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Gendered Power:
A Discourse on Female-Gendered Myth in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*

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Gendered Power: A Discourse on Female-Gendered Myth in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*

by

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My paper has a modest and limited aim: to describe the phenomena of female-gendered mythological references which are to be found throughout the text of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan hai ching*), and thus provide an introductory foundation for others to pursue more detailed and specialized investigations of the topic in the sinological and comparative disciplines of history, religion studies, sociology, anthropology, and art.[1] In this paper I argue that this ancient text privileges female gender in an unprecedented way in the ancient Chinese cultural tradition. In applying gender as a category of analysis, I aim to limit my study to this single text so as to evaluate its gendered statements and to discuss its system of female-gendered constructs.[2] Evidence will be drawn primarily from the female-gendered mythological data in this text. Myth is defined here as a cultural construct that reflects a symbolic prehistorical mentalité.[3] The modern critic must attempt to decipher this mythic construct and archaic mentalité. I engage in this gender discourse in the hope that my investigation and interpretation of the data will advance our understanding of the concept of woman as it is mediated through ancient oral myths that were preserved in classical writings.[4]

Gender criticism is productive for studying classical Chinese texts and it offers an entirely new perspective on the ancient cultural tradition. Among male-authored classical texts, for example, the *Mencius* (*Meng Tzu*) typically projects a patriarchal ideology.[5] The male-authored *Biographies of Women* (*Lieh nü chuan)* portrays female gender in ways that fulfil male aspirations for female subordination.[6] The female-authored *Lessons for Women* (*Nü chieh*), for its part, proposes the moral and personal accommodation of women and their low position in the patriarchal system.[7] Other classical texts give similar representations.

Among classical Chinese texts the notable exception to the rule of gender asymmetry, in which the male predominates in terms of cultural superiority and moral values, is the *Classic of Mountains and Seas.*[8] This text posits a balanced gender symmetry in which both female and male genders have significant functions and roles. Yet, as I shall show, woman acquires such prestige in terms of power, authority, and influence, that the text implicitly constructs a gender asymmetry in which the female is accorded a privileged status.

Traditional and modern sinological scholars have adopted a pluralistic and multi-disciplinary approach to the classic. Classical and medieval Chinese commentators and

bibliographers have identified the text as geography, cosmology, prophecy, and fiction.[9] Modern scholars have studied it from the standpoint of ethnology, medical science, religion, and mythology.[10] My own view is that the classic contains all these disciplinary strands, but the organizing principle is the human science of mythology.[11]

Theoretical Perspectives

My inquiry into the incidence of female-gendered myth has been informed by theoretical issues current in gender criticism. I have made use of the hierarchical opposition of male and female attributes proposed by Hélène Cixous.[12] But I have done so from a comparative standpoint and in a way that demonstrates that, contrary to the concept of fixed gender attributes in Cixous's theory, the Chinese data indicate a wide variation of gender role and function. In this respect, the data confirm the early perception of Margaret Mead that there exists an "extraordinary diversity" of gender roles in the cultural history of humankind.[13] Thirdly, I have adopted Jacques Derrida's gender concept of "the feminine-as-alternative logic" to explore the language and symbolic structure of gender in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*.[14]

Fourth, I make use of revisionist studies of the theoretical foundation of Frederick Engels which has recently been usefully applied by classical scholars.[15] Engels demonstrated that the position of women in antiquity was not always subordinate to that of men; he argued that among tribal orders in the prehistorical era there existed a pre-class egalitarianism between males and females which became eroded by the emergence of private property as an organizing principle in society. Moreover, he maintained, the system of private property generated a class structure that did not privilege female gender. Engels based his ethnographic and historical reconstructions on Western classical literature. In my paper I will utilize only one classical Chinese text to validate his theory on the prehistorical position of women, as this is expressed in ancient myth.

