such as Ti K'u, were less fortunate. Ti K'u was husband to two goddesses who bore two sons by virgin birth. Ti K'u is a significant figure in myth because of his role as husband of the goddess Chien Ti, who bore Ch'i, or Hsieh, the founder of the Shang people, and also as husband of the goddess Chiang Yuan, who bore Hou Chi, founder of the Chou people. Both births were by miraculous conception, not through Ti K'u. Thus Ti K'u is connected, if not paternally, then by affiliation, to the founding myths of the first two historically verifiable dynasties of China.

The first of the following readings is from the reconstructed fragments of *The Genealogical Records of Emperors and Kings* by Huang-fu Mi (A.D. 215–282). This Chin dynasty author was the transmitter and reformulator of late myths and legends about primeval deities. As his title

indicates, he created "official" biographies of the gods, supplying details of forebears, circumstances of birth, marriage, and offspring. Most of his material is of late mythographic vintage and cannot be corroborated by the early texts. It serves, however, as a fine example of the fashion for mythopoeia in post-Han intellectual circles.

The second reading is from the late Chou *Annals of Master Lü.* It purports to be an account of the origin of "Northern Music." The figures in the pretty drama are the major protagonists in the third reading, which is an account of the founder of the Shang people from the *Historical Records* of Ssu-ma Ch'ien. Several mythic motifs come into play here: music and a feast are often associated with love and nuptials; God is referred to as Ti; a bird, which is a swallow in the first version, a black bird in the second; the divine egg miraculously fertilized; the act of bathing, which often denotes regeneration or fertilization; the son who becomes a hero and brings order and peace to the world; the son born by parthenogenesis.

Attention has been drawn frequently to the unique demythologizing and humanizing style of *The Classic of History,* which, it will be recalled, begins in time with Yao. The account in *Historical Records,* in the third reading, is based on that in *The Classic of History,* which makes Ch'i or Hsieh a humble minister of the Golden Age ruler Shun and an assistant to Yü in controlling the flood, who is rewarded with the Shang fiefdom by Shun. The "five social relationships" are those between ruler and minister, father and son, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend.

> When Ti K'u was born, there was a divine miracle. He uttered his own name, "Ch'ün." (*Ti wang shih-chi,* TSCC 3701.8)

> The Yu-Sung clan had two glamorous daughters. They built a nine-story tower for them. When they ate and drank, drum music was always played for them. God ordered a swallow to go and look at them, and it sang with a cry like "Yee-yee!" The two daughters fell in love with it and each tried to be the one to catch it. They covered it with a jade box. After a moment they opened it up and looked at it. The swallow had laid two eggs. It flew away to the north and never came back. The two daughters composed a song, a line of which went, "Swallow, Swallow, you flew away!" This is, in fact, the first composition in the style of Northern Music. (*Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu, Yin ch'u,* SPTK 6.6b)

Yin Hsieh's mother was called Chien Ti. She was the daughter of the Yu-Sung clan and the second concubine of Ti K'u. Three of them went to bathe. They saw a black bird drop its egg. Chien Ti picked it up and swallowed it. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to Ch'i. Ch'i grew up and gave meritorious service in helping Yü control the floodwater. Emperor Shun therefore gave this command to Ch'i: "The people do not have close family relationships, and the five social relationships are in disorder. You will serve as my director of retinue." He gave him the Shang fiefdom and conferred on him the surname Tzu-shih. Hsieh flourished in the reigns of Yao T'ang, Yü Shun, and Yü the Great. His accomplishments were well known among the people, and so the people became peaceable. (*Shih chi, Yin pen chi,* SPPY 3.1a–b)

Chiang Yuan Gives Birth to Hou Chi

The earliest accounts of the virgin birth of Hou Chi occur in lines from two hymns in *The Classic of Poetry*, for which the latest date of compilation is circa 600 B.C. Poem 245, "She Who First Gave Birth to Our People," and poem 300, "The Sealed Palace," relate the myth in slightly differing versions. The latter is briefer, poem 300 being a poetic chronology of the Chou noble house of the prince of Lu, said to have been descended from Hou Chi and the founding rulers of the Chou, King Wen and King Wu. Poem 245 gives a fuller version of the myth and focuses more closely on the birth and life of the god Hou Chi. Both of the readings below were discussed in chapter 2, but here only the first half of poem 245, which narrates the birth myth and the three trials of the divinely born infant-hero, is presented (the first reading), as is the case in the prose version of the myth by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (the second reading).

