



## Love

Compared with the rude promiscuity, violent couplings, and lustful passions of myths worldwide on the theme of love, the decorous tenor of this motif in the Chinese mythological tradition indicates at least two major trends in the mythographic period, namely, censorship and social mores. In comparison with mythologies worldwide, it becomes evident that although Chinese myths generally find their counterpart in other mythic systems, there is a clear distinction between Chinese and other myths on the sexual theme, for they are sanitized and domesticated for the presumed sensibilities of readers of the late and postclassical era. While evidence for censorship is not ample, there is one instance of redactors trawling the classical repertoire. This occurs in the extant text of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. At the end of chapters 9 and 13, two identical endnotes state that in the year 6 B.C. the officials Wang, Kung, and Hsiu corrected the text of chapters 1–9 and 10–13 of the *Classic*. The word *correct* could indicate mild editorial amendments or full-scale censorial excision of offending material. It is noteworthy that this took place in the first year of the reign of the Former Han Emperor Ai (6–1 B.C.), when the emperor, convinced of the unethical, unorthodox developments in the government office responsible for court entertainment, abolished the office *in toto* (Birrell 1993, 5). It is probable that the new broom also swept through other departments in

line with the emperor's distaste for laxity and depravity. Whether there were originally no bawdy passages in the early texts of myths or, as seems more likely, such passages were bowdlerized, the result is that in classical Chinese mythology there is no goddess of love such as Aphrodite (or Venus), nor a god of love such as Eros or Cupid, nor the amorous adventures of Zeus and others. Even in texts that only imply sexual activity, such as Yü's encounter with the T'u-shan girl, the episode is hedged with ambiguity and innuendo. During the Han period, either in conjunction with puritanical censorship or in an independent evolution, new social mores dictated that narratives on the theme of love should depict courteous exchanges between lovers, as with the Queen Mother of the West and King Mu of Chou, or express the ideal values of fidelity and devotion, but in particular that they should skirt around a direct reference to physical realism and avoid prurient excess. In all this, of course, the values of the social system should be reflected in the conventional gender roles of the subordinate female and dominant male. The result is, as the readings indicate, that the mythic power of the narratives had been subdued by social philosophy current in the Han and post-Han eras.

In other, more robust mythological traditions, lustful couplings between the gods and humans usually have a procreative function. Clearly, this functional aspect is absent from most classical Chinese myths. This does not mean to say that the procreation myth per se is a minor one but that procreation results not from Olympian intercourse but through miraculous birth or following an idealized and courtly exchange of pleasantries. Examples are the birth of Ch'i in the myth of Yü and the T'u-shan girl and the birth of Shao Hao in the myth of the Son of the White Emperor and Huan O. Most conceptions in Chinese myth are divine and miraculous and are achieved without the intervention of a male. The only exceptions are Kun, who gave birth to Yü, and the fabled Country of Men, where men give birth to sons only, through their middle, back, or side. The most prestigious examples of divine procreation without sex are Chien Ti, ancestress of the Shang, and Chiang Yuan, ancestress of the Chou, who trod in a giant's footprint and swallowed a bird's egg.

The readings in this chapter illustrate typical aspects of mythic love: the battle between the sexes, the founding of the institution of marriage, married love, divine courtship, separation, and bereavement.

## Nü Kua Marries Her Brother in the First Marriage

The Nü Kua text has been placed first in the readings because the goddess originally belonged to the pantheon of primeval deities as creator and savior of the world. But in this text, which is late in the mythographic tradition, she does not appear in her earlier emanation. The reading serves to show how a classical myth is reworked to convey new values and is thus subverted. The T'ang author Li Jung (fl. A.D. 846-874) has eliminated the two main functions of the goddess and has humanized her, relegating her to a conventionally subordinate female role and diminishing her own divinity and mythic power by making her pray to a higher god.

In this mythopoeic passage, Li Jung presents an etiological myth of the institution of marriage. The sentence "there were two people, Nü Kua, older brother and sister," is so awkward that it betrays this reworking of old mythic material. Some scholars interpret it to mean that Nü is the sister, Kua the brother. The same odd construction occurs in the Woman Ch'ou narrative: "There are two people in the sea. Her name is Woman Ch'ou." Leaving aside the question of the name or names, the narrative relates how the brother and sister invoked God to sanction their union and how permission was granted for what was the first marriage among humans. Like Adam and Eve, the first couple, who covered their nakedness with a fig leaf, the brother and sister feel ashamed of their sexual difference after carnal knowledge of each other and hide behind a fan.