Postmodern scholars have rediscovered in Jakob Bachofen's theory of "mother right" (*Mutterrecht*) a comparative model for examining whether females in prehistorical societies enjoyed an equal or even privileged position. In his theory, Bachofen argued that "mother right" represented the natural and biological relationship between mother and child which developed into a matriarchy, and later into a "gynocracy," or civil rule by women.[16] Despite the methodological problems inherent in his work, such as unreliability of sources, the outmoded term "matriarchy" (now replaced by "female gender"), and his acceptance of the mid-nineteenth-

century Western image of the perfect woman, it remains instructive for rediscovering the dominant mother figure in obliquely narrated passages and the obscure references to all-female societies. Bachofen's theory has also served to underscore that, although the mother figure occurs in the classical Chinese text, the text itself does not indicate the presence of the mythological construct of a matriarchy, but, on the contrary the presence of the controlling figure of the woman (*nü*) in whom are invested symbolic emblems of power, authority, and influence.

Since this subject is a complex one and the data are varied and abundant, my procedure will be relatively simple. First, I will identify the female mythical figures in the classic, explaining in each case my criteria of selection. Second, I will specify the function and role of each female figure. Thirdly, I will indicate how the text uses power imagery to reinforce these functions. Then I will briefly mention the general incidence of female gender in the text apart from female figures, which is manifested in geographical names, ritual, and clan names. I will also summarize the major occurrences of gendered liminality, that is, figures of indeterminate or ambiguous gender, and related myths. Brief reference is made to the feminization of male names and titles. All these points of discussion will be brought together in my conclusions to show how the classic may be viewed as a feminized text and how it expresses the concept of privileging the female in its gendered mythological constructs. Finally, reasons will be offered to explain the ways by which the concept of woman was written out of the classical record and how males in the historical era superseded those functions and roles which had belonged exclusively to female figures in mythological accounts.

Female-gendered Mythical Figures

The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* constitutes the major source of ancient Chinese mythology and it forms the *locus classicus* for numerous figures and episodes. More importantly for my purposes here, the classic has preserved a significant number of female-gendered myths which are otherwise unknown outside this text. Among its eighteen chapters, Chapter Sixteen is in itself an outstanding source that narrates the myths of fifteen female figures, including major cosmological episodes.

The question of identifying female-gendered figures in this text is beset with difficulties. Of the total of 204 figures, many are mentioned only by name with no identifying context. Some names are not readily translatable into gender. Where the context indicates male gender, in some

cases feminized names are given for the figures. Several figures are of ambiguous or liminal gender. The gender of many obscure figures remains unknown. It is a mistaken enterprise to identify the gender of some figures in this text on the basis of their gendered identity in other texts because, as I shall show, gender identity may alternate.

Exacerbating the problem of gender identification is a stylistic feature of this text. Generally speaking, mythical episodes are only briefly narrated. It is as if the authors of the eighteen books (the whole text was serially composed between the third century B.C. to around A.D. 100) assumed that the reader already knew the mythical narrative by rote; or were prohibited from recording the sacred story in full; or else they thought that the reader was consulting a set of illustrations to the text while in the act of reading. (It is known that since its inception up to the present the text has been associated with different collections of illustrations.)[17]

Nevertheless, it is possible to establish criteria for determining which figures are female-gendered. They are based on names, titles, context, and textual comparison within the classic. I have identified thirty-five individual named figures, plus two groups of nine and ten figures, which make a total of thirty-seven figures, counting the groups as one unit, or 54 combined figures.

Most titles and names are formulaic. The most frequent formulaic epithet is "woman" (*nü*), which is also used for "daughter". Other epithets are "mother" (*mu*), "queen or dead consort" (*p'in*), "corpse" (shih), "giantess" (*chü*), "junior wife" (*ch'ieh*), and "knight" (*shih*). There are also epithets which constitute female stop-gap names, such as Beautiful (*O*), Grace (*Huang*), and Sublime (*O*, a different graph). Several names have no epithets attached.

What follows is a list of the female-gendered names and titles of thirty-seven figures, arranged in order of frequency of mention in the text. I indicate the gender signifier with supporting contextual data. They are grouped into sixteen categories.