It is worth enumerating the mythic motifs in these accounts: the ancestry of Chiang Yuan, her relation to the god Ti K'u, her erotic experience in the fields (in the prose version), the fertility motif of God's footprint, the miraculous birth without pain or injury, the three trials of the child god, signs of the protective presence of God in the people living close to nature and in the creatures of nature, and the mythic name Ch'i, the Abandoned.

It is always rewarding to compare two versions of a myth, whether they are of the same date or, as in this case, separated by five hundred years. Ssu-ma Ch'ien clearly rationalizes the mythic narrative of poem

245, on which he must have based his own account, and inserts explanatory data, such as names and Chiang Yuan's motivation for infanticide, but the historian excludes the fertility rite and Chiang Yuan's barrenness and the inauguration of the new temple rite to Hou Chi with its paean of praise to the glorious line of the Chou. With the advent of the Han empire, the mythic account, told by the court historian, has shifted away from a belief in the divine descent of the god Hou Chi and his people, the Chou, to a historicizing and humanizing biographical mode that subverts the mythic themes.

> She who first gave birth to our people
> Was Chiang Yuan.
> And how did she give birth to our people?
> She performed the Yin and Ssu sacrifices well
> So that she might not be without child.
> She trod in the big toe of God's footprint
> And was filled with joy and was enriched;
> She felt a movement and it soon came to pass
> That she gave birth and suckled
> The one who was Hou Chi.
>
> She fulfilled her due months
> And her firstborn came forth,
> With no rending or tearing,
> Without injury or harm.
> And this revealed the miraculous,
> For did not God give her an easy birth,
> Was he not well pleased with her sacrifice?
> And so she bore her child with comfort.
>
> She laid it in a narrow alley
> But ox and sheep suckled it.
> She laid it in a wood on the plain
> But it was found by woodcutters on the plain.
> She laid it on chill ice
> But birds covered it with their wings.
> Then the birds went away
> And Hou Chi wailed,
> Really loud and strong;
> The sound was truly great.

Then he crawled in truth;
He straddled and strode upright
To look for food for his mouth.
He planted large beans,
And the large beans grew thick on the vine;
His ears of grain were heavy, heavy,
His hemp and wheat grew thick;
The gourd stems were laden with fruit.
(*Shih ching,* 245, *Sheng min,* SPPY 17.1.1a–7a)

Hou Chi of the Chou was named Ch'i, the Abandoned. His mother, the daughter of the Yu-t'ai clan, was called Chiang Yuan. Chiang Yuan was Ti K'u's first consort. Chiang Yuan went out to the wild fields and she saw the footprints of a giant. Her heart was full of joy and pleasure, and she felt the desire to tread in the footprints. As she trod in them there was a movement in her body as if she were with child. She went on until her due time and gave birth to a baby boy. Because she thought he was unlucky, she abandoned him in a narrow alley. All the horses and cattle that passed by avoided treading on him. She moved him into woods, but she happened to meet too many people in the mountain woods. She moved him away and abandoned him on the ice of a ditch, but flying birds protected him with their wings and cushioned him. Chiang Yuan thought he might be a god, so she took him up at once and brought him up until he was fully grown. Because she had wanted to abandon him at first, his name was Ch'i. (*Shih chi, Chou pen chi,* SPPY 4.1a–b)

P'an Hu

The god Ti K'u, known by his other name, Kao Hsin, also features in the P'an Hu dog myth, and again he plays no biological role in the account of a miraculous birth. The theme of barrenness recurs in this narrative, this time in the person of a woman beyond childbearing age, "an old wife" of Ti K'u or Kao Hsin. The myth is preserved in the form of a folk tale, one of a collection compiled by Kan Pao in the fourth century A.D. Shorn of its fictional elements, the kernel is basically an etiological myth, that is, it relates the founding of a new people and a new social order. The dog myth contains two covert taboos: bestiality (copulation between a human and an animal) and sibling incest. Derk Bodde agrees with Wolfram Eberhard that this account constitutes an ances-

tral myth of the Miao and Yao tribes of South China (Bodde 1961, 383; Eberhard 1968, 44–46). It should be noted that although the names of the mythical P'an Hu and the cosmological demigod P'an Ku are phonetically similar, and although both myths appear to derive from South China, there is no connection between the two in terms of substance, motif, or meaning.