Although interpretation of Li Jung's version could stop at a new etiological myth that explains the human institution of marriage sanctioned by God, the lateness of his version prompts further questions beyond the purely etiological concerning the necessity for such a new version of the myth. Li Jung's neomyth of the late T'ang era may fit the paradigm proposed by Malinowski: "myth serves principally to establish a sociological charter, or a retrospective moral pattern of behavior" (1954, 144). It is possible to conjecture that the T'ang myth may have as its underlying intent a rationale for incest between brother and sister in certain communities and in certain situations. It might belong to that category of myth which converts an overtly antisocial behavior pattern into a socially acceptable norm. Eberhard has stated of this mythic narrative, "Otherwise, cases of sibling marriage are rare in Chinese mythology" (1968, 445). Other accounts of sibling marriage occur in *The Treatise on Research into Nature*, of the third to the fifth century A.D., and

in *A Record of Researches into Spirits*, of the fourth century A.D. (Mathieu 1989, 158-59). Sibling marriage is also present in the P'an Hu dog myth, when the sons and daughters of the dog and the princess intermarry to found a new race. It would seem that in times of dire need, such as floods, famine, war, or epidemics which decimate populations and reduce humans to the bare choice of survival of the human race, traditional taboos tend to be overlooked and the forbidden condoned.

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

Oh Heaven, if Thou wouldst send us two forth to become man  
and wife,  
then make all the misty vapor gather;  
if not, then make all the misty vapor disperse.

At this the misty vapor immediately gathered. When the sister became intimate with her brother, they plaited some grass to make a fan to screen their faces. Even today, when a man takes a wife, they hold a fan, which is a symbol of what happened long ago. (*T'u yi chih*, TSCC 3.51)

### The Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt River

The narrative of the Lord of the Granary and the Goddess of Salt River from *The Origin of Hereditary Families* (commentary ca. third century A.D.) contains numerous motifs based on that most enduring of myths, gender competition or, stated in more traditional terms, the battle between the sexes, which literally informs this narrative. The goddess plays the role of the trickster familiar to many mythologies, especially Old Man Coyote of the Crow Indians (Lowie 1935, III). In this role she is comparable to Ch'ang O of the lunar myth. Like other trickster tales worldwide, the myth of the Goddess of Salt River is a humorous account, in which the hero, the Lord of the Granary, outwits the tricky goddess by playing on her feminine weakness of vanity

and by using the cunning ruse of offering her an intimate love token, a waist girdle, which turns out to be a hunting weapon. Other motifs are the metamorphosis of the goddess into a swarm of insects; the darkening of the world as she blots out the sun; the sunlit rock from which the hero shoots his fatal arrow; and the restoration of the world to goodness and light. The sitiological motif in the names of the two protagonists, grain and salt (*Lin* and *Yen*), suggests that the underlying intent of this section of the account might be construed as the desire of the ruler of a territory rich in the natural resources of salt and fish to acquire territory rich in grain, or vice versa. In primitive economies salt was a prerequisite for the preservation and preparation of staple foods. One last motif is discernible in this narrative, that is, the vestige of a local sun myth in which a goddess possesses power over the sun. If this surmise is correct, it parallels other sun myths in the Chinese tradition, such as that of Hsi-Ho, in which a female deity predominates. The theme of gender competition mentioned at the outset also implies that the myth might also be read as an evolving contest for supremacy between a matriarchal and patriarchal society.

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. (Ch'in Chia-mo's reconstructed text, *Shih pen*, *Shih hsing*, 1.93-94)

## Draught Ox and Weaver Maid

The motifs of the stellar myth of Weaver Maid and Draught Ox were discussed in chapter 9, where attention was drawn to the evolution of the love motif of the myth.

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

The major star myth of Weaver Maid spawned a number of subsidiary mythic narratives, of which that of the Sky River or the Sky Voyager is the most important. This narrative, along with that of Weaver Maid and Draught Ox, combines the elements of astronomy and aerial travel. The motif of an aerial voyage reflects the great interest in travel into the unknown during the Han period, itself a mark of the territorial expansion of that great dynasty. The first verifiably dated explorer was Chang Ch'ien, who was sent on a diplomatic mission by the Han Emperor Wu to secure treaties with China's western neighbors. From his travels between 138 and 122 B.C., he gathered information on the geographic, scientific, and social aspects of different ethnic regions in the Tarim Basin and brought back many exotic items, such as the grape, walnut, and hemp. A sixth-century A.D. text, *A Record of the Seasonal Customs of Ching Ch'u*, preserved in a Ming compendium, even relates that Chang Ch'ien was ordered by the Han Emperor Wu to discover the source of the "River," by which is meant the Yellow River (Yuan K'o 1980.2, 88). The earlier narrative from *The Treatise on Research into Nature*, which forms the reading here, follows the account in the *Seasonal Customs* more or less verbatim but does not have the prefatory section on Emperor Wu's command.