A. Woman (*Nü*), also signifying Daughter: 19 figures[18]

1. Woman Lovely (Nü Wa). The text gives her as "the youngest daughter of the God Flame, the fire deity (Yen Ti). She died and metamorphosed into a bird named Sprite Guard (Ching Wei). The graph for Lovely/*Wa* in the name of the goddess consists of the gender signifier woman (*nü*) and the phonetic *wa* which denotes a frog.[19]

2. Woman Corpse (Nü Shih). The text gives her as "the daughter of God." She died and metamorphosed into a plant (the *yao*), similar to the dodder. Her title *Shih* denotes a corpse deity, of whom twelve feature in the classic. The name of the god is not given or identifiable.[20]

3. Woman Sacrificer (Nü Chi). Female gender is confirmed only from her name or title, "Woman". There is no gendered context in her myth.[21]

4. Woman Battleaxe (Nü Ch'i). The same construction as for figure no. 3, with whom she is mythically linked.[22]

5. Woman Deuce (Nü Ch'ou), also known as the Corpse of Woman Deuce (Nü Ch'ou chih Shih). The name Ch'ou, translated here as "Deuce," denotes the second of the twelve divisions of the sky in ancient cosmology, and the second of twelve cyclical celestial terms for measuring time.[23] Her myth relates that she died in a cosmic solar catastrophe.[24]

6. & 7. The One Woman (Yi Nü-tzu). This title occurs twice in the text and denotes two different figures. One occurs in a myth of sericulture. The other occurs in a mythic account of sacred violence and sitiogony.[25]

8. & 9. Two Women (Liang Nü-tzu). They are given as the leaders or representatives of the Country of Women (Nü-tzu Kuo).[26]

10. Loving Woman (Ssu Nü). This goddess appears in a minimal myth of spinsterhood, celibacy, or chastity.[27]

11. The Guts of Woman Kua (Nü Kua chih Ch'ang). This title denotes a group of ten deities, gender unspecified. They spring from the bodily transformation of the pristine creatrix Woman Kua whom other texts give as the maker of the world and humankind, and the savior of the world in a dual catastrophe of flood and fire.[28]

12. Woman Destroyer (Nü Mieh). Her myth receives minimal mention. This goddess is linked to Woman Sacrificer, and also to Woman Battleaxe.[29]

13. Woman Killer (Nü Ch'ieh). This goddess is given as the daughter of a mountain deity.[30]

14. Woman Droughtghoul (Nü Pa). Her other designations, both female-gendered, are "Daughter of the God Yellow" (Huang Ti Nü) and "Sky Daughter" (or "Sky Woman", T'ien Nü).[31]

15. Beautiful Woman (O Nü). Both names of this goddess are female-gendered (the graph for *O* contains the female signifier *nü*).[32]

16. Pretty Woman, the Liaison Wife (O Nü Yuan-fu). Three gendered elements occur in her title (*O*, *Nü*, *Fu*). Her myth contains a rare reference to lust and pregnancy in Chinese mythology.[33]

17. & 18. The Two Daughters of God (Ti chih Erh Nü). These are two goddesses of the River Yangtze and its tributaries. They are nameless here and in other texts, but some commentators have named them mythopoeically.[34]

19. The Silkmulberry of God's Daughter (Ti Nü chih Sang). The mythical context is minimal, but it has parallels with the myths of Woman Lovely and Woman Corpse (nos. 1. and 2. above), which allow a reconstruction of her myth: she is the daughter of a god, she dies, and is metamorphosed into a natural object. This reconstruction is supported by the pun in her title; Silkmulberry (*Sang*) is a pun for "mourning" (*sang*).[35]

B. Giantess (*Chü*): 2 figures

20. The Corpse of the Yellow Giantess (Huang Chü chih Shih). The title of this goddess overlaps with other corpse deity titles (nos. 2 and 5). "Yellow" is a recurring epithet. The graph for *Chü* (Giantess) contains the signifier for woman.[36]

21. Cry Giantess Skygate (Wu Chü T'ien-men). Some commentators take this four-graph name to refer to a mountain. But since the name "Cry" (*Wu*) occurs in the title of a number of divinities in this classic, and since "Giantess" (*Chü*) occurs in the name of a goddess, this name probably denotes a female-gendered deity.[37]

C Breath (*Hsi*) and Breathe-out (*Hsu*): 3

22. Breath Blend (Hsi Ho). This deity is clearly designated as female through contextual references to her role as "wife" (*ch'i*) of a god, and to her gender as a "girl" (*nü-tzu*). She is the paramount sun goddess in this text.[38]