Kao Hsin had an old wife who lived in the royal palace. She developed an earache. After some time the doctor cleared her ear out to cure her and he removed a knob-worm as big as a cocoon. After the wife had gone out, she put it in a gourd basket and covered it with a plate. Soon the knob-worm changed into a dog and it had five-color markings. So it was named P'an Hu, Plate-Gourd, and she looked after it.

At the time the Jung-wu were powerful and successful and frequently invaded the border region. So he [Kao Hsin] dispatched generals to attack and quell the invasion but they could not capture or defeat them [the invaders]. So [Kao Hsin] issued a proclamation that if anyone in the world could capture the head of the commander in chief of the Jung-wu, he would be rewarded with a thousand catties of gold and would have the fiefdom of ten thousand households, and he would have the hand of his own daughter in marriage. Some time later, P'an Hu carried in his jaws a head he had captured and he carried it to the tower of the royal palace. The king examined it, and it turned out to be the very head of the commander of the Jung-wu. What was to be done about it? His courtiers all said, "Plate-Gourd is an animal, so he cannot have an official rank or a wife. He should not have the reward, even though he deserves it." His youngest daughter heard them and entreated the king, saying: "Your Majesty did promise me to him before the whole world! Plate-Gourd came with the head in his jaws and saved your kingdom from disaster. This was decreed by Heaven. How can it just be due to the wisdom and power of a dog? The king must weigh his words carefully; the chief earls must attach importance to their good faith. You cannot cancel an agreement that was pledged before the whole world just because of a girl's body—that would mean catastrophe for your kingdom." The king became alarmed and agreed with what she said. He ordered his youngest daughter to be a dutiful wife to Plate-Gourd.

Plate-Gourd led the girl up South Mountain. The grass and trees were thick and bushy and there was no trace of human footprints.

> Then the girl took her clothes off and became bonded to him as his servant, wearing clothes that she made as best she could, and she followed Plate-Gourd up the mountain. (*Sou shen chi,* TSCC 14.91)

Po Yi

The mythical figure of Po Yi, and his numerous namesakes, was discussed in chapter 2 with a special emphasis on his culture-bearing function of domesticating birds and beasts. Here he is examined in his role as the hero descended from a god through virgin birth in the generation of his grandmother, Nü-hsiu. The myth of this miraculous birth bears a strong resemblance to the myth of Chien Ti, consort of Ti K'u, mother of Hsieh (or Ch'i), the founder of the Shang people. The motif of ornithomorphous hierogamy had become a convention in Han biographies of gods, demigods, and heroes. Both of the accounts of Chien Ti and Nü-hsiu swallowing a divine egg and becoming pregnant come from the pen of Ssu-ma Ch'ien and have to be considered late mythological versions. The Han historian's tendency to rationalize and make consistent the protean stuff of myth is also evident in his fusion of two mythical Po Yi figures, one being the ancestor of the Ch'in people, the other a minister of Shun responsible for forestry and animal husbandry. As Karlgren noted, "it would seem that Sï-ma [Ch'ien] has confused two different sets of legends. . . . But there is, as we have seen, not the slightest support for all this in the pre-Han sources" (1946, 260, 261). In this version of the myth, Po Yi's name was originally Ta Fei, and this itself suggests that yet another fusion of mythical figures may have occurred.

