



Goddesses

There are fewer goddesses in the classical Chinese pantheon than gods, and, with a few exceptions, goddesses are not equal in importance to the gods in terms of function, cult, or continuity of mythological tradition. Of the nineteen goddesses who feature in various myths throughout this book, ten are the focus of particular attention here. The most ancient in the textual tradition are Chiang Yuan, Nü Pa or Drought Fury, and Weaver Maid, who are mentioned in separate poems in *The Classic of Poetry*, circa 600 B.C. Chien Ti, Nü Kua, Fu-fei, and the T'u-shan girl also belong to the old mythology and appear in the fourth-century B.C. texts "Questions of Heaven" and *Li sao* of *Songs of Ch'u*. Next in the textual chronology are Heng O/Ch'ang O, Hsi-Ho, Ch'ang-hsi, the Queen Mother of the West, Woman Ch'ou, and Ching Wei, who appear in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* and *Huai-nan Tzu*, dating between the third and second centuries B.C., except for Ch'ang-hsi and Hsi-Ho, whose myths are narrated in late chapters of the *Classic*, dating from the first century A.D. O-huang and Nü-ying, the Hsiang queens who were wives of Shun, are first mentioned by name as the daughters of Yao in the sixth century A.D., although the two daughters of Yao are mentioned but not named in the late Chou *Classic of History*. The Dark Lady and Huang O first achieve importance in the period from the fourth to the sixth century A.D. The earliest reference to the

Goddess of Salt River is in the late classical era, but this account is probably based on an earlier oral tradition. Jasper Lady appears in the tenth century, being an amalgam of goddesses in the ancient Ch'u tradition of the "Nine Songs" of *Songs of Ch'u*, and in rhapsodies of the Han and post-Han eras, notably those epideictic evocations of goddesses by the pseudonymous Sung Yü, which were probably written in the third or fourth century A.D.

From a mythographic standpoint, of course, the first mention of some goddesses in a late textual source does not mean that they cannot belong to a much earlier oral tradition. Conversely, some deities, for example, O-huang and Nü-ying, who are identified as the daughters of Yao in the sixth century A.D., may originally have been independent divinities localized in the Yangtze region, a localization the author of our reading from the *Commentary on the Classic of Rivers* makes clear, since he refers to them by the name Hsiang, a tributary of the Yangtze.

The goddesses mentioned throughout this book do not include some well-known deities. Excluded are the goddesses Hsiang Chün or Princess of the River Hsiang, Hsiang Fu-jen or Lady of the River Hsiang, and Shan kuei or Mountain Wraith, who all appear in the "Nine Songs," dating from the fourth century B.C., in *Songs of Ch'u*. A second omission is the earth deity Hou-t'u, who is invoked in Han hymns. Mountain goddesses who appear in literary evocations in rhapsodies attributed to Sung Yü, a Ch'u author of the early third century B.C., are also excluded. These rhapsodies belong to pseudepigraphic literature, that is, anonymous pieces ascribed to a well-known name. A hiatus of seven centuries divides the era of the putative Sung Yü from these lyrically erotic rhapsodies, and their style is radically different from that of literary pieces known to date from the third century B.C. The main reason for their exclusion is that they belong to the literary tradition rather than mythological sources. They do not impart a myth; rather, they express religious, ritual, and imaginative verities.

The gender of some divinities is often obscured by their title. For example, the name of the earth deity is Hou-t'u: *Hou* signifies a hallowed title, such as Divine Lord or Divine Lady, or Lord or Empress, attached equally to females and males; *t'u* means earth or soil. Sinologists have been divided on the issue of the gender of Hou-t'u. Burton Watson favors the traditional rendition, "Earth Lord" (1961, 2, 59). Edouard Chavannes and Michael Loewe prefer the rendition "Earth Queen" (Chavannes 1910, 521-25; Loewe 1974, 28, 170-72). More recently, Rémi Mathieu has agreed with Chavannes and Loewe (1989, 195), and Wolf-

gang Münke has explored the issue (1976, 142-43). In a Han hymn recorded in Pan Ku's *History of the Han* of the first century A.D., which the historian dates from the reign of the Han Emperor Wu (141-87 B.C.), the earth deity is lauded thus: "Empress Earth is the rich Old Woman" (*Hou-t'u fu-wen*) (Birrell 1993, 35, 183 nn. 37-38). In the same set of hymns, a deity who is linked to the deity of Heaven, and who is therefore likely to be the earth deity, is praised thus: "Old Goddess is richly endowed" (ibid., 38). The female gender of Hou-t'u has, however, recently been rejected by David R. Knechtges, who, referring to the Han hymn, states that "the rich Old Woman . . . has nothing to do with the female sex" (1990, 312). He bases his evidence for this assertion on the opinion of a thirteenth-century A.D. commentator of the Han hymn, Wu Jen-chieh (d. ca. 1200), who claimed that *fu-wen* 'rich old woman' is a variant or corruption of *fu-yun* 'rich and fecund' (ibid.). Nevertheless, his argument on this point must be seen in the light of textual evidence proper. For it is well known that medieval commentators amended and manipulated classical textual readings in the name of variants, corruptions, or rare glosses to suit their argument, opinion, or point of view. A textual rule holds, however, that if the original, earliest text reads convincingly, it should remain intact; whereas if that text is garbled, then amendments are clearly allowable. In the case of the text of the Han hymn, preserved in an important traditional history, it clearly indicates a female gender for Hou-t'u, who must therefore be rendered as Empress Earth, or a similar feminine title. It is most likely that late commentators such as Wu Jen-chieh preferred to conceive of Hou-t'u as a male deity, and their preference, or prejudice, has filtered down to modern research and translation. Edward H. Schafer draws the same conclusion concerning the diminution of the role of the goddess Nü Kua in the T'ang dynasty (1973, 29).