23. Ever Breath (Ch'ang Hsi). The female gender of this goddess is indicated by contextual references to her as a "wife" and a "girl." She is the paramount moon goddess in this text. Her name "Breath" parallels that of the sun goddess, and her name "Ever" occurs in the names of other goddesses outside this text.[39]

24. Breathe-out (Hsu). Her minimal mythic narrative refers to her as "a deity with a human face" (*shen jen mien*). Some commentators take the name *Hsu* to denote the figure named in the following passage of her myth, whose name is Chuan Hsu (Fond Care), the sky god. But the graphs for *Hsu* (Breathe-out) and the *Hsu* of Chuan Hsu are different, and their meanings are not

the same. Since the name of the "deity with a human face" contains the breathing motif present in the names of the sun and moon goddesses, it is possible to conjecture that she is also female-gendered.[40]

D. Sublime (*O*): 1

25. Sublime Grace (O Huang). Several female-gender indicators occur in her title and mythic content. The graph for *O* (Sublime) contains the female signifier (*nü*); and she is identified as the wife of a major male deity in this text named Chün (Foremost).[41]

E. Beautiful, Pretty (*O*): [2]

Two occurrences of this stop-gap name were discussed in nos. 15 and 16 above. The graph for this title *O* does not contain the female-gender signifier *nü*.

F. Corpse (*Shih*): [3]

Three occurrences of this title have been discussed in nos. 2, 5, and 20 above.

G. Mother (*Mu*): 1

26. The Mother Queen of the West (Hsi Wang Mu).

The epithet "Mother" in the title of this paramount goddess is the only occurrence in this text.[42]

H. Queen, or dead consort (*P'in*): 1

This title occurs only once in this text. It is used collectively to denote a group of nine divine consorts who are dead.

27. The Nine Queens (*Chiu P'in*): 1 (or nine unnamed individuals).

The graph for *P'in* contains the female signifier. An early medieval source gives the name of one queen as Lu Yü, but this is a late mythopoeic invention.[43]

I. Junior Wife (*Ch'ieh*): 1

28. The Junior Wife of the Rain Master (Yü Shih Ch'ieh). The graph for *Ch'ieh* (Junior Wife) contains the female signifier.[44]

J. Knight (*Shih*): 1

29. Knight Homage (Shih Ching). The context of this mythical figure specifies female gender: "the wife of Hugefish" (Kun, the semi-divine failed hero of the flood). In classical texts, the term "Knight" (*Shih*) usually applies to males and translates as "knight, scholar, or gentleman". It is also rendered as "warrior". Since the context of this figure's myth indicates female gender, and since other figures in this text have the title and function of female warrior, I have retained the rendition of "Knight" in my translation of the goddess's name.[45]

K. Lady (*Shih*): 1

30. Lady Climb Liken (Teng Pi Shih), also known as Lady Climb North (Teng Pei Shih). The title *Shih* also denotes a clan, or clan member. The text identifies this figure as female-gendered through her role as the wife of the male god Shun (Hibiscus). The name "Liken" occurs in the name of two corpse deities of indeterminate gender in the classic.[46]

L. Shaman (*Wu*): 1

31. Shaman Motherinlaw (Wu Ku). This name appears among a group of ten shamans, most of whose names are genderless. The title "Shaman" attaches to males and females. Some texts differentiate between a female shaman (*wu*) and a male shaman (*hsi*). The graph for *Ku* (Motherinlaw) contains the female signifier. I have read Wu Ku as a female-gendered figure.[47]

M. Warrior (*Wu*): 1

32. Warrior Net (Wu Lo). Internal textual evidence shows that this figure is female-gendered. She is a fertility goddess with attributes of feminine beauty, and she is the patronal deity of mothers and girl babies. Her epithet "Warrior" parallels that of "Knight" for Knight Homage (no. 29 above). The name "Net" also occurs in the name of another shaman in the group of ten mentioned above (no. 31), Shaman Net who may also be a female figure.[48]

N. Torch (*Chu*): 1

33. Torch Glare (Chu Kuang). The text identifies her as one of "the two daughters" (*erh nü*) of Lady Climb Liken. The name "Torch" occurs in the names of two other deities in this classic, Torch Dragon (Chu Lung) and Torch Shade (Chu Yin), who are of indeterminate gender. By analogy with the deity Torch Glare whom the text specifies as female, the two other Torch deities may also be construed as female figures.[49]