> The ancestor of the Ch'in people was a descendant of the god Chuan Hsu. His granddaughter was called Nü-hsiu. When Nü-hsiu was weaving, a black bird dropped an egg. Nü-hsiu swallowed it and gave birth to Ta Yeh. Ta Yeh took the daughter of the Shao-tien as his wife, and her name was Nü-hua. Nü-hua gave birth to Ta Fei, who controlled the inundated earth with Yü. Once he had completed his work . . . he aided Shun in taming birds and beasts. (*Shih chi, Ch'in pen chi,* SPPY 5.1a–b)

Kun and Yü

The myths of Kun and Yü were related in chapter 3, with a focus on their function of saving the world from disaster. This chapter deals with the miracle of Yü's birth. Unlike other birth myths, in that of Yü's birth no female plays a role, and even female products, such as an egg, are absent. The birth of Yü is entirely a masculine event; he has no mother and he is born from the corpse of his executed father. The myth relates that his father, Kun, was executed for the theft of the self-renewing soil from God. From his unpromising beginning as the child of an executed criminal, Yü becomes a hero recognized and favored by God, who allows him to use his stolen gift to control the flood. Both of the readings of this myth exemplify the authentic narrative style of archaic myth. The first is from "Questions of Heaven," the second from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* circa the first century A.D. There is little or no logical explanation in these accounts and no sentiment, but there are the elements of savage action, abrupt accounts of metamorphoses, and an ending that resolves the conflict among Kun, God, and humankind.

There are several different versions of Kun's death in the late Chou texts. *Discourses of the States* and *Chronicle of Tso* relate that he turned into a bear, as does "Questions of Heaven." Other versions state that he became a dragon or turtle. A separate passage in the *Chronicle of Tso* recounts that Yao was the executioner, and another version that it was Shun.

> If [Kun] completed his tasks as it was willed, why did God punish him? He lay exposed on Feather Mountain for a long time, but why did he not decompose for three years? Lord Yü issued from Kun's belly. How did he metamorphose? (*Ch'u Tz'u, T'ien wen,* SPTK 3.6a–b)

> Floodwater dashed up against the skies. Kun stole God's self-renewing soil in order to dam the floodwater, but he did not wait for God's official permission. God ordered Chu Yung to kill Kun on the approaches to Feather Mountain. Yü was born from Kun's belly. So in the end, God issued a command allowing Yü to spread out the self-replacing soil so as to quell the floods in the Nine Provinces. (*Shan hai ching, Hai nei ching,* SPPY 18.8b–9a)

Yü, the T'u-shan Girl, and Ch'i

The account of the birth of Yü's son, Ch'i, is similarly archaic in form and content. The laconic narrative contains several motifs that have resonances with other myths of deities and heroes. Yü's metamorphosis into a bear links him with his father's dead spirit (in that version of the Kun myth which relates that Kun's corpse turned into a bear). The motif of food and drum music connect this myth with the narrative of Chien Ti, marking the Yü episode as his nuptial feast with the woman who was to bear his son. His son is conceived by an error, when Yü makes a sound like a drumbeat as his feet pound a stone in rhythmic ecstasy before his marriage. It is worth noting that ancient Chinese drums were made of stone, among other materials. The second metamorphosis in the narrative when T'u-shan girl turns into a stone links the birth of Ch'i to music and connects it to the myth of Ch'i (known as K'ai) receiving the gift of music from God. Other motifs are the godlike command of Yü that his son be brought forth from his mother's stone womb, and the miraculous splitting of the stone mother to reveal the child god. There is also the linked motif of Yü's error of pounding the stone and his later lameness, called "the Yü walk."

The source of this myth is significant for mythography. It is said by the T'ang classical scholar and commentator Yen Shih-ku (A.D. 581–645) to be a reference he located in a text from *Huai-nan Tzu,* compiled circa 139 B.C. That text, however, does not appear in the extant editions of *Huai-nan Tzu*. The only reference the latter makes to the Yü/Ch'i myth is: "Yü was born of a stone." Embroidered versions of the metamorphosis of the T'u-shan girl into stone begin to appear in the writings of Han commentators such as Kao Yu (third century A.D.), and Ying Shao (second century A.D.). The fourth-century commentator of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* Kuo P'u, however, specifies that the mother of Ch'i (K'ai) metamorphosed into stone and gave birth to Ch'i on the mountain (Mathieu 1989, 125). Thus the tradition of Ch'i's miraculous birth is confirmed by at least the early fourth century A.D. and probably derives from an earlier tradition.