The concept of Hou-t'u as a female deity certainly accords with similar deities in mythologies worldwide. Just as early textual evidence supports the view that the Chinese earth deity was female, so, too, it could be shown that the corn deity, Hou Chi, might be female, Empress Millet. Thus she would parallel the corn goddess, Demeter or Ceres, in the Greco-Roman tradition. The comparative method, however, is a double-edged sword here, and it could be equally argued that Hou Chi has his counterpart in the male Eleusian Triptolemus sent by Demeter to teach humans the art of agriculture.

It will be noted that several goddesses bear the name O or Huang, which are used as a prefix or suffix, and are known as stopgap names

or quasi-names. They are similar to the Greek name Hera, meaning Lady, to the name Eurydice or Wide-Judging, and Creusa or Princess, the feminine of Creon, Prince or Ruler. Such stopgap names are often applied to more than one mythical figure, such as O-huang, who is either the daughter of Yao or the wife of Ti Chün. Other goddesses have in their name the prefix Nü or Woman, such as Nü Kua, Nü Ch'ou, Nü Pa (Drought Fury), Nü Chiao, Nü-ying, and so on. Karlgren took the curious position, no doubt influenced here by paternalistic traditionalism, that Nü Kua might be a male deity, arguing that the word Nü in Nü Kua "does not necessarily indicate a lady" but could just form part of the general clan name Nü Kua (1946, 229). Yet when one analyses the function and role of deities having the prefix Nü in their names, one finds all of them to be distinctively female. Furthermore, no clearly male mythical figure bears the prefix Nü in his name. The only conclusion to be drawn is that deities bearing that prefix in their name must be female.

Although male deities predominate in the classical Chinese pantheon, female ones are often more mythologically significant in terms of their function and role. Nü Kua, for example, is both the creator of human beings and the savior of the threatened cosmos. Ch'ang-hsi is the mother of the moons; Hsi-Ho is the charioteer of the sun and the mother of the suns. Ch'ang O is another lunar deity. The Queen Mother of the West is ruler of the western paradise and a punishing goddess; she is also the deity who grants mortals the gift of immortality. Woman Ch'ou (Nü Ch'ou) and Drought Fury (Nü Pa) are the baneful demons of drought. Fu-fei is the river goddess of the Lo. Ching Wei is a doomed goddess, as is the star-goddess, Weaver Maid. The T'u-shan girl gave birth to the demigod Ch'i/K'ai. Chiang Yuan and Chien Ti were the ancestral goddesses of the Shang and Chou peoples. Thus the functions and roles of these female deities are diverse and significant: creation, the motion of celestial bodies, nature spirit, local tutelary spirit, mother of a god, consort of a demigod or a god, harbinger of disaster, donor of immortality, bringer of punishment, and dynastic foundation.

Nü Kua

The earliest references to Nü Kua are sparse and enigmatic. The "Questions of Heaven" asks, "Who shaped the body of Nü Kua?" indicating that she was unusually formed. The question also implies that

Nü Kua, the greatest primeval cosmogonic deity, was not the ultimate creator, since she was formed before she created humans. In this respect, the creatrix is similar to those other cosmogonic gods of mythology worldwide who create the world and humankind not *ex nihilo* but from preexisting matter and from a preexisting state. The *Huai-nan Tzu* relates that in the beginning of time, Nü Kua made “seventy transformations,” but it is not clear if this refers to her creative powers of changing and renewing the cosmos or to her own sacred metamorphoses. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* mentions “ten spirits whose name is ‘The Bowels of Nü Kua,’” which strangely describes a deity whose bodily form exists disparately, but in aggregate, in other supernal beings. These early traditions about Nü Kua always treat her as an independent deity and a major cosmogonic goddess.

In the Latter Han era, however, the process of relegating her to a minor role began with Pan Ku’s incorporation of Nü Kua as one of a number of minor deities subsumed under the major god T’ai Hao, whom he mistakenly identified as Fu Hsi (Karlgrén 1946, 230). Later in the Han period, Nü Kua’s divinity was further eroded when she lost her independent status and became linked to Fu Hsi as his consort, making a divine pair, like Zeus and Hera. In Han iconography she is represented with a body of a serpent entwined with Fu Hsi’s serpentine form. Edward H. Schafer offered a plausible explanation of the diminution of Nü Kua in the postclassical tradition: “Her gradual degradation from her ancient eminence was partly due to the contempt of some eminent and educated men for animalian gods, and partly due to the increasing domination of masculinity in the elite social doctrine” (Schafer 1973, 29).

The mythic motifs and themes in the readings have already been discussed in chapters 1 and 3.