O. Ancestress, Foremother (also Ancestor, Forefather) (*Tsu*): 1

34. Thunder Foremother (Lei Tsu). The text identifies this figure as female-gendered through her role as the wife of the God Yellow (Huang Ti). The title *Tsu* is genderless, but in this text it clearly indicates a female. In most classical texts, written in the patristic tradition by male authors, the term usually denotes a male.[50]

P. Miscellaneous Names and Titles: 3

The following names and titles do not indicate gender, and they may include epithets. Only their context supplies gender identity.

35. Evening Bright (Hsiao Ming). The context identifies her female gender as one of the two daughters of the goddess Lady Climb Liken (see no. 30).[51]

36. Sacrificial Vessel (Hsien). The female gender of this deity is confirmed twice in the passage relating her myth by her designations as "girl" (*nü-tzu*) and "daughter" (*nü-tzu*) of a river god.[52]

37. Hear Omen (T'ing Yao). The text indicates female gender for this goddess in her role as the wife of the God Flame (Yen Ti). She is "the child" of a river god.[53]

These sixteen categories of female names and titles in the classic comprise a total of thirty-five individual female figures plus two groups of figures. In percentage terms, taking the total figure of 204 mythical figures in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* female figures constitute just over eighteen percent. These total and percentage figures have to be tentative, however, since the gender identity of so many figures in the text remains unknown. Female gender has been indicated by the title or epithet "Woman," the most frequent in the text, in addition to other titles. Female gender has also been provided for many figures through the context of their mythic narrative. Where the name has been genderless, the evidence given by the context has proved invaluable for gender identification. This text has been shown to serve as a precious resource for the study of fugitive gendered myth.

Female-Gendered Function, Role, Activity

As the foregoing discussion suggests, the translated titles and names as well as the mythic contexts yield significant clues concerning the function, role, and activity of many female figures in this text. A number of questions will now be addressed. What functions did female figures perform? Of what cultural significance are these? Do they reveal what sources of power, authority, and influence are available to female figures? Are their activities and roles exclusively or predominantly female, and is there female independence of function? Is a special knowledge implied? Which functions of female mythical figures may be viewed as being in cultural opposition to later concepts of the female role in traditional society? Which female functions recorded in mythological texts in the classic were superseded by males in the historical era? The last two questions will be addressed in my conclusion. The remaining questions will be raised as they are relevant in the ensuing discussion.

I have isolated eighteen major categories of function, role, and activity in the mythic episodes of the thirty-five female figures and the two groups of figures. They may be subsumed

under the general rubric of control, of the cosmos, life, weather, divine violence, and punishment, and the rubric of creation, including foundation, nurture, mediation, and kinship. To avoid attaching a spurious value to these functional categories I will deal with them in alphabetical order.

1. Divine Consort

Of the thirty-seven female figures nine are designated as divine consorts, that is, the "wife" (*ch'i* or *fu)* or the "dead wife" (*p'in*) of a male deity who is named. For example, the dead wives named the Nine Queens have the role of consorts of the sky god Chuan Hsu (Fond Care); Breath Blend the sun goddess is consort to the god Chün (Foremost); the Junior Wife is consort to the rain god named the Rain Master; Lady Climb Liken to Shun (Hibiscus); Sublime Grace to Foremost; Knight Homage to the semi-divine Kun (Hugefish); Ever Breath the moon goddess to Foremost; Thunder Foremother to the God Yellow (Huang Ti); and Hear Omen to the fire god Flame. The god Foremost (Chün) who has three separate consorts in this text is a paramount divinity, but he does not appear in the pantheons of other classical works.

