



## Heroes

The mythical figure of the hero has been encountered in previous chapters in the different roles as savior, culture bearer, warrior, and founder of a new race, tribe, or dynasty. Figures such as Shun closely resemble Raglan's model of the hero with twenty-two stereotypical biographical features (1937). The powerful and successful Yellow Emperor, who combines both military and civil roles of warrior and culture bearer, is one of the great heroes in the pantheon. Of the demigods Yao, Shun, and Yü in the Golden Age, the mythical qualities of the hero are most fully realized in the narratives of Yü, who overcame a multiplicity of heroic tasks while confronting the overwhelming disaster of the flood. In the human sphere the Lord of the Granary and Li Ping fit the heroic paradigm, with the added element of humor, which is so lacking in the Yü stories.

Another aspect of the hero type which complements the dynamic and positive function of the all-conquering, successful, and dominant mythical hero, such as the Yellow Emperor, Shun, or Yü, is the failed hero, a god, demigod, or human who struggles in a fair contest for supremacy but loses against a more formidable contender. The failure is not projected as a monster or villain but is treated sympathetically in the myths. The term *the nobility of failure* was coined by Ivan Morris in his analysis of Japanese heroes in myth, legend, and history (1975). The

term admirably characterizes role models in the Chinese tradition, such as the Flame Emperor, Ch'ih Yu, Yi the Archer, Kun, and Tan Chu, whose myths fit the paradigm of the failed hero. They are gods and demigods whom the communal memory stubbornly refuses to vilify, rubbish, and expunge from myth, legend, and folktale.

The mythical and legendary heroes presented here performed acts of heroism which were inspired by such diverse motives as revenge, hubris, military courage, idealism, nobility of spirit, and patriotism. Many were immortalized in a narrative poem entitled "On Reading *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*" by T'ao Yuan-ming, also called T'ao Ch'ien (A.D. 365-427); heroes such as K'ua-fu, Ching Wei, Hsing T'ien, Cha Yü, and Kun were all lauded in his literary appreciation of the *Classic* (Davis 1983, 1:160-64; *Chien chu T'ao Yuan-ming chi*, SPTK 4.18a-24a).

### Ching Wei Dams the Sea

The myth of Ching Wei combines the diverse themes of pathos, pluck, and the refusal to accept defeat. Nü Wa, the Lady Beautiful, was one of the three daughters of the Flame Emperor. After she drowned in the east sea, she metamorphosed into the Ching Wei, Spirit Guardian bird. In some versions she mated with a sea swallow. The myth of Ching Wei does not explain why she is doomed to the futile task of damming the vast east sea with pathetically tiny bits of wood and pebble. It could be that she was punished for trespassing, for "playing in the east sea" without permission, thus violating the territorial prerogative of the sea god; or her act may be construed as a token of her revenge against the sea god in whose waters she drowned. Certainly, the motif of metamorphosis is linked to the theme of punishment in mythic narratives. The revenge motive was, in fact, accepted by the earliest commentator on the mythic narrative, which appears in an early chapter of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (third century B.C.). Kuo P'u's interpretation is supported by the goddess's other names: the Oath Bird, Resolve Bird, and Victim Bird. The first two express her vow for revenge, while the third denotes her fate. It is significant that just as the Flame Emperor was conquered by his brother, the Yellow Emperor, using the element of water against his fire, so the goddess Nü Wa, the Flame Emperor's daughter, was overcome by the hostile element of the east sea. Although it is tempting to adduce the motif of punishment for this myth, it is not so explicit as in the myths of Kun or Ch'ih Yu.

Another two hundred leagues to the north is a mountain called Fa-chiu, and on its summit there are numerous *che*-thorn trees. There is a bird in them. Its appearance is like a crow, and it has a colorful head, a white beak, and scarlet feet. Its name is Ching Wei; its name is from its call. It is the Flame Emperor's younger daughter, who was called Nü Wa. Nü Wa was playing in the east sea when she sank and failed to resurface. So she became the Ching Wei [Spirit Guardian]. She is forever carrying in her beak wood and stones from the western hills to dam up the east sea. (*Shan hai ching, Pei tz'u san ching*, SPPY 3.16b)

### K'ua-fu Races the Sun

The name K'ua-fu means Boastful Father or Braggart Man, and it is one of the few names in Chinese mythology which clearly describes the theme associated with the mythical figure. This theme is hubris, the sin of pride in challenging a greater power than oneself and treating that power or authority with contempt. The myth of hubris is usually accompanied by the motif of nemesis. The first text below narrates that K'ua-fu was a lesser god who lived on a mountain near the sky, the name of which is the Perfect City Which Bears Heaven (*Ch'eng-tu tsai t'ien*). It denotes a sacred height, an *axis mundi*, which Eliade terms the celestial archetype of the holy city (1971, 7-9). Thus K'ua-fu is at the epicenter of Heaven and earth, with control over the powers of each sphere.