People say that when Heaven and earth opened and unfolded, humankind did not yet exist. Nü Kua kneaded yellow earth and fashioned human beings. Though she worked feverishly, she did not have enough strength to finish her task, so she drew her cord in a furrow through the mud and lifted it out to make human beings. That is why rich aristocrats are the human beings made from yellow earth, while ordinary poor commoners are the human beings made from the cord’s furrow. (*Feng su t’ung-yi*, CFCE 1.83)

In remote antiquity the four poles collapsed. The Nine Regions split up. Heaven could not cover all things uniformly, and earth could not

carry everything at once. Fires raged fiercely and could not be extinguished. Water rose in vast floods without abating. Fierce beasts devoured the people of Chuan. Violent birds seized the old and weak in their talons. Then Nü Kua smelted five-color stones to mend the blue sky. She severed the feet of a giant sea turtle to support the four poles and killed a black dragon to save the region of Chi. And she piled up the ashes from burned reeds to dam the surging waters. The blue sky was mended. The four poles were set right. The surging waters dried up. The region of Chi was under control. Fierce beasts died and the people of Chuan lived. They bore earth's square area on their backs and embraced the round sky. . . .

Ever since then, there have been no birds or beasts, no insects or reptiles, that do not sheathe their claws and fangs and conceal their poisonous venom, and they no longer have rapacious hearts. When one considers her achievement, it knows only the bounds of Ninth Heaven above and the limits of Yellow Clod below. She is acclaimed by later generations, and her brilliant glory sweetly suffuses the whole world. She rides in a thunder-carriage driving shaft-steeds of winged dragons and an outer pair of green hornless dragons. She bears the emblem of the Fortune of Life and Death. Her seat is the Visionary Chart. Her steeds' halter is of yellow cloud; in the front is a white calf-dragon, in the rear a rushing snake. Floating, drifting, free and easy, she guides ghostly spirits as she ascends to Ninth Heaven. She has audience with God inside the holy gates. Silently, solemnly, she comes to rest below the High Ancestor. Then, without displaying her achievements, without spreading her fame, she holds the secret of the Way of the True Person and follows the eternal nature of Heaven and earth. (*Huai-nan Tzu, Lan ming*, SPPY 6.7b-8a)

Draught Ox and Weaver Maid

The earliest reference to the star goddess, Weaver Maid, occurs in poem 203 of *The Classic of Poetry* (see the first reading below), where she is personified as a hapless weaver. Draught Ox is also mentioned in the same poem and is juxtaposed with Weaver Maid. But the two stars are not linked in the poem, although the later tradition makes them lovers and then mates. Unlike other stellar myths, such as the Ch'en and Shen stars, and Fu Yueh, no myth exists to explain whether Weaver Maid and Draught Ox were metamorphosed into stars from suprahuman or human form, or whether the movement and pattern of the stars to which

their names became attached inspired their stellar personifications. Weaver Maid and Draught Ox stars are the equivalent to stars in Vega and Altair. Michael Loewe has shown that in the Han period, Weaver Maid star formed a triangle of three stars and Draught Ox star formed a straight line of three stars (1979, 112).

The primary intent of the reference to the stars in the poem from the *Classic* is to illustrate the themes of negative capability, failure, and uselessness. For although the weaver weaves, she never finishes her cloth, and although the ox is a powerful draught animal, it is not yoked to a carriage. It was in the Han era that the juxtaposition of the two star deities prompted mythopoeic poets to link the two romantically as unhappy lovers. The most famous expression of this occurs in poem 10 of the "Nineteen Old Poems" of the Han era: "Tears she sheds fall like rain. / River Han clear and shallow, / Away from each other — how much longer?" (Birrell 1986, 40, ll. 6–8). Mythopoeia has supplied a romantic liaison between the stars, and a reason for their separation is evident in the flooding waters of the River Han or Sky River, which flows between them and ebbs only once a year for them to meet. In the course of time, new legendary details were added, such as the sentimental feature of magpies flocking to form a bridge for the lovers on the seventh night of the seventh month. From the sixth century A.D. the figure of Weaver Maid rather than Draught Ox dominated the myth and legends of the two star gods. The second reading, from *Material Appended to the "Erh, ya" [Dictionary]* by Lo Yuan (A.D. 1136–84), reflects this development. In this text, the star goddess is given a divine genealogy, and she is more fully personified compared with her portrayal in *The Classic of Poetry*. Moreover, her place in the sky is localized; the purpose of her weaving is explained; the context of her marriage to the star god is given; the figure of God supersedes that of Draught Ox (making the father-figure more significant than the lover-husband); and a reason for her punishment is provided. Draught Ox never became a major mythical figure but played a minor role in stellar myth. It is possible that originally the star god was not human but a beast and that in postclassical mythography the implication of bestiality made him a taboo figure. His other name is River Drum.

In the sky there is Han River;
 It looks down and is so bright.
 And at an angle is the Weaver Maid;
 All day long she makes but seven moves;

Though she makes seven moves
 She does not finish her pattern.
 Dazzling is the Draught Ox,
 But he is not yoked to a carriage.