The question the mythographer and mythologist must decide, therefore, is whether to reject the text of the myth supplied by Yen Shih-ku because it does not appear in extant editions of the putative source, or whether to accept it as authentic on the assumption that Yen was citing an edition of *Huai-nan Tzu* which is no longer extant but was available to him in the early T'ang dynasty. It will be recalled that most

extant editions of the classics were fixed in orthodox versions in the Sung dynasty, four centuries after Yen. Karlgren concluded in "Legends and Cults in Ancient China" that because Yen appears only to refer to the text in question rather than citing it verbatim, and because Han and post-Han commentators in general fail to cite the passage, it must be rejected as a valid mythic text of the late second century B.C. (1946, 310). On the other hand, Wolfram Eberhard, in his critical review of Karlgren's methodology in that article, countered Karlgren's rejection of the Yen Shih-ku passage with this general principle of mythographic methodology: "All Ethnologists and Sociologists accept the fact that a myth, a custom or a cult reported earlier than a second myth, custom or cult, must not be *a priori* older or more primitive than the second; otherwise no Ethnology would be possible! A myth reported only in a later text, may very well represent a form, reflecting quite an early state of development" (1946, 360). Additional support for Yen's text of the myth resides in its intrinsic style: its syntax is archaic, it lacks consecutive narrative links, it is laconic, and it lacks the explanatory material typical of later narratives. Of course, the text could be a forgery of the early T'ang era, but stylistically it is quite different from the T'ang mode of narrative.

> When Yü was controlling the floodwaters and was making a passage through Mount Huan-yuan, he changed into a bear. He spoke to the T'u-shan girl: "If you want to give me some food, when you hear the sound of a drumbeat, come to me." But Yü leaped on a stone and by mistake drummed on it. The T'u-shan girl came forward, but when she saw Yü in the guise of a bear she was ashamed and fled. She reached the foothills of Mount Sung-kao, when she turned into a stone and gave birth to Ch'i. Yü said, "Give me back my son!" The stone then split open on its north flank and Ch'i was born. (Yen Shih-ku's commentary on *Han shu, Wu-ti chi,* referring to a nonextant passage in *Huai-nan Tzu,* SPPY 6.17b–18a)

Ti Chün and His Wives

The god Ti Chün is a shadowy figure. He is linked to solar and lunar myths of the birth of the ten suns and the birth of the twelve moons through his two consorts, Hsi-Ho and Ch'ang-hsi (first and second readings). As in the case of Ti K'u, these myths appear to recount virgin births. Ti Chün, in his function of the god who came down to his two altars on earth, is also linked (third reading) to the ornitholog-

ical myth of the bird of paradise called Hsiang-ch'i-sha, translated by Mathieu as birds that throw back sand facing each other (1983, 1:541, 542 n. 3). (The fourth reading explains the names of these birds of paradise.) The god is also linked to solar myth through Yi the Archer, for it was Ti Chün who gave Yi the vermilion bow and plain arrows to shoot down the ten suns. Yuan K'o notes that in the great repository of classical myth, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* Ti Chün is one of the supreme gods, but in the evolution of myths he became a faded deity. Since this *Classic* is the only early text to mention the deity Ti Chün, and then only in fragments, it constitutes a valuable document for this mythical figure (Yuan K'o 1980.2, 107). Ti Chün is also made famous through his descendants, who, according to the same *Classic,* founded various countries and brought the gift of culture to these regions. The fifth reading mentions a local site named after the god. Some examples of these were presented at the end of chapter 2. It would seem that Ti Chün and his descendants belong to a quite separate mythological tradition, perhaps reflecting regional variation and cultural differentiation at the time of the compilation of the chapters of the *Classic* which preserve the mythic narratives, that is, circa the first century A.D.