The conventional genealogy of K'ua-fu gives his descent from Hou-t'u, Empress Earth. The color motif in the yellow snakes he wears is emblematic of the yellow earth. Snakes held by deities in their hands or worn in their ears or on their head signified the gods' power over the kinetic forces and mysterious design of the cosmos. The two readings from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* tell how K'ua-fu challenged the power of the sun to a race against time. As the sun went down, K'ua-fu caught up with it but was consumed by thirst and died. After he died, his stick was metamorphosed into Teng Grove. His death from thirst was the punishment analogous to his crime of hubris. The first reading is from a first-century A.D. chapter of the *Classic*; the second is from a first century B.C. chapter.

A separate tradition relating to K'ua-fu's death is based on yet another account in the *Classic* which relates more clearly the theme of punishment. It tells how the Responding Dragon, which had power

over water and could cause severe drought, killed him. In that passage the death of K'ua-fu is linked to the death of Ch'ih Yu, and both gods were executed because they were judged to be rebels. Metamorphosis into wood also links the myths of these two gods.

Kuo P'u responded ambiguously to the mythical figure of K'ua-fu in his commentary, saying, "Divine was K'ua-fu! But he was difficult to understand." T'ao Yuan-ming applauded K'ua-fu's audacity in his narrative poem: "His divine strength was very wonderful. . . / His merits were accomplished after his death" (Davis 1983, 1:160-61).

In the great wilderness there is a mountain called the Perfect City Which Bears Heaven. There is a man who wears two yellow snakes in his ears and holds two yellow snakes in his hands. His name is K'ua-fu. Empress Earth gave birth to Hsin, and Hsin gave birth to K'ua-fu. K'ua-fu's strength knew no bounds. He wanted to chase the sun's shadow and he caught up with it at Yü valley. He decided to drink from the river, but there was not enough, so he decided to walk toward the Great Marsh. But he did not reach it and he died in this place. (*Shan hai ching*, *Ta huang pei ching*, SPPY 17.4a)

K'ua-fu and the sun had a race. The sun went in. K'ua-fu was so thirsty he wanted to have a drink. He drank from the river and the Wei, but the river and the Wei were not enough. He went northward to drink from the Great Marsh, but he did not reach it, and he died of thirst on the way. His abandoned stick turned into Teng Grove. (*Shan hai ching*, *Hai wai pei ching*, SPPY 8.2b)

### Hsing T'ien Dances with Shield and Battle-Ax

The myth of the failed hero Hsing T'ien relates how this lesser god challenged God (Ti) for the godhead, or divine rule (Shen), but he lost. The brief narrative does not explain who the warrior god Hsing T'ien was, nor his place in the pantheon. His name has several variants: Hsing T'ien or Punished by Heaven, Hsing T'ien or Formed by Heaven, and Hsing Yao or Form Prematurely Dying. The confusion in his name is matched by that of the battlefield, Ch'ang-yang, which is written either as Eternal Sunlight or as Eternal Ram. The translation of mythical names is notoriously difficult, and the renditions here are only approximate. A. R. Davis discussed fully the variants of the names, noting of T'ien (Heaven) and Yao (Prematurely Dying) that their written forms are very similar (2:129). The name of this hero becomes significant in

terms of his myth if it is taken as Hsing T'ien, meaning Punished by Heaven, for this would constitute an epithet applied to the mythical figure after his death and would explain the reason for his death. In this case, Hsing T'ien would belong to the group of heroes such as Ch'ih Yu and K'ua-fu who were punished for the crime of hubris.

Although the mythical figure of the warrior-god, such as Ch'ih Yu, Kung Kung, the Flame Emperor, and the Yellow Emperor, occurs frequently in Chinese mythology, the motif of gruesome violence is rare. The presence of the motif in the Hsing T'ien myth allows of comparison with similar instances in mythology worldwide, especially in the narratives of Odinic warriors. Hsing T'ien's bizarre war dance after he has been decapitated is unusual in the Chinese repertoire for its reference to the headless hero using his nipples and navel to serve as replacement eyes and mouth. The rarity of such motifs prompts the speculation that the Hsing T'ien myth was overlooked by the censoring redactors who otherwise managed to delete much of the typical barbarism of mythological narrative. As such, sex and gruesome violence, and coupling and nudity were linked as taboo topics in the minds of officials such as Wang, Kung, and Hsiu, who are known to have "corrected" the text from which the following reading is taken, in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, first century B.C.