(*Shih ching*, 203, SPPY 13.7a-b)

East of Sky River is Weaver Maid, daughter of God in Heaven. Year by year she toils and slaves with loom and shuttle till she finishes weaving a celestial robe of cloudy silk. God in Heaven pitied her living alone, and allowed her to marry Draught Ox west of the river. After they married she neglected her weaving work. God in Heaven grew angry and punished her by ordering her to return to the east of the river, letting her make one crossing each year to be with Draught Ox. (*Erh ya yi*, TSCC 13.147)

The Hsiang Queens

A similar romantic tradition grew up around the two daughters of Yao (*Erh nü*), who became the wives of Shun. When Shun died on a tour of the realm at a place called Ts'ang-wu (probably in Hunan province), his wives drowned in Hsiang River. They became spirits of the river and were known by the river's name. But long before this myth evolved, local river goddesses of the Hsiang, the main river of ancient Ch'u, were already being worshiped and hymned, as attested by the Ch'u "Nine Songs" (Hawkes 1985, 104-9). Perhaps the earliest text to equate the two daughters of Yao with the Hsiang River goddesses was chapter 5 of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (third century B.C.), which is the third reading here. The later author of the *Commentary on the Classic of Rivers*, Li Tao-yuan (d. A.D. 526), incorporated local lore into his notes based on a Han book on China's rivers, and in his chapter on Hsiang River he added the legend that forms the first reading. It would seem that by his day the ancient river goddesses hymned in the Ch'u "Nine Songs" had lost their mythological and religious individuality and had become absorbed into a confused amalgam of river spirits of the Hsiang. Li Tao-yuan makes it clear that the haunt of the drowned wives of Shun was the area of Lake Tung-t'ing (Hunan), into which several rivers drain, including the Hsiao and Hsiang rivers. By the Ming dynasty the lore of the two spirit queens had become so well known and well loved that their name was given to a species of bamboo. The second reading is from the Ming text *A Botanical Treatise* by Wang



*Figure 9. Ch'ang O ascending to the crescent moon, with the elixir-bearing toad and hare. Funerary Ch'u silk painting, Tomb of the wife of the Marquis of Tai, Ma-wang-tui, Ch'ang-sha, Hunan province, circa 190 B.C. From Wen-wu, *The Western Han Silk Painting* (1972), detail from Fig. 1.*

Hsiang-chin (1561-1653). A biography full of mythical, legendary, and fictional elements appears in *Biographies of Women* (*Lieh nü chuan*, SPPY 1.1a-2a).

They say that when Shun the Great made a royal tour of his territories, his two queens followed the expedition. They drowned in Hsiang River, and their spirits wandered over the deeps of Lake Tung-t'ing and appeared on the banks where the Hsiao and Hsiang rivers meet. (*Shui ching chu*, *Hsiang shui*, SPTK 38.14a)

The local speckled bamboo are very beautiful, and in the Wu area the speckled bamboo is called the Hsiang queens' bamboo. The speckles on it are like tear stains. (*Ch'ün fang p'u*, *Chu p'u*, CFPCS 5.139)

A further 120 leagues southeast is the mountain called Tung-t'ing. On the mountaintop there is a lot of yellow gold, and at the base a lot of silver and iron. The mountain trees are full of *tzu*-trees, pear trees, tangerine trees, and pomelos, and there are many plants—*chien*-fragrant grass, *mi-wu* grass, *shao-yao* peony, and *ch'ung-ch'iung* grass. The god's two daughters live on the mountain. They often wander over the depths of the river in the breezes blowing from the Li and Yuan rivers where they meet in the deep waters of the Hsiao-Hsiang confluence in the region of Kiukiang. And every time the waters of these rivers ebb and flow, there is always a raging wind and driving rain. And there are many strange spirits who look like humans and wear snakes on their head, and they hold snakes in their left and right hands. And there are many strange birds there. (*Shan hai ching*, *Chung tz'u shih-erh ching*, SPPY 5.41b-43a)

Woman Ch'ou

The three narratives of Woman Ch'ou (Nü Ch'ou) from *The Classic of Mountains of Seas* are rich in mythic motifs. They display the incongruities, oddness, and paradox of authentic myth. The first two readings date from the first century A.D., the third from the second century B.C. The first narrative relates that "there are two people in the sea," but, paradoxically, only Woman Ch'ou is mentioned. Her attribute of a crab may be explained as a symbol of regeneration and as a creature that knows the ways of the sea and the lie of the land. Since the crab periodically sheds its shell and reveals fresh skin underneath, there is a widespread belief that it never dies (Malinowski 1954, 129; Frazer 1984,

90). The *Huai-nan Tzu* links the regenerative power of the crab with the moon, stating that the crab waxes and wanes with the moon (Mathieu 1983, I: 497 n. 3, citing *Huai-nan Tzu* 4.5b). The name Ch'ou signifies the second of the Twelve Earthly Branches of the ancient calendrical system, and also a period of time, the nocturnal hours between 1.00 and 3.00 A.M.

Further paradox is evident in the second and third readings, which relate that the goddess's name was Woman Ch'ou Corpse, stating that "Woman Ch'ou Corpse was born." Besides this corpse deity, the *Classic* describes or refers to ten other corpse deities. The paradox signifies life in death and death in life. Woman Ch'ou's function is to counter the effects of drought by self-immolation, from which she is reborn because she never truly dies. Her deformity from being scorched by the sun she hides with her sleeve, or in the variant, with her right hand. Her rebirth is marked by the green clothes she wears, a color emblemizing life and cyclical renewal: green signifies water, vegetal growth, and so life itself. It is emblematic of the thing desired. The same *Classic* relates that the other drought deity, Drought Fury or Nü Pa, was "dressed in green clothes." Like Drought Fury, Woman Ch'ou is virginal, as are other generative deities in mythology. The last reading narrates, "Where the ten suns are up above, Woman Ch'ou lived there on the top of the mountain," thus linking the goddess to the nexus of solar myths, in which Ti Chün, Yi the Archer, Hsi-Ho, and K'ua-fu play a role. Commentators have sought to establish that this and similar mythic narratives point to the practice of sacrificing shamanesses to the sun in times of drought, interpreting the myth in sociological terms (Mathieu 1989, 49 n. 1). Yet the mythic motifs are so complex and profound that such a reading would seem to be too narrow.