The five readings that follow are from these later chapters of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas.* In the first passage the figure of Hsi-Ho appears. She was discussed in chapter 1 as a goddess connected with the etiological myth of sunrise and sunset. Several traditions prevail in respect of the identity and the gender of the deity. *The Classic of History,* for example, presents Hsi-Ho as one person, a male who was astronomer and cult master in charge of the calendar and solar divination. Other texts, following *Major Tradition of the "Ancient History,"* present Hsi and Ho as two males, the eldest brothers of two families who were astronomical cult masters. A third tradition, deriving from *Songs of Ch'u* (*Li sao* and "Questions of Heaven"), refers to Hsi-Ho in the singular as the charioteer of the sun, without specifying the gender. The *Huai-nan Tzu* indicates that the charioteer of the sun is female, without naming her. A fifth tradition, which has its source in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* narrates that Hsi-Ho is the mother of the ten suns, who looks after them following their day's journey through the sky, and that she is the consort of Ti Chün.

The mythical figure of Ch'ang-hsi is as shadowy as Ti Chün. Two traditions exist: (1) Ch'ang-hsi is identified as the male Shang Yi, astronomer and cult master who divined by the moon, according to *Annals of Master Lü;* (2) Ch'ang-hsi is identified in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*

(the second reading) as the mother of the twelve moons, who cares for them after their passage across the nocturnal world, and she is the consort of the god Ti Chün. Yet the identification of the two mythical figures as male court astronomers bears the hallmark of the historicizing impulse of texts like *The Classic of History* and has little to do with mythology. The number of the suns and moons engendered by Hsi-Ho and Ch'ang-hsi corresponds to the ten days of the week in antiquity and the twelve months of the year.

If the myths of Hsi-Ho and Ch'ang-hsi are removed from their Chinese context and compared with other mythologies, the goddess Hsi-Ho finds no counterpart among Hellenic or Roman gods of the sun Helios, Apollo, Phaeton, or Sol, but she does find an echo in the sun goddess of Japan, Amaterasu, though this goddess is authenticated only by late texts in the Japanese tradition. Ch'ang-hsi, on the other hand, has many female counterparts in the moon goddesses Phoebe, Diana, and Luna.

> Beyond the southeast sea, around Kan River there is the kingdom of Hsi-Ho. There is a girl named Hsi-Ho. She is just now bathing the suns in Kan Gulf. Hsi-Ho is Ti Chün's wife. She gave birth to the ten suns. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang nan ching,* SPPY 15.5a)

> There is a girl. She is just bathing the moons. Ti Chün's wife, Ch'ang-hsi, gave birth to the twelve moons. She is just beginning to bathe them. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang hsi ching,* SPPY 16.5a)

> Among the five-colored birds there is the Spit-the-Other-with-Sand, which made only Ti Chün a friend out of all those on earth below. This brilliantly plumaged bird presides over the emperor's two altars on earth. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang tung ching,* SPPY 14.5b)

> Birds of five colors have three names: one is Huang Niao [Divine Bird], one is Luan Niao [Luan Bird], and one is Feng Niao [Phoenix Bird]. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang hsi ching,* SPPY 16.2b)

> [Wei-] ch'iu is three hundred leagues in circumference. South of this mound is Ti Chün's bamboo grove. The bamboos are so big that each could be made into a boat. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang pei ching,* SPPY 17.1a)

King Yen of Hsu

King Yen is a shadowy mythical figure who is said to have ruled in the Chou era, in the tenth century B.C. according to one tradition, in the

seventh century B.C. according to another. The name of his kingdom, Hsu, was the name of one of the mythical provinces demarcated by Yü the Great which was traditionally located in the modern region of Shantung. The text of the reading, however, appears to place his kingdom in the Yangtze region. Eberhard more specifically situated the kingdom of Hsu in Hsu-chou, northern Kiangsu province (1968, 411). Yen's reign was characterized by remarkable political success, so the myth records, so that he attracted the enmity of the Chou ruler, who was overlord of a loose federation of states or kingdoms (*kuo*), including Hsu, and the southern kingdom of Ch'u, which was sent to vanquish Hsu.