The myth of Hsing T'ien is particularly interesting because it anticipates the concept in medical science of bodily transplants. In the frenzy of battle the warrior-god substitutes part of his torso to make good the loss of his sight and speech, so that he is able to continue his furious battle. That he eventually died is indicated by a fragment in *Huai-nan Tzu*: "In the west is the corpse of Hsing's remains" (Yuan K'o and Chou Ming 1985, 64). Kuo P'u wrote this appraisal of the hero: "Though transformed, he did not submit," and T'ao Ch'ien wrote this epitaph for the dead god: "His fierce spirit will live for ever" (Davis 1983, 1:161-62).

Hsing T'ien and God came to this place and fought for divine rule. God cut off his head and buried it on Ch'ang-yang mountain. Hsing T'ien made his nipples serve as eyes and his navel as his mouth, and brandishing his shield and battle-ax, he danced. (*Shan hai ching*, *Hai wai hsi ching*, SPPY 7.2a)

## The Foolish Old Man Moves a Mountain

The sophisticated fictional techniques of the long account of the Foolish Old Man, Yü-kung, from the fourth-century A.D. text *Lieh Tzu* indicate that the myth is late in the tradition, and this is confirmed by the absence of early classical texts referring to or narrating this myth. The myth shares with that of Ching Wei the theme of seemingly futile effort. Unlike the earlier myth of the goddess metamorphosed into a bird, the *Lieh Tzu* narrative contains many complex motifs and themes. To the basic theme of futility are harnessed those of commitment to an ideal and faith in one's beliefs and goals. The thematic framework is based on Taoist concepts and philosophical attitudes familiar from *Chuang Tzu*, such as the relativity of values and role reversals, so that the Foolish Old Man proves to be wise while the Wise Old Man in the story turns out to be wrong. While the myth has enduring appeal due to the theme of adherence to an ideal, it lacks the poignancy and individual heroism of the myths of Ching Wei and Hsing T'ien. The reason is that the philosophical thrust of the narrative requires that the hero win in his struggle, and his eventual triumph is achieved by the device, literal in this case, of *deus ex machina*.

The two mountains T'ai Hsing and Royal House are seven hundred leagues square and eighty thousand feet high and were originally in the south of Chi Province and north of Ho-yang. The Foolish Old Man of North Mount was almost ninety years old, and he lived opposite these mountains. He thought it a painful burden that the northern edge of the mountains should make his journeys back and forth such a long way around. So he gathered his household and put this plan to them: "You and I will use our utmost strength to level out a narrow pass, which will go through to Yü in the south and go as far as the south side of Han River. How about it?" They all agreed with his plan. His wife expressed her doubts, saying, "With your strength you couldn't even destroy the hillock of K'uei-fu, so how could you destroy T'ai Hsing and Royal House mountains? And where would you put the soil and stones?" They all said, "We'll throw them on the tail end of Po Sea north of Yin-t'u." Then leading his son and grandson, the three men carrying poles, he broke up rocks and furrowed the soil, and they transported them in baskets and hods to the tail end of Po Sea. A neighbor, the widow Ching-

ch'eng, had a son left to her who was just losing his milk teeth, and he leaped up and went to help them.

The seasons had changed from cold to hot when they all came back home for the first time. The Wise Old Man of the River Bend laughed at the Foolish Old Man and said, "Well, you aren't very smart. How can you, with your last bit of strength and in your declining years, ever break up even one hair of this mountain, let alone the earth on it?" The Foolish Old Man of North Mount gave a long sigh and said, "Your mind is thick, you just can't understand—you're not nearly as good as the widow's weak young boy. Even if I die, there'll be my son, who will carry on, and my son has had my grandson born to him too, and that grandson will also have a son born to him, and his son will have a son born to him as well, and that son will have his grandson too. Son after son, grandson after grandson forever and ever. This mountain won't get any bigger, so why do you fret that eventually it won't be flattened?" The Wise Old Man of the River Bend was lost for an answer. The snake-holding god heard of this and, feeling concerned that this would never come to an end, reported it to God. God was moved by his faith in his ideal and ordered the two sons of K'ua-o to carry the two mountains on their backs, placing one in Shuo to the east, and placing one in Yung to the south. Ever since then, from south of Chi Province to the south side of Han River there is not a single bank to interrupt the flat ground. (*Lieh Tzu, T'ang wen, SPPY 5.8a-9b*)