There are two people in the sea. Her name is Woman Ch'ou. Woman Ch'ou has a large crab. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang tung ching*, SPPY 14.5a)

There was a person who wore green clothes and hid her face with her sleeve. Her name was Woman Ch'ou Corpse. (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang hsi ching*, SPPY 16.4a)

Woman Ch'ou Corpse was born, but the ten suns scorched her to death. That was north of the Land of Men. She screened her face with her right hand. Where the ten suns are up above, Woman Ch'ou lived there on the top of the mountain. (*Shan hai ching, Hai wai hsi ching*, SPPY 7.2b)



Figure 10. The Queen Mother of the West, with *sheng* head-dress, seated on her leopard throne, attended (clockwise) by the nine-tailed fox, the kneeling hare offering an elixir, two officials, the trance-dancing toad, a crouching suppliant, the three-legged crow of the sun, and a standing guard. Rubbing from a funerary carved brick, 38 cm. high, 18 cm. wide. Latter Han, Ch'eng-tu, Szechwan Provincial Museum Collection. From Shih Yen, *Chung-kuo tiao-su shih t'u lu*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jenmin mei-shu), 1983, 248.

The Queen Mother of the West

The Queen Mother of the West is not a primeval cosmogonic deity but a goddess who appears comparatively late in the mythological tradition during the late Chou and early Han periods. The name West Mother (*Hsi-mu*), however, appears very early in Chinese culture, being inscribed on Shang oracle bones (thirteenth century B.C.) in the context of animal sacrifice. The Queen Mother of the West is first mentioned in *Chuang Tzu* in the fourth century B.C., together with primeval deities such as Fu Hsi, the Yellow Emperor, Chuan Hsu, and some lesser gods, but this is only a scant reference. She is not mentioned in any other

Chou text. In one late text, *Hsun Tzu* of the third century B.C., the name refers only to the western kingdom.

The first readings relate myths about the goddess and describe her attributes. Of these four readings from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the first and third date from the third century B.C.; the second is from the second century B.C., the fourth from the first century A.D. The goddess portrayed in the narratives appears like the Greek goddess, Artemis, a "lady of wild things," and a "lion unto women" (Rose 1970, 127). Like Artemis, she is a goddess of the wilds, far from human habitation and cultivation. The Queen Mother of the West is a deity who presides over a mountain wilderness in the west and lives among wild beasts. In these accounts she is described as a human with unkempt hair, a panther's tail, and tiger's fangs, and she has a retinue of feline beasts and birds that bring her messages and food. Her only civilizing features are the symbolic *sheng* head ornament she wears, a sort of crown, and her staff, a sort of scepter. Her mountain realm is designated as being in the west, and it is said to be the sacred mountain range of K'un-lun. This is an *axis mundi*, a holy place poised equally between sky and land, Heaven and earth, and is visited by gods. It is a paradise for mortals who have been favored with the gift of eternal life and those who have a communion with the gods. Like Artemis, too, whose name means Slaughterer or Butcher, the Queen Mother of the West's other attribute is that she is a plague bringer and an avenging goddess.

In her later manifestation, the Queen Mother of the West, like the monstrously ugly Gorgo, who in early myth was hairy and wild, is represented as a beautiful female divinity. This is well illustrated by the fifth reading, a long narrative from *The Chronicle of Emperor Mu*, which is believed to date from the fourth century B.C. but is probably a post-Han fictional romance. The narrative depicts the Queen Mother of the West in her civilized aspect, behaving like a dignified queen in her exchange of diplomatic gifts and polite courtesies with King Mu, the fifth king of the Chou dynasty (trad. 1001-947 B.C.). Many legends are attached to his name, such as the anecdote preserved in *Lieh Tzu* about the inventor Master Yen. The *Lieh Tzu* contains a chapter entitled "King Mu of Chou," which relates many of these traditional tales. The text of *The Chronicle of Emperor Mu* purports to be much earlier than *Lieh Tzu*, a fourth-century A.D. forgery. The *Chronicle* was allegedly discovered in A.D. 281 when a graverobber named Pu Chün stole treasures from the grave of King Hsiang of the Wei state, a late Chou ruler who died between 319 and 296 B.C. The style of the *Chronicle*, however, bears

many resemblances to the fictional romances combining poetry and prose which began to be popular in the Six Dynasties era, circa the fourth to fifth century A.D., and the story of the discovery in the tomb might well be apocryphal (see Mathieu's study of the text and translation, 1978).