The first reading is from *The Treatise on Research into Nature,* dating between the third and fifth century A.D. and was no doubt in part based on much earlier texts, such as *Shih Tzu* (fourth century B.C.) and *Hsun Tzu* (third century B.C.), which are the third and second readings below. The narrative in the *Treatise* contains several mythic themes. King Yen is projected as a hero miraculously born from an egg that was dropped by an elegant palace lady, who abandoned it out of shame; it was later hatched by a poor spinster. The egg motif is here linked to the dog motif, since it is a dog that finds the abandoned egg. The name of the dog, Ku-ts'ang, which means Wild Goose in the Blue Sky, connects the dog ornithologically with the divine egg, a connection with divinity, too, when the dog metamorphoses into a dragon, a creature of the skies. The name of the king's reign, Kung, after the miraculous discovery of a bow (*kung*) and arrow, also has a mythic resonance. King Yen's own name is circumstantial, deriving from his miraculous birth from an egg hatched at bedtime (*yen*). There is a mythic correlation, too, between the dog in this myth and the dog P'an Hu, since both narratives give an account at their close of the foundation of a new people and a new region. Thus the long myth of King Yen of Hsu embodies several major mythic themes: miraculous birth, the life and trials of the hero, mythical names, a divine dog metamorphosed into a dragon, discovery of divine weapons, the mercy and justice of a true leader, and the foundation of a new state.

The annals of King Yen of Hsu say that an attendant in the palace of the ruler of Hsu became pregnant and gave birth to an egg, but because she thought it was unlucky, she abandoned it by the riverside. A woman who lived on her own had a dog called Ku-ts'ang. He was out hunting on the riverside when he found the abandoned egg.

So he put it in his mouth and brought it home. The woman who lived all alone thought it was very strange, so she covered the egg to keep it warm. Later on it hatched and produced a baby boy. The time of its birth was bedtime, and so it was called Yen [Bedtime].

The attendant in the palace of the ruler of Hsu heard about it and went to reclaim him. The child grew up to be merciful and wise and succeeded the ruler of the kingdom of Hsu. Later, when the dog Ku-ts'ang was on the point of death, he grew horns and nine tails and, in fact, turned out to be a yellow dragon. King Yen then buried him. (In the region of Hsu you still today see burial clothes made of dog skin.) When King Yen had established his kingdom, his mercy and justice became well known. He conceived the idea of making a journey by boat to the sovereign state [of Chou], so he cut a watercourse between the states of Ch'en and Tsai. While the canal work was in progress, they found a scarlet bow and a scarlet arrow. He considered this to mean that he had won special favor from Heaven. So he took as the name of his reign Kung [Bow] and proclaimed himself King Yen of Hsu. The nobles of the Yangtze and Huai river areas all submitted to his authority. Thirty-six states in all submitted to him. When the king of Chou heard of this, he dispatched an envoy riding in a four-horse carriage. In one day he reached Ch'u state and ordered Ch'u to attack King Yen. Being a merciful man, King Yen could not bear to harm his people by fighting, and so he was defeated by Ch'u. He fled to P'eng-ch'eng in Wu-yuan district near the east hills. Those of his people who followed him numbered several tens of thousands. Later these hills were named Hsu Hills after him. People erected a stone house on the hilltop for the spirit of the place, and the people worshiped there. (Today it all still exists.) (*Po wu chih, Yi wen*, SPPY 8.3a–b)

In appearance, King Yen of Hsu had eyes that could not look down. (*Hsun Tzu, Fei hsiang*, SPPY 3.2a)

King Yen of Hsu had muscles but he had no bones. . . . King Yen of Hsu loved anything unusual. He dived deep into rivers and caught strange fish, and he went far into the mountains and caught strange animals. He laid many of them out on display in the courtyard. (*Shih Tzu*, SPPY 1.2a, 1.3b)

Yi Yin Is Born of a Hollow Mulberry Tree

Yi Yin is the great hero who aided T'ang the Conqueror in his epic struggle to defeat the last tyrannical ruler of the Hsia and found the Shang. If Yi Yin were an historical figure, his dates would be around 1766 B.C., that is, the traditional date (not historically verified) for the accession of T'ang, the founding king of the Shang. Yi Yin appears in most of the important late Chou texts, such as *Annals of Master Lü, Mo Tzu,* "Questions of Heaven," *Mencius, Hsun Tzu, Shih Tzu,* and elsewhere. In all of these he is portrayed sympathetically as the hero who rose to fame from humble circumstances. *Mencius,* for example, even elevates Yi Yin to the status of the exemplar of the good minister who exiles a "bad ruler" (the son of T'ang the Conqueror), making Yi Yin the archetypal Confucian hero.