### K'ai Receives the Music of Heaven

The myth of K'ai, or Ch'i, son of Yü, has been discussed in several chapters, where it has been noted that a textual variant of *steals* instead of *receives* alters the interpretation, making K'ai a hero who dares to offend God in order to bring the harmony of Heaven down to earth. The reading comes from a first-century A.D. chapter of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*.

Beyond the seas to the southwest, south of Scarlet River and west of Drifting Sands, there is a man called Hsia-hou K'ai who wears a green snake in his pierced ears and rides a pair of dragons. K'ai went up to Heaven three times as a guest. He received the "Nine Counterpoints" and the "Nine Songs," and brought them down to earth. This Plain

of Heavenly Mu is sixteen thousand feet high and it was here that K'ai first came to sing the "Nine Summons." (*Shan hai ching, Ta huang hsi ching*, SPPY 16.7b-8a)

### The Death of Po Yi and Shu Ch'i

Po Yi and Shu Ch'i are famous exemplars of political idealism. Princes of the kingdom of Ku-chu, they went into self-imposed exile when each refused to ascend the throne after the death of their father. In exile from their homeland, they sought refuge with a nobleman of the Chou people, named Ch'ang, Lord of the West. This was a critical moment in politics because Ch'ang, and later his son, Fa, were campaigning against the Shang ruler, King Chou, who had been tyrannically oppressing his people. Ch'ang became known as King Wen of the Chou after the conquest of the Shang was completed by Fa, who became King Wu of the Chou. Unfortunately for the exiles Po Yi and Shu Ch'i, their loyalty lay with the Shang, and they voiced objections to the military campaigns of the Chou. Refusing "to eat the corn of Chou," they fled once more, this time to a mountain wilderness. In the end, their political idealism led them to die of starvation.

In the philosophical writings of Confucius and Mencius, Po Yi and Shu Ch'i became heroic exemplars of the Confucian ideals of nonviolent political engagement and of political integrity. The philosopher Chuang Tzu is ambiguous in his treatment of the two princes. On the one hand, he depicts them as Taoist exemplars of the virtue of avoiding social and political contamination by abstention from high office. On the other, he condemns them for bringing about their own death (Watson 1968, 321-22, 78-79, 329).

Sarah Allan discusses the myth of Po Yi and Shu Ch'i, and the related figures of the Chou kings Wen and Wu, from the perspective of the transfer of rule from Shang to Chou. She notes that in the version of the myth in "Questions of Heaven," King Wu went into battle against the Shang king bearing the corpse of his father, King Wen. In the first reading below, from *Historical Records*, however, Ssu-ma Ch'ien relates that King Wu bore only the spirit tablet of his father as he launched his final campaign. The Han historian also explains why Po Yi and Shu Ch'i refused to acknowledge King Wu as a legitimate ruler: first, he showed a lack of filial piety in not burying his father before going to war; second, he committed the crime of regicide in killing King Chou of the Shang; third, Po Yi and Shu Ch'i objected to this breach of he-



editary rule (Allan 1981, 107, III-17). The second reading is from an early text, which is no longer extant, cited by Ma Su in *Hypotheses on History*, preface dated A.D. 1670. The title of the early text is *Biographies of Great Men*.

Po Yi and Shu Ch'i were the two sons of the ruler of Ku-chu. Their father wanted to make Shu Ch'i his heir. When their father died, Shu Ch'i ceded the throne to Po Yi. Po Yi declined and said, "It was Father's wish." Then he fled from the kingdom. Shu Ch'i was also unwilling to accede, so he ran away from the kingdom too. Then the kingdom made the middle son the successor to the throne. Then Po Yi and Shu Ch'i heard that Ch'ang, the Lord of the West, had a good reputation for caring for the aged and they asked themselves whether it would be a good idea to go and make their home there. When they arrived, the Lord of the West had died, and King Wu was bearing his wooden tablet of royal authority inscribed with the name "King Wen," for he was moving to the east to attack King Chou. (*Shih chi, Po Yi lieh chuan*, SPPY 61.2a-b)