It is clear from the mythic narratives of the Queen Mother of the West that, like many other mythical figures, she is polyfunctional and ambiguous. Moreover, her attributes and functions evolve over the centuries in accordance with the changing values of myth in society. Thus she moves with relative ease from the role of wild and savage deity, the avenging goddess, to cultured and humanized queen, the audience-granting monarch. It is in her latter role and function that she is generally recognized by most Sinologists. Yet this is a role described in such a late mythic narrative, *The Chronicle of Emperor Mu* [of the Chou], dating between the third and fourth century A.D., that it cannot serve as the pristine image of the goddess. In his recent article on the Queen Mother of the West (*Hsi wang mu*), Riccardo Fracasso summarized the views and speculations of several Sinologists concerning the elusive and enigmatic function of the goddess in the earliest extended narrative, that is, the first reading below, from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a passage dating from the late Chou period (ca. third century B.C.). In this text the Queen Mother of the West is stated to be "the official in charge of vile plagues sent from Heaven, and of the five dread evils." This translation disguises the fact that it allows of several renditions and interpretations, ranging from the goddess's power over the stars Li and Wu ts'an, to her power over the disasters visited by Heaven on earth for crimes, or to her control of baneful spirits. Fracasso concludes his summary of these versions and views of the meaning of the phrase "T'ien chih li chi wu ts'an" by drawing a significant parallel between the Tibetan goddess Kha la me 'bar ma, with her attendant "masters of illnesses" and "masters of epidemics" (Fracasso 1988, 15, 32, citing Wojkowitz 1977, 269-73, 303, 308). In my view his mythic parallel convincingly elucidates the Queen Mother of the West's earliest role as an avenging goddess, awesome in her divine power.

The major attribute of the Queen Mother of the West is her power to confer immortality, and it is this that comes into play in the later mythological and literary tradition. She is pictured in traditional iconography holding her staff (scepter or wand) in her left hand and a basket of the peaches of immortality in the other. The peaches were fabled to ripen only once in every three thousand years. The fruit may be

mythically linked to the giant cosmic peach tree, which serves as a massive sky-ladder three thousand leagues across for the gods to descend and ascend (see chap. 14). Her function of bestowing immortality, however, was a late invention and is not mentioned in early texts. Even in the *Chronicle* she only expresses a wish to the earthly ruler, "May you never die," and "For you alone does Heaven wait"; otherwise, the account is devoid of the trappings of immortality which characterize later texts. The earliest textual reference to the goddess's power to confer immortality occurs in *Huai-nan Tzu*, in the narrative about Ch'ang O, who stole the drug of immortality from Yi, who had obtained it from the goddess. In later texts, such as *The Old Fable of [Emperor] Wu of the Han* and *The Inner Chapters of Emperor Wu of the Han*, the royal visit of a Chinese king or emperor to the goddess is elaborated, but the theme shifts from immortality to longevity, showing that the potency of the myth of immortality was commencing to wane.

Another three hundred and fifty leagues west is a mountain called Jade Mountain, which is where the Queen Mother of the West dwells. In appearance the Queen Mother of the West is like a human, with a panther's tail and a tiger's fangs, and she is a fine whistler. In her tangled hair she wears the *sheng* crown. She is the official in charge of vile plagues sent from heaven, and of the five dread evils. (*Shan hai ching*, *Hsi tz'u san ching*, SPPY 2.19a-b)

The Queen Mother of the West reclines on a bench throne and wears the *sheng* crown on her head and holds her staff in her hand. South of her are three bluebirds who gather food for the Queen Mother of the West north of K'un-lun void. (*Shan hai ching*, *Hai nei pei ching*, SPPY 12.1a)

Another two hundred and twenty leagues west are the mountains of San-wei, where the three bluebirds live. This mountain is one hundred leagues around. (*Shan hai ching*, *Hsi tz'u san ching*, SPPY 2.22a)

There are three bluebirds with scarlet heads and black eyes. One is called the Greater Blackfeather, one is called the Lesser Blackfeather, and one is called the Bluebird. (*Shan hai ching*, *Ta huang hsi ching*, SPPY 16.3b)

On the lucky *chia-tzu* day the emperor was the guest of the Queen Mother of the West. Then, bearing the white jade tablet and the dark jade disc of monarchy, he had an audience with the Queen Mother of the West. As a token of good will, he presented her with a brocade

sash embroidered in a hundred colors and a [textual lacuna] embroidered in three hundred colors. The Queen Mother of the West accepted them with repeated bows of thanks. On the [textual lacuna] *yi-ch'ou* day, the emperor held a banquet in honor of the Queen Mother of the West beside Jasper Pool. The Queen Mother of the West sang an unaccompanied song for the emperor which went:

White clouds in the sky,
 Hilly mounds rise up through them.
 Miles of road far ahead,
 Mountains and streams crossing it.
 May you never die
 So you can return to us again.

The emperor answered her with a poem that went:

I must go home to my land in the east
 To govern all the Hsia in peace.
 When the myriad people are settled and at peace
 I will want to visit you.
 Within three years
 I will return to your wilds.

The Queen Mother of the West sang another ditty for the emperor which went:

Ever since I went to this land in the west
 I have lived in these wilds.
 Tigers and panthers form my pride,
 Crows and jays nest with me.
 I enjoy my life and will not move.
 I am the Emperor of Heaven's daughter.
 How I pity all humankind
 For they are parted from you.
 Blow the panpipes, beat the panpipe tongues!
 Let your mind soar on high,
 Master of humankind,
 For you alone does Heaven wait.