The reading that follows is from the *Annals of Master Lü,* of the third century B.C. The narrative establishes the heroic character of Yi Yin from his miraculous birth to the beginning of his illustrious career with T'ang the Conqueror. It explains how Yi Yin acquired his name from Yi River (*yin* means 'chief'), how T'ang obtained Yi Yin's services through a ruse, and how Yi Yin in his initial career delighted his ruler with his superb cooking. It is noteworthy that in the version in *Mencius,* Yi Yin's early job is as a farmer, not as a chef (D. C. Lau 1970, 146). Other fragments of myth exist, however, which relate that Yi Yin was not so much a chef as ceremonial bearer of the sacrificial vessel (*ting*) used for cooking food for the gods (Allan 1981, 92 n. 18). If one probes deeper into this motif, it is possible to surmise that Yi Yin's specialized ritual knowledge brought him to the attention of T'ang, who sought to endow his rule with authority and legitimacy through proper socio-ritual observance. The motif at once denotes the humble status of Yi Yin and points to a sitiogonic myth.

The passage contains numerous other motifs: an abandoned baby who turns out to be a hero; a flood; a cradle of hollow mulberry; dead wood preserving new life; the mythical significance of mulberry, a world-tree associated with the rising sun; the oracular dream; the divine command not to look back home; punishment for disobeying the command; metamorphosis; the lowly cook as foster parent; the mortar presaging the hero's early career as a cook. Many of these motifs are to be found in hero myths and apocalyptic myths worldwide, such as Moses in the bulrushes and Lot's wife turned to salt, to draw on but one Western source.

The account clearly divides into two sections: the first contains the motifs that herald the coming of the great man; the second deals with a special rite. The mythic first half does not inform this rite; the rite does not enact the myth. The rite essentially has to do with the act of transference as Yi Yin moves from one social order, the Yu Shen, to another, the household of T'ang, the royal house. The rite has nothing to do with Yi personally, for he is said to be "a good man." The text says that this rite "cleansed him of evil," perhaps indicating the presence of a social taboo in respect of Yi Yin's association with another social group or class. Whether such a taboo operates because he will be preparing food for the future king, or for the king's gods, or whether it is because of his strange parentage, or because of his being an outsider is not made clear. The purification rite is considered a necessary stage before embarking on the great task awaiting him in the heroic service of T'ang the Conqueror.

> A daughter of the Yu Shen clan was picking mulberry [leaves] when she found a baby in a hollow mulberry tree. She presented it to her lord. The lord ordered his cook to bring the child up. When he inquired how this had happened, someone said that the baby's mother had lived near Yi River and that after she became pregnant a spirit told her in a dream, "If your mortar bowl leaks water, hurry to the east, but don't look back." Next day she did see her mortar bowl leak water, so she told her neighbors and hurried ten leagues to the east. But she looked back at her city—there was nothing but water. Her body then transformed into a hollow mulberry tree, which is why they called the baby Yi Yin. This is the reason why Yi Yin was born of a hollow mulberry tree. He grew up and became a good man. T'ang the Conqueror heard about him and sent a messenger to ask if the Yu Shen clan would let him have Yi Yin, but the Yu Shen clan refused. Yi Yin, for his part, wanted to serve in the household of T'ang the Conqueror. T'ang therefore asked the Yu Shen for a bride for him to marry. The Yu Shen clan was delighted and they made Yi Yin a guarantor to escort the bride. . . . When T'ang the Conqueror acquired the services of Yi Yin, they cleansed him of evil in the temple: they incensed him with *huan-wei* grass and bound some *wei* plants and set fire to them; they smeared him with the blood of a sacrificial ox and pig. The next day T'ang the Conqueror formally presided at court and gave Yi Yin an audience. He delighted T'ang the Conqueror with tasty dishes cooked to perfection. (*Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu, Pen wei,* SPTK 14.3b–4a, 14.5a)