It is a significant feature of passages which relate that female figures are the consort of a male deity that only the name of the male deity is given, not the male myth. The male names are attached with no contextual explanation to these female myths. By contrast, the names of female deities in their role of consort are never appended to myths of male deities, in this text. Moreover, female deities who are linked to males in this consort function do not perform any joint function as a divine couple with them. In this connection it is noteworthy that there is a low incidence (only twenty-four percent) of female figures who fulfil the role of divine consort. Another remarkable feature of this consort list in the classic is the absence of major female deities who stand preeminent and independent in their divine power. All these factors suggest that this weak appendage of male deities in name only to the myths of some female figures who are "wived" to them is a late mythopoeic invention disguising an authorial strategy of diminishing some forms of female power and authority. This was a trend, as we shall see, in the later evolution of female mythical figures.

A minor pattern observable in this functional category is the low incidence of polygamy, which only occurs in the residual myth of the Nine Queens and the consorts of the god Foremost. Their myths may serve as evidence for the mythic construct of the social practice of polygamy.

2. Control of Living Things

The function of divine control of all living things is associated solely with the goddess named the Mother Queen of the West (Hsi Wang Mu). One of her mythic narratives relates that she presides over a paradisial creation on Mount Flamingfire, a peak on the numinous range of Mount Offspringline (K'un-lun). No male deity performs the same function in the classic, nor is the goddess associated with a male deity in this text. Her paradise, sited in the west, is minimally described as a utopia which contains all living things, "all the myriad creatures that are on earth." Unlike the patriarchal creator Yahweh, the Mother Queen of the West is not shown to have a personal relationship with or intervention in creation or humankind.[54]

3. Control of World Catastrophe

The same goddess has the further function of inflicting awesome catastrophes on the world. She is said to be in control of the "Catastrophes from the Sky" and the "Five Destructive Forces." The first group may refer to the natural disasters of flood, fire, thunder and lightning, and drought. The second group may denote plague, drought, famine, ravaging insects, and ferocious monsters. The goddess's power and authority are revealed through her control of the cosmos and her ability to undo the design of the cosmos. Her function is exclusively female, and she is independent in her performance of it.[55]

4. Cosmological Controller

Goddesses have the function of controlling the orderly sequence of celestial bodies. The sun goddess Breath Blend is said to preside over the orderly rotation of the ten suns, who are her children, and to purify them and restore their numinous divinity after their journey through the world. The same function is performed by the moon goddess Ever Breath for her children, the twelve moons. Less familiar myths relate that the goddess Evening Bright creates light in a darkened part of the universe, while her sister Torch Glare brightens the daytime sky. The myths of two female figures are unfortunately textually corrupt but allow of some reconstruction. Cry Giantess Skygate appears to have the function of controlling the pivot of the sky at Mount Sunmoon. The figure Breathe-out seems to have a similar function, and her myth as well as that of the former appears in a cosmologically significant passage, which also relates the myth of the separation of sky and earth.[56]

The goddess Woman Droughtghoul (Nü Pa) has the function of controlling torrential rain, by withholding it when other gods wield it as a weapon in their cosmic battles.[57]

These seven goddesses are independent figures who perform their functions of

cosmological control without the aid of male deities nor jointly with them. Although male deities are associated with them as their divine spouse in some cases, such as the solar and lunar goddesses, they do not share the role or activity of the female.

5. The Cosmological Human Body

It is known from mythic narratives in other classical texts that the primeval goddess Woman Kua created the world through her divine transformations and that she created humankind out of yellow mud. This classic, however, records only a vestigial manifestation of her creational function. It relates that the goddess created ten deities from her human form through the transformation of her guts. (The numerological motif of ten has been seen in the solar myth of Breath Blend.) Although the gender of the ten deities is not given, it may be assumed that they are female. In this text no male deity performs the creational function of Woman Kua. Nor is the myth of the cosmological human body replicated in a male myth in this text.[58]

6. Cultural Benefit

Five goddesses confer cultural benefits on humankind. The deity named The One Woman is said to have discovered sericulture, and a second etiological myth of sericulture is seen in the vestigial myth of the goddess Silkmulberry- Godsdaughter, whose minimal myth appears to relate that she metamorphosed into a gigantic world tree which produced prolific leaves for feeding silkworms.

The cultural myth of Shaman Motherinlaw is elicited from references to shamanic functions scattered throughout the text. They include gathering herbal drugs on a holy mountain for preserving a corpse from decay, inducing a trance, and for medication. The shamanic function is that of mediating between deities and humans, a function symbolically represented by the ascent of a high mountain (and disappearing into clouds), and its descent bearing divine gifts.