Then the emperor drove his horses and ascended Mount Yen. Then he recorded an inscription on a rock on Mount Yen and planted a locust tree there with a sign inscribed "the Queen Mother of the West's Mountain." (*Mu T'ien-tzu chuan*, SPPY 3.1a-2a)

Ch'ang O

The mythical figure of Ch'ang O, or Heng O, has been discussed in the context of the myths of Yi the Archer. The motifs of the narratives will be summarized here. The earliest reference to this deity in *Huai-nan Tzu* uses the name Heng O. Rémi Mathieu notes that the name Heng violated the taboo name of Emperor Wen of the Han (r. 180-157 B.C.) and was replaced by Ch'ang, although in the late Han period the name Heng was restored (1989, 56 n. 2). She is not the only lunar goddess; there is a mythic narrative that relates that Ch'ang-hsi gave birth to the twelve moons and cared for them after their passage across the sky. The *Ch'ang* of Ch'ang O is written with the female radical, *Ch'ang* of Ch'ang-hsi without, but the two names are the same; the *hsi* of Ch'ang-hsi is the same as in Hsi-Ho, and in Fu Hsi. The two major motifs in the Ch'ang O narratives are her theft and her metamorphosis. Her theft is not of the altruistic kind exemplified by Kun; but, like Kun, she belongs to the trickster category of figures in mythology. Her metamorphosis into a toad may be read as her punishment by a higher god. This reading is the earliest reference to the Queen Mother of the West's role as donor of immortality.

Yi asked the Queen Mother of the West for the drug of immortality. Yi's wife, Heng O, stole it and escaped to the moon. She was metamorphosed on the moon and became the striped toad Ch'an-ch'u, and she is the essence of the moon. (Subcommentary of *Ch'u hsueh chi*, citing *Huai-nan Tzu*, SPCY 1.4a)

Jasper Lady

The goddess Jasper Lady, Yao-chi, is a late invention whose name is derived from Taoistic epithets based on a jadelike substance, believed to be the purest and most refined of mundane things. In this she resembles divine women described in post-Han rhapsodies. Similarly, her image is based on mythopoeic evocations of the fertility goddess of Mount Kao-t'ang and Mount Wu, place-names that are mentioned in the reading that follows. The reading consists of a long narrative from *A Record of Immortals, Compiled in Yung-ch'eng* by Tu Kuang-t'ing (A.D. 850-933). It relates how the powerful goddess Jasper Lady helped Yü to control the flood. Without her aid, the narrative persuades, Yü would not have succeeded; Yü's role is to be helpless and subservient before the divine woman.

Tu Kuang-t'ing lived in Ch'eng-tu (Szechwan province) in the late T'ang era and was a Taoist priest who wrote many pieces on magic and alchemy. His most famous work is the fictional tale (*ch'uan-ch'i*) "The Man with the Curly Beard," which deals with the legendary theme of the foundation of the T'ang dynasty. The title of the miscellany from which the narrative of Jasper Lady is taken contains the mythic place-name Yung-ch'eng, which evokes a place in western Shu (Szechwan) where the Queen Mother of the West was believed to live. Numerous fictional elements appear in Tu's tale which are typical of a T'ang romance: an opening genealogy of the goddess which is further elaborated in the narrative; miraculous conception; magical techniques and metamorphoses; atmospheric place-names; literary references; descriptions of nature; a supernatural storm; arcane scripture; a bejeweled fairy palace; the color motifs of cinnabar, signifying immortality; black, symbolizing here the occult; and purple, emblematic of the Taoist pantheon. It is clear from Tu's treatment of the ancient demigod Yü and his elevation of the newly invented Taoist deity Jasper Lady, together with his inclusion of Taoist motifs, that he has utilized mythological themes and figures for the purposes of fiction and, in so doing, has subverted their ancient values and meaning in order to subordinate them to the interests of Taoist belief prevalent in the medieval age of the late T'ang period.

Lady Yun-hua was the twenty-third daughter of the Queen Mother and the younger sister of Princess T'ai-chen. Her personal name was Yao-chi, Jasper Lady. She had been granted the techniques of causing whirlwinds, fusing substances, creating myriad visions, refining divine beings, and flying away in different shapes and forms. She happened to be roaming away from the area of the east sea and was passing by the river when Mount Wu came into view. Its peaks and cliffs jutted out sharply, and wooded ravines were darkly beautiful, with gigantic rocks like an earthly altar. She lingered there for a long while. At that time, Yü the Great was controlling the floods and was living near the mountain. A great wind suddenly came, making the cliffs shudder and the valleys collapse. There was nothing Yü could do to prevent it. Then he came upon the lady, and bowing to her, he asked her for her help. She at once commanded her handmaid to bring Yü the *Book of Rules and Orders* for demons and spirits. Then she ordered her spirits, K'uang-chang, Yü-yü, Huang-mo, Ta-yi, Keng-ch'en, T'ung Lü, and others, to help Yü to hew rocks in order

to clear the spurting waves and to dredge blocked riverbeds to conduct water through the narrow places, so as to ease the flow of water. Yü bowed to them and thanked them for their help.

Yü wished to visit the lady on the summit of the soaring pinnacle, but before he could look around, she had turned into a rock. Now she suddenly flies around, dispersing into light cloud, which grows dense, then stops, and condenses into an evening shower. Now she turns into a roving dragon, now into a soaring crane. She takes on a thousand appearances, ten thousand shapes. It was impossible to approach her. Yü suspected she might be a treacherous phantasm, not a true immortal, so he asked T'ung Lü about her. Lü said, ". . . Lady Yun-hua is the daughter of the Mother of Metal. . . Hers is not a body that dwelt naturally in the womb, but it is the vapor from the pale shadow of West Hua. . . When she comes among humans, she turns into a human, among animals she turns into an animal. Surely she is not limited to the shape of clouds or rain, or a dragon, or a stork, or a flying swan, or wheeling phoenix?" Yü thought what he said was right.