When King Wu of the Chou attacked the Shang King Chou, Po Yi and Shu Ch'i did not follow him but retired and went into hiding on Mount Shou-yang. There they gathered edible ferns for food. Wang Mo-tzu came into the mountains and rebuked them, saying, "You refused to eat the corn of Chou state, yet you have hidden away in the mountains of Chou and you are eating Chou ferns. Why is that?" So the two men refused to go on eating ferns, and at the end of seven days, Heaven sent them a white deer to give them milk. The two men thought to themselves that this deer would make an excellent meal. The deer realized their intention and refused to come back to them. So the two sons passed away from starvation. (*Yi shih*, citing *Lieh shih chuan*, PCTP 20.37b)

### Kan Chiang and Mo Yeh Forge Swords

In those of the early texts that date from the fourth to the second century B.C., such as *Chuang Tzu*, *Annals of Master Lü*, *Huai-nan Tzu*, and *Intrigues of the Warring States*, the myths of sword casting and of the two famous swords named Kan Chiang and Mo Yeh are only glancingly mentioned in terms of these names. It is only in the first century A.D. that the fully developed myth of the two sword makers Kan Chiang and Mo Yeh first appears in *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yueh*

compiled by Chao Yeh (fl. ca. A.D. 40). Wu and Yueh were ancient states famous for their fine swords. The sudden appearance of this fully fledged myth has led Lionello Lanciotti to believe that "the origin of that group of legends is not purely Chinese" (1955, 106-7). He went on to suggest that the written characters for the name Mo Yeh had several variants and were undoubtedly originally the transliteration of a foreign name.

The narrative of the legendary sword makers of Wu state, Kan Chiang and his wife, Mo Yeh, belongs to the considerable lore of metallurgy, sword making, and magic swords in antiquity. For example, according to an early tradition, the sword that was used to cut open the corpse of Kun to release his son Yü was a Wu sword (*The Storehouse of All Things*, TSCC 1.1b). The lore of myth and legend derives in part from the fact that sword making was a noble but dangerous profession. As the reading illustrates, this profession engendered its own mythic tradition, its own ritual, and its own identity as a mining community. The idea of a separate mining community is expressed in the central and final passages, which speak of hill-mining and a group of three hundred children from miners' families assisting in the metallurgical process. The evidence for a special ritual for the smelting process occurs several times in the text: adherence to cosmological conjunctions of Yin and Yang and the proper season, attendance upon the witness of the gods, the wearing of white hemp and grass (white symbolizing the element of metal and the color of death), human sacrifice with the ritual of cutting off nails and hair, and the naming of swords after their makers. The multiplicity of rituals referred to in the text suggests that the process of smelting ore often failed. (It is clear from the text that the metal used was iron ore rather than bronze.) That the tradition of metallurgy inspired its own lore is indicated by the opening reference to a master sword maker, and later in the text by the reference to the authority of this master in connection with a tradition of ritual self-sacrifice. Moreover, as Lanciotti suggested, Kan Chiang's revelation of the secret of his master's ritual self-sacrifice only after he has failed in smelting indicates that Kan Chiang belongs to "a dynasty of smiths with secret doctrines" (1955, 110).

The tragic heroism of the wife, Mo Yeh, who throws herself into the furnace as sacrifice to the gods of metallurgy, is prompted by the villain of the story, King Ho Lü of Wu. Elsewhere, however, King Ho Lü (r. 514-496 B.C.) is portrayed as a great military leader who conquered the great state of Ch'u and was an expert on metal weaponry. Mo Yeh's

suicide is only hinted at in the text. It is suggested by the verb *t'ou* 'to throw'. This verb is frequently used in the context of women who commit suicide by throwing themselves into a river or off a tower, or, as in this case, into a fire. The same verb *t'ou* is used in the story of the suicide of Han Ping's wife recounted in chapter 12. Some scholars, however, prefer to read the Mo Yeh passage not as suicide, the ultimate sacrifice to the gods, but as a ritual act of throwing only her hair and nail clippings into the furnace, a mimetic act of animal sacrifice in antiquity. It will be recalled, nevertheless, that in the mythic narrative "At Mulberry Forest They Pray for Rain," in chapter 3, the Shang ruler, T'ang the Conqueror, performed this ritual too but then placed himself on top of a sacrificial pyre.