The goddess Pretty Girl, the Liaison Wife, is the indirect bearer of the gifts of archery, music, and a musical instrument, through her three divine sons. The ancestral goddess Hear Omen also produced a line of worker gods who made the Yangtze River region habitable for humans.

Four of the five goddesses perform their functions independently of male deities. The shamanic functions of Shaman Motherinlaw are linked to a specialist group of nine other

shamans of indeterminate gender.

7. Fertility Function

The function of fertility goddess is most clearly expressed in the myth of Warrior Net who is the divine patroness of expectant mothers and enables them to have girl babies. The fertility motif recurs in some enigmatic passages in the text which refer to all-female societies, such as the Country of Women, the lands of Woman Deuce, and the land ruled jointly by Woman Sacrificer and Woman Battleaxe. Their minimalist mode of narration suggests that these myths may have been heavily censored by imperial editors, whose postscripts appear in the body of the text, and are datable to the year 6 B.C. Certainly the commentators down the centuries engaged in a lively debate on the significance of these all-female societies. The wording of the myths taken together with the earliest commentary dating from around A.D. 400 implies that the women in all-female societies performed a fertilization rite, such as bathing in a yellow pool.[59]

8. Founder and Ruler

Eleven goddesses perform the function of founding and/or ruling an earthly kingdom. The Mother Queen of the West presides over her western paradisial utopia. The fertility goddess Warrior Net rules her sacred mountain of Mount Greenwaist. Woman Sacrificer and Woman Battleaxe rule the countries named after them. The goddess Woman Deuce is the founder of the country named after her. The figures named the Two Women rule the Country of Women. The goddess Junior Wife of the Rain Master is founder and ruler of the country of her name. The goddess Sublime Grace founded (literally, "gave birth to" [*sheng*]) the Country of Threebody. The goddess Knight Homage is the ancestress of the Country of Happyhorse Head. The goddess Woman Killer is the ancestress of the Country of Longlifehemp. In all except the last case, these female figures perform their function of ruler and /or founder independently of males.[60]

9. Mediator Function

Only one female figure, Shaman Motherinlaw, fulfils the role of mediator between humans and deities, by symbolically ascending a holy mountain and communing with the deities. The reason for this one instance may be that the other female figures are powerful deities in their own right and do not need divine assistance, receiving instead human supplication in times of disaster and catastrophe. An example of the latter occurs in the myth of Woman Droughtghoul, which includes a rite to bring an end to a drought.[61]

10. Maternal Function

Thirteen goddesses fulfil the role of mother. But only one of them bears the title of "Mother", and she, paradoxically, does not perform this function; this is the goddess named as the Mother Queen of the West. Moreover, her title of "Mother" is negated by her destructive function of wreaking world catastrophes. By contrast, the goddess Warrior Net exhibits a maternal solicitude to mothers, despite her threatening name. Her maternal function is limited, however, to enabling girl babies, a function she shares with the Country of Women. In the latter case, the myth is supplemented by a fourth-century A.D. commentary which relates that *all male* babies die prematurely, implying that only females are allowed to survive. Thus the two female rulers and their female population may be classed as mothers, but they are also infanticides.

The two cosmological deities, the sun goddess Breath Blend and the moon goddess Ever Breath, display their maternal role through the act of bathing their celestial children each day and night after they have become soiled in their journey through the world. The goddess Lady Climb Liken is mother to two other cosmological deities, Evening Bright and Torch Glare.

The name of Shaman MotherinLaw contains a residual reference to motherhood, but no maternal function is related in her myth. The goddess Knight Homage, like Warrior Net, has a military name, and she is the mother of a deity with the violent name of Fiery Steam (gender unknown). The goddess Woman Killer is the mother of the god Tiny Fathom (gender unknown), and grandmother of the god Longlife Hemp, whose own function is to serve as an *axis mundi.*

The ancestral goddess Thunder Foremother founded a genealogical line that culminates in the major deity Chuan Hsu (Fond Care), whose mother is the goddess Beautiful Woman. Thunder Foremother is the mother of the deity Radiant Thought (gender unknown), who came down on earth and settled by a river. The goddess Hear Omen is the mother of the deity Flame Dweller and the ancestress of the important worker gods, Common Work (Kung Kung), Play Tool, and Art Tool.[62] The goddess Pretty Woman, the Liaison Wife (so-called because she was shared by two male deities), gave birth to three culture deities.