That the events in the account of the Sky Voyager were attached to the historical figure of Chang Ch'ien in the *Seasonal Customs* illustrates a general rule in the making of myth or legend, namely, to give greater glory to a narrative by investing it with the name of a famous person, real or imagined. The same mythopoeia revolved around the person of the Han Emperor Wu. The reading mentions by name a historical fig-

ure, one Yen Chün-p'ing, who lived in the first century B.C. He was a Taoist and an astronomer of Shu (Szechwan), who was said to sight strange stars. The text itself is attributed to the author and astronomer Chang Hua (A.D. 232-300) but is probably a pseudepigraphic work of the Six Dynasties.

In olden days it was said that Sky River was connected to the sea. Nowadays there is a man who lives on a little island. Year after year in the eighth month, a floating raft comes and goes, and it never fails to pass by at the same time. The man had a wonderful idea—he erected a soaring compartment on the raft, packed provisions, boarded the raft, and left. During ten days or more he still saw the stars, moon, and sun, but from then on it became blurred far and wide, and he could not tell whether it was day or night. He went on for ten days or more, when suddenly he came to a place where there were what seemed like inner and outer city walls and well-ordered houses, and in the distance he could see many weaver women in a palace. He saw a man leading oxen to an island bank to drink from it. The oxherd then said in surprise, "How did you get here?" The man explained all about his purpose in coming here and, for his part, asked where this place was. He answered, "Go back to Shu commandery and put your question to Yen Chün-p'ing; then you will know." In the end the man did not go farther up the island shore because he was to return according to the raft's regular time. Later on he reached Shu and asked Yen Chün-p'ing, who said, "On a certain day of a certain month in a certain year a stranger star trespassed into the Draught Ox constellation." He calculated the year and month, and it was just when this man had arrived in Sky River. (*Po wu chih*, *Tsa shui*, 2, SPPY 3.3a)

### The Son of the White Emperor Courts the Goddess Huang O

The love of the goddess Huang O and the Son of the White Emperor is told in a courtly narrative dating from the sixth century A.D., itself based on an account in *Researches into Lost Records* by Wang Chia, of the fourth century A.D. The courtly mode is evident in the way their love is described through indirection, and the consummation of their love, which resulted in the birth of their son, the god Shao Hao, is omitted, in keeping with the high literary mode of the Liang dynasty (Bir-

rell 1986, 6–28). Despite this obviating style, there are clear markers of sexual desire: the love feast, outdoor scenario, music, song, and an idyllic boat journey. Moreover, the elegant but elusively phrased songs that the gods exchange contain covert declarations of love.

The child-god who was born from this love has two names apart from Shao Hao, which his mother gave him: Ch'ung Sang or Exhausted Mulberry, and Sang Ch'iu, the first being the name of the mythical place where his parents courted. Mulberry has the connotation of the Tree of Life in the east, the world-tree, Leaning Mulberry. Other names for the god Shao Hao are Metal Sky and Phoenix Bird. Metal is the element that is usually an attribute of the west, according to the traditional Five Elements theory, whereas Shao Hao is more generally believed to preside over the east. His "tomb" is now sited in the east, in Ch'ü-fu, Shantung, the birthplace of Confucius.

Shao Hao ruled by the power of metal. His mother was called Huang O. She lived in a palace of exquisite jade and she wove by night. Sometimes she sailed on a wooden raft by day to amuse herself, passing the vast and boundless reach of Ch'ung Sang. At that time there was a child-god whose appearance stood out from the ordinary. He was called the Son of the White Emperor, that is, the essence of T'ai-po. He descended from on high to the margin of a river and feasted and played with Huang O. He performed the "Easy Grace" music and had fun and games until he forgot to go home. At Ch'ung Sang there was a lone mulberry tree on the shore of the West Sea which grew straight up for eight thousand feet. Its leaves were red and its berries maroon. It bore fruit once in ten thousand years. Anyone who ate it became as old as Heaven. The prince and Huang O drifted on the sea. Their mast was of cassia, the banners were plaited with scented reeds. A pigeon made of carved jade was fixed on the mast-head, for there is a saying that a pigeon knows the times of the four seasons. That is why it says in the *Spring and Autumn* records, "When midsummer comes and midwinter goes, they arrange the ordinances for this interval." Nowadays the weathercock is a vestigial symbol of this. The prince and Huang O sat down together and strummed their paulownia lute and catalpa zither. Huang O bent over her zither and sang a clear song:

The sky is clear, the earth is wide and immense,  
Ten thousand images turn to fading, changing into nothing.  
We drift through skies so vast and gaze into space.



We ride in a light boat, companions of the sun.  
 We point our craft somewhere and reach Ch'ung Sang.  
 My heart knows such joy, yet our bliss is not yet full.

People say that where she journeyed is Sang-chung; in the "Airs of Wei" in *The Classic of Poetry* it says: "He made a date with me among the mulberries [*sang chung*]." It must refer to this. The Son of the White Emperor replied with this song:

The Four Cords and the Four Sides, it is hard to see their limits.