Kan Chiang came from Wu state. He had studied under the same master as Ou the Smith and both of them could make swords. When Yueh state had previously sent three swords of fine workmanship as a gift, [King] Ho Lü acquired them and prized them. That is why the state ordered their sword maker to make two more fine swords. One was called Kan Chiang, the second was called Mo Yeh. Mo Yeh was Kan Chiang's wife. When Kan Chiang made swords, he selected the purest iron from the five mountains and the finest gold in the six cosmic points. Then he waited for Heaven's proper time and attended on earth's due season, when Yin and Yang would be in conjunction and all the gods would be present to observe.

But the breath of Heaven descended, and the result was that the molten essences of gold and iron would not fuse and refused to liquify. Kan Chiang did not know why this had happened. Mo Yeh said, "Your reputation for skilled sword making came to the attention of the King, and he ordered you to make swords for him. But three months have passed and they are still unfinished. Perhaps there is a meaning in the failure with the smelting?" Kan Chiang said, "I do not know what the reason is." Mo Yeh said, "In the transformation process between gods and humans, a human is required before success can be achieved. You, sir, are now making swords. Do you think you will be successful after the gods have taken their human [offering], or if they haven't?" Kan Chiang said, "Some time ago, when my master was smelting and the gold and iron substances would not fuse, both he and his wife got into the smelting oven together, and afterward the smelting was successful. From that time on, whenever people have gone mining for ore for smelting, they have worn white

hempen clothes and a robe made of sweet grass. Otherwise they would not dare to smelt gold on the mountain. Do you think I should have done the same just now when I was making the swords and the transformation process failed?" Mo Yeh said, "If your former master realized that he had to have his body burned up in the furnace to achieve success, where is our difficulty?" So Kan Chiang's wife cut off her hair and clipped her nails and threw herself into the fire. Then he made all the boys and girls, three hundred of them, pound the furnace pipes and bank up the charcoal. Then the gold and iron liquified and so the swords were made. The Yang sword was called Kan Chiang, the Yin sword was called Mo Yeh. The Yang one was decorated with a tortoise design, the Yin one with an inscription. Kan Chiang hid the Yang sword and took away the Yin sword and presented it to Ho Lü, the King of Wu, who treasured it dearly. (*Wu Yueh ch'un-ch'ü, Ho Lü nei chuan*, SPPY 4.1b-2a)

The potency of the myth of the two swords is evident from its literary elaboration in later centuries. The following poem by Pao Chao (A.D. ?412-?466) expresses the romanticized aspect of the myth, and it was included in the famous early medieval anthology of love poetry, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*, compiled circa A.D. 539-545:

A pair of swords about to part  
 First cried out in their case.  
 In night's smoky rain they became one,  
 Then they took different forms.  
 The female sank in Wu River water,  
 The male flew into Ch'u city.  
 Wu River is deep, fathomless,  
 Ch'u city has forbidding portals.  
 Once Heaven parted from Earth  
 Wasn't that worse than Light gone from Dark?  
 Magic things do not part forever,  
 One thousand years and they reunite.

(Birrell 1986, 119, amended)

### Eyebrows Twelve Inches Apart

Although there is a strong case for arguing that Chao Yeh's text indicates that Mo Yeh committed suicide, Kan Pao's fourth-century A.D. text reveals that Mo Yeh is alive and well but that Kan Chiang is

executed by royal command of the king of Ch'u state. The action has moved from Wu through Yueh to Ch'u. It will be recalled that in general, Kan Pao's collection of tales constitutes reworkings of old mythic material, besides legend and folklore, the intent of which was to amuse and divert readers rather than to transmit the eternal verities of myth. It is probably safer to take Chao Yeh's narrative as a version close to the authentic myth of sword making and to treat Kan Pao's tale as a fictional diversion based on an older mythical account. Certainly, his narrative is full of fictional color: the oath sworn by the father who is about to die, the numerical motif of three, repetition of speech, the riddle of the rock, the vow of revenge, the king's ominous dream, the king's ransom, the dirge of the boy hero, the miracle of his petrified corpse, the act of revenge, the three heads in the cooking pot, and the joint grave with its ironic epitaph. The piece ends with a familiar Six Dynasties touristic touch.

The account belongs to the category of revenge myth which traces its ancestry to Chou dynasty classics such as the *Chronicle of Tso*, which has a similarly grisly account of the fate of Yi the Archer and his sons. The revenge myth has its apotheosis in gruesome macho-sadistic stories of heroes in *The Water Margin* of the Ming dynasty (Plaks 1987, 304-58).