Later on, when he did go to visit her, he suddenly saw a cloudy tower and a jade terrace, a jasper palace with jade turrets, which looked magnificent. Standing on guard were spirit officers whose names were unknown: lions held the gates, horses of Heaven made way, vicious dragons, lightning animals, eight guards stood by the palace pavilions. The lady was sitting quietly on the jasper terrace. Yü bowed his head very low and asked about the Way. . . Then the lady ordered her handmaid, Ling Jung-hua, to bring out a small cinabar-red jade box. She opened it and lifted up a priceless document in a distinguished script and presented it to Yü. Yü bowed low as he accepted it and then he left. He also gained the help of Keng-ch'en and Yü-yü, so that in the end he managed to direct the waves and contain the rivers, and he succeeded in accomplishing his task. He made fast the Five Peaks and demarcated the Nine Provinces. Heaven therefore conferred on him the Black Jade insignia and made him the True Man of the Purple Palace. (*T'ai-p'ing kuang chi*, citing *Yung-ch'eng chi hsien lü*, JMWH 56.347-49)

The Goddess of Salt River

The myth of the Goddess of Salt River derives from fragments of a text entitled *The Origin of Hereditary Families*, which dates from the

Ch'in/Han era, circa late third to early second century B.C. These fragments were collated and edited, and also in part reconstructed, by Ch'in Chia-mo and other Ch'ing scholars to form a consecutive narrative about the larger myth of the origins of the Pa tribe of Szechwan. The mythological genealogy of the Pa is related in the first reading, which comes from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, in a late chapter dating from the first century A.D. The second reading is from Ch'in Chia-mo's reconstructed text.

The myth of the goddess forms a part of the narrative of the trials and ultimate success of the hero, the Lord of the Granary, who was of the Pa tribe. It relates the aggressive encounter between the hero and the goddess, which constitutes one of the hero's trials before he becomes leader of his people and ruler of a new city-kingdom. The goddess is cast in the role of a malign deity whose evil is foiled by the resourceful hero. In its colorful drama and its depiction of the hero as a cunning adversary, the myth is reminiscent of myths of Odysseus, who defeated his enemies by his cunning, resourcefulness, and courage. The cunning of the Lord of the Granary is evident in the gift he offers the goddess: it is a green silk cord, which she accepts, through his wily flattery, as a decorative girdle, but which in the end ensnares her, because it is also a hunting weapon.

It is significant that both protagonists have the element of food in their name, that is, salt (*yen*) and grain > granary (*lin*). This nominally makes the account a sitiological myth. Since the larger mythic narrative of the Lord of the Granary relates how he became chief of the tribe and then went on to found a new city, it is possible that the underlying structure of the submyth of his encounter with the goddess could be read as a contest between a matriarchal community, Yen-yang, which was rich in the resources of fish and salt, and a dynamically expanding patriarchal tribe seeking conquest of rich land and peoples beyond its frontiers.

In the southwest is Pa country. Ta Hao gave birth to Hsien-niao. Hsien-niao gave birth to Ch'eng-li. Ch'eng-li gave birth to Hou-chao, and Hou-chao was the founder of the Pa people. (*Shan hai ching, Hai nei ching*, SPPY 18.4a)

The ancestor of the Lord of the Granary originally came from Wu Tan. The Man tribe of Pa commandery and Nan commandery originally had five surnames: the Pa clan, the Fan clan, the Shen clan, the Hsiang clan, and the Cheng clan. They all came from Mount Wu-lo

Chung-li. On this mountain there were two caves, one scarlet and one black, like cinnabar and lacquer. The children of the Pa clan were born in the scarlet cave, and the children of the other four surnames were all born in the black cave. Before there were chieftains, they were all subjects of the spirits and gods. The Lord of the Granary's given name was Wu-hsiang; his surname was that of the Pa clan. He set out together with the Fan clan, the Shen clan, the Hsiang clan, and the Cheng clan—five surnames in all—and they all competed for divine power to rule. Then they all together threw their swords at a rock and agreed that whoever could hit the target would be elevated to be their lord. When the son of the Pa clan, Wu-hsiang, was the only one to hit the target, they all sighed. Then he ordered each clan to sail in an earthenware boat, carved with designs and painted, and to float the boats in the river. They made an agreement that whoever could stay afloat would become their lord. The other clans all sank, and Wu-hsiang's was the only one to stay afloat. So they unanimously made him their chieftain. He became the Lord of the Granary. Now he sailed the earthenware boat from Yi River to Yen-yang. At Salt River there is a goddess. She said to the Lord of the Granary, "This land is vast, and there is all the fish and salt that come from it. I wish you would stay here and live among us." The Lord of the Granary refused. At nightfall the Salt Goddess suddenly came to sleep with him. At dawn she turned into a flying insect and flew in a swarm with other insects. They blotted out the sunlight and the world grew pitch black for more than ten days in a row. The Lord of the Granary could not make out which was east or west for seven days and seven nights. He ordered someone to hold a green silk cord and present it to the Salt Goddess. He said to her, "This will suit you if you wear it as a fringed belt. If we are to live together, then please accept it from me." The Salt Goddess accepted it and wore it as a fringed belt. At once the Lord of the Granary stood on a sunlit rock, and aiming at the green cord she wore, he shot arrows at her. He hit her and the Salt Goddess died. Then the sky cleared far and wide. The Lord of the Granary then ruled over Yi City, and the four clan names submitted to him. (Ch'in Chia-mo's reconstructed text, *Shih pen*, *Shih hsing*, 1:93-94)