I race with light and chase shadow, and all around there's water.

In the quiet of the night in the royal palace she faces her weaving loom.

On Catalpa Peak the brilliant catalpa trees are very tall and straight.

We cut catalpa for instruments, to make lute and zither.

I sing a clear song and free, my joy knows no bounds.

On the vast seashore I have come to make my nest.

When Huang O gave birth to Shao Hao, she called him Ch'ung Sang and Sang Ch'iu. (*Shih yi chi*, HWTS 1.4b-5b)

### The Bereavement of Shun's Wives

The legend of the consorts of Shun, who, according to a late tradition, became river goddesses after his death, was discussed in chapter 9, under the heading of "The Hsiang Queens."

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)

## Yü and the T'u-shan Girl

The myth of Yü's marriage to the T'u-shan girl was discussed in chapters 5 and 8, with a special emphasis on the motifs of the necessary error of Yü's drumming on a stone, Yü's ursinic bestiovestism, the girl's metamorphosis into a stone, and the miraculous birth of the god of music, Ch'i, or K'ai. No love is expressed between the parents, and the narrative itself is typical of the primitive myths, which lack sentiment and emotion but are rich in graphic action.

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)

## Han P'ing, a Husband and His Wife

The story of Han P'ing and his wife expresses the powerful mythic theme of undying love. The reading comes from the fourth-century A.D. collection of mythological, legendary, and fictional tales compiled by Kan Pao. Its date is approximate to that of a long anonymous verse narrative that has the same theme and shares many familiar features, "A Peacock Southeast Flew" (Birrell 1986, 53-62). The most obvious parallels are the enforced separation of a young married couple, their enduring love, a villainous prince (in the verse narrative a scheming mother-in-law), the wife given to another man, a double suicide, twin trees growing across their graves, mandarin ducks symbolizing married love singing a sad song over their graves, and the popular sympathy their tragic fate aroused. The similarities between the prose and poetic expressions of the love story cannot be coincidental but result from the power of its mythic theme. This is attested by the continued reworking of the story in later centuries. The same story is included in the tenth-century compendium *Atlas of the Whole World in the T'ai-p'ing Era* (A.D. 976-984), compiled by Yueh Shih (A.D. 930-1007), but it contains additional decorative

detail about the wife's suicide leap: "The rags that came away in their hands turned into butterflies" (Yuan K'o 1980.2, 281). The story was also dramatized in the Yuan dynasty, and the Ming dynasty author Ch'en Yao-wen inserted a song Han P'ing sang before committing suicide:

On South Mountain there is a crow;  
 On North Mountain they set their snares.  
 Crows by nature fly high;  
 What use are those snares now!  
 Crows and magpies fly in pairs,  
 They would not be happy with a phoenix mate.  
 My wife is an ordinary girl,  
 She is not happy with the Sung prince.  
 (*T'ien-chung chi*, citing *Chiu kuo chih*, SKCS  
 18.71b)

The text of the love narrative from Kan Pao's collection follows.

Prince K'ang of the Sung had a manservant called Han P'ing. Han P'ing married a daughter of the Ho family, who was so beautiful that Prince K'ang took her away from him. P'ing deeply resented this, so the prince imprisoned him and punished him by making him do early morning labor on the city wall. His wife sent P'ing a letter in secret, which was worded to disguise her meaning: "When the rain pours in torrents and the river rises and gets deeper, our hearts will come together at sunrise." When the prince received her letter, he showed it to his courtiers, but none of the courtiers could decipher its meaning. His official Su Ho gave this solution: "'When the rain pours in torrents' means to grieve and pine; 'the river rises and gets deeper' means to be unable to go out or come in; 'our hearts will come together at sunrise' means a death wish." Not long afterward, P'ing committed suicide. Then his wife secretly made her clothes worn and rotten. When the prince went up the tower with her, she threw herself from the tower. The courtiers grabbed her, but her clothes missed their grasp and she fell to her death. A suicide note in her belt said, "The prince would have preferred me to live, but I preferred to die. I request the favor that my body be buried with P'ing." The prince was very angry and refused to grant her wish. He ordered a countryman to bury her so that the burial mounds would face each other at some distance from each other. The prince said, "You went on loving each other as husband and wife. If you can make your

burial mounds come together I will not stand in your way." When everyone was asleep, two huge catalpa trees grew up at the edge of the two burial mounds. In ten days they had grown to full size. They bent their trunks across toward each other, so that the roots were entwined below and the boughs embraced above. And there were two mandarin ducks, a male and a female, which remained perched on top of the trees. They refused to leave at night or by day but entwined their necks and sang sadly, so that people were very moved. The people of Sung felt sorry for them and ever after called these trees the "loving-you tree." (*Sou shen chi*, TSCC II.77-78)