In his cogent article on this myth, Lanciotti has interpreted it as a follow-up of the narrative presented by Chao Yeh (1955, 316-22). As with the name of Mo Yeh, he noted that the young hero's name is written with many variants, suggesting that "the origin of that group of legends is not purely Chinese" (*ibid.*, 114). The various names for the son of Kan Chiang, Ch'ih Pi, mean Red between the Eyebrows, One Inch Broad between His Eyebrows, Scarlet Nose, and Scarlet Likeness (Yuan K'o 1980.2, 277).

When Kan Chiang and Mo Yeh were in Ch'u, Kan Chiang had to make swords for the king of Ch'u. After three years they were ready, but the king was angry and decided to put him to death. The swords were male and female. Kan Chiang's wife was heavily pregnant and was due to give birth. Now Kan Chiang told his wife, "I was asked to make swords for the king, and I completed them in three years. But the king is angry with me. When I go, the king is sure to have me put to death. If you give birth to a boy, tell him when he grows up, 'As you go out of the door, look south at the hill, and where a pine tree grows above a rock, my sword lies hidden behind it.'" Then, taking the female sword with him he went to have an audience

with the king of Ch'u. The king grew very angry. He ordered Kan Chiang to produce the other sword. But Kan Chiang said that there had been two swords, one male and one female; the female sword had been brought, but not the male sword. The king was enraged and promptly had him put to death.

Mo Yeh's son was called Ch'ih Pi. Later, when he had grown up, he asked his mother, "Where is my father?" His mother said, "Your father had to make swords for the king of Ch'u. He finished them in three years, but the king was very angry and killed him. When he was about to die he charged me: 'Tell your son, "As you go out of the door, look south at the hill, and where a pine tree grows above a rock, my sword lies hidden behind it.'"" Then the son went out of the door, looked south, but failed to see a mountain. All he saw was a pine stump in front of the hall, and nearby was a stone sticking up. He at once cleaved open the back of the stone with an ax and found the sword. Night and day he longed to seek his revenge from the king of Ch'u. The king dreamed he saw a lad with eyebrows twelve inches apart who said he wanted to seek revenge. The king immediately offered a ransom of a thousand pieces of gold for this young boy. When the boy heard of this, he disappeared and went into the forest. He sang sadly as he walked along. A stranger who met him said, "You are very young. Why are you wailing so sadly?" He said, "I am the son of Kan Chiang and Mo Yeh. The king of Ch'u killed my father, and I want my revenge on him." The stranger said, "I have heard that the king has offered a ransom of a thousand pieces of gold for your head. If I go to the king with your head and your sword, I will get your revenge for you." The boy said, "That would be fine!" Then he slit his own throat and held out his head and his sword and gave them to him. He stood there, a petrified corpse. The stranger said, "I will not fail you." Then the corpse toppled over.

The stranger took the head and went to see the king of Ch'u. The king was overjoyed. The stranger said, "This is the head of a very brave man, so we must boil it in a large pot." They boiled the head for three days and three nights, but it would not cook through. The head bobbed about in the boiling water, its eyes glaring with rage. The stranger said, "The boy's head refuses to cook through. I would like Your Majesty to go up and look in at it yourself, then it will be sure to cook properly." The king at once went up to it. The stranger chopped the king's head off with the sword and the king's head fell into the boiling water. Then the stranger lopped off his own head

and another head fell into the boiling water. The three heads all dissolved into each other, so it was impossible to tell who was who. Then they separated the flesh from the boiling water and buried it. That is why the burial ground bore the name Grave of the Three Kings. Today it is situated in the region north of Ju-nan in Yi-ch'un county. (*Sou shen chi*, TSCC II.71-72)

### The Five Brothers

This long passage that follows is from the *Gazette of Hua-yang* by Ch'ang Chü, of the fourth century A.D. It is a miscellany of interesting bits of information about Hua-yang, the area of ancient Shu (Szechwan), which included the ancient city of Ch'eng-tu. The extract bears all the hallmarks of a scissors-and-paste miscellany, for it comprises three different narratives loosely linked by the theme of Shu itself. The three accounts are: (1) an explanation of how Stalagmite Village acquired its name in the era of one of the ancestral kings of Shu; (2) an explanation of the enmity between the kings of Ch'in and of Shu in the late Chou era; and (3) an explanation of the names of a mythic peak based on the tale of the five strong men of Shu who brought five Ch'in brides to the king of Shu.

It is curious that a miscellany about the region of Shu should express a point of view critical of the place, its people, and its ruler in antiquity: the king of Shu is branded as an oversexed ruler; the soldiers of Ch'in play a scatological trick on the people of Shu, in which ox feces become "gold"; the Ch'in court hurls insults at the Shu envoys; and the five strong men of Shu suffer a drastic fate together with the brides of Ch'in. The narrative as a whole differs from others in this chapter because it expresses no praise or admiration for the heroic ideal but ridicules the Shu envoys for their pretensions to heroism in a coarse satire. Thus the extract may be read as an anti-Shu tract.

In the reign of Emperor K'ai-ming . . . there were in Shu five strong men who could move mountains and lift weights of three hundred thousand pounds. Every time a prince passed away, they would immediately set up a huge stone thirty feet long, weighing thirty thousand pounds, for the tomb's memorial stone. Today, these are like stalagmites. The area is called Stalagmite Village. . . .

In the era of King Hsien of the Chou, the king of Shu possessed the territory of Pao and Han [-chung]. As he went hunting in the val-

ley, he happened to meet King Hui of the Ch'in. King Hui filled a wicker box with gold and sent it to the king of Shu. The king of Shu reciprocated with precious objects. But all the objects turned to clay, and King Hui became angry. But his court officials congratulated him, saying, "Heaven has singled us out for its favor. Your Majesty will take the land of Shu." King Hui was overjoyed. So they made five stone oxen, and each morning they released gold from their buttocks and announced, "Even our ox-shit is gold!" There were a hundred soldiers in charge of the stone oxen. The people of Shu were delighted with them. He [the king of Shu] ordered envoys to ask for the stone oxen, and King Hui allowed them to take them. So they sent the five brothers to receive the stone oxen. But the oxen no longer dropped gold dung and they became angry. He sent the five brothers back to return the oxen and they twitted the people of Ch'in saying, "Huh! You eastern calf-boys!" The people of Ch'in laughed at them and said, "We may be calf-boys, but we are sure going to take Shu!" . . .

King Hui knew that the king of Shu enjoyed sex, so he allowed five brides to be sent in marriage to Shu. The Shu court sent the five brothers to receive them. As they were bringing them back to Tzu-t'ung, they saw a huge snake that went into a cave. One of the men held onto its tail and tugged it, but he could not manage. The five men came and helped together, and with loud shouts they dragged the snake out. The mountain collapsed, and as it did, it crushed to death the five men and the five ladies of Ch'in with their retinue. Then the mountain formed into five peaks crowned with a flat slab of stone. The king of Shu was bitterly upset. So he climbed the mountain and officially named it Five Bride Peak. He had the words "Watching Brides Beacon" and "Longing Wives Terrace" incised into the slab of stone. Today this mountain also goes by the name of Five Brothers Peak. (*Hua-yang kuo-chih, Shu chih*, SPTK 3.2a-3b)

### Li Ping Fights the Water Beast

A discussion of the Li Ping myth appears in chapter 3 under the title "The Virgin Brides and the River God," where the myth was examined from the aspect of the hero's function as the slayer of an evil monster and the underlying pattern of its "sociological charter." It is worth noting that in this narrative a hero of Ch'in is the savior of the people of Shu, thus replicating the subordinate relationship of Shu to Ch'in which was evident in the preceding text.



After King Chao of Ch'in had attacked and conquered Shu, he appointed Li Ping as prefect of the Shu commandery. There was a river god who took two young virgins as his brides every year. The head officer of the region declared, "You will have to hand over a million in cash to pay for the brides' dowry." Ping said, "That won't be necessary. I have young daughters of my own." When the time came, he had his daughters beautifully dressed and made up, and he led them away to be drowned in the river. Li Ping went straight up to the throne of the local god, poured out wine as an offering, and said, "Up till now, I have continued our family line into the ninth generation. Lord of the River, you are a mighty god. Please show your august presence to me, so that I may humbly serve you with wine." Ping held the goblet of wine forward. All the god did was to ripple its surface, but he did not consume it. Ping said in a thunderous voice, "Lord of the River, you have mocked me, so now I intend to fight you!" He drew out his sword, then suddenly he vanished. A little later two blue oxen were fighting on the sloping riverbank. After a few moments Ping went back to his officers and ordered them to help him: "The ox facing south with white tied around his saddle will be me with my white silk ribbon." Then he returned to the fray. The Keeper of Records promptly shot dead with his arrow the ox facing north. With the Lord of the River dead, there was no more trouble ever again. (*T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, citing *Feng su t'ung-yi*, SPTK 882.4a-b)