Of these thirteen female figures who perform a maternal function, eight are mothers who give birth to divine children. Of the remaining five figures, one has the role of mother in name only, one is a patroness of mothers, one is indirectly linked to motherhood, and two are infanticidal mothers. Seven of the eight baby-producing divine mothers are said to be the wife of a male deity, but their myths do not narrate colourful details of lustful couplings, in the manner of Indian or Greco-Roman myth. The decorous mode of Chinese mythic narrative strongly

points to expurgated texts. Among the mothers in this category, Woman Killer is a single parent, or reproduces by parthenogenesis. The two women rulers of the Country of Women also belong to this type. In percentage terms, thirty-five percent of female figures perform a maternal function in various ways; twenty-one percent produce babies. The maternal function predominates among the eighteen functions.

11. Nurture

Although the nurturing function may be thought to belong to the maternal function, some examples of the latter indicate that they are not necessarily complementary. The nurturing goddesses have been shown to be Warrior Net, Breath Blend, Ever Breath, and Shaman Motherinlaw. Their nurturing power is seen in their roles of fostering, nursing, and spiritual and medical care.

12. Sacred Violence

The function that most dramatically illustrates the power and authority of female figures is the exercise of violence in its cosmic, sacred, and physical dimensions. Whereas myths of sacred violence among male figures in this classic provide contextual causes, such as divine retribution, female myths of violence rarely supply an explanatory context.

Some clues are embedded in the mythic narratives of female figures. The Mother Queen of the West displays her power by unleashing cosmic disasters. No other deity, male or female, inflicts such violence in the text. In seeking causation or a motive for her actions, one risks interpreting myth as history; in subjecting myth to psychological analysis one accords a modern personality to a primeval impersonal being. Perhaps it is safer to conclude that the goddess's sacred violence is random, and, rather than reflecting human rationalization, is an expression of a nonrational cosmic system.

The group of goddesses named Woman Sacrificer, Woman Battleaxe, Woman Destroyer, and Woman Killer represent the concept of violence through their names and attributes. Their myths raise more questions than the context can yield. They convey ideas of military prowess, punitive execution, hunting, and sacrifice.[63] If theirs was a sacrificial function, what or whom did they butcher? Did they cook the sacrificial food? Who ate their sacrificial offering? A few data can be gleaned. Their function was exclusively female. It was a communal activity, practised by two females in a dyadic relationship. The myth of the One Woman provides more information about this function, if indeed it is sacrificial. She is said to wield a club and to make

a food offering while kneeling. Her violent weapon of a club, used in war or hunting or execution, links her to Woman Battleaxe. She is also linked to Woman Sacrifice and Woman Battleaxe through her sitiological emblem (in the case of Woman Battleaxe this is said to be an eel).[64]

The clearest explanatory context for the female function of sacred violence occurs in the myth of Woman Droughtghoul. The myth relates that she is commanded by her divine father, the God Yellow, to use her power of withholding rain in his battle with the god of war, who is using rain as one of his weapons. The goddess eliminates the rain and wind weapons of the god of war, named Ch'ih Yu (Jest Much), and then executes him.

An example of ludic violence is seen in the myth of the goddesses named the Two Daughters of God. Their divine power play causes the four tributaries of the Yangtze to merge in a turbulent rain storm. The function of violence combines with that of fertility in their myth; it is expressed in the narrative through the verb to "merge" (*chiao*), which has the connotation of sexual intercourse.[65]

The myths of these nine female figures reveal significant forms of sacred power. For the most part, this function is not replicated in the myths of male figures, nor is it shared by them. The function of female violence is unprecedented in classical mythology and it is unique to this classic.

13. Sacrificial Function

The sacrificial function was briefly mentioned in relation to the preceding category of sacred violence. It is probably the function of Woman Battleaxe, Woman Destroyer, and Woman Killer. It is clearly implicit in the name of Woman Sacrificer, and therefore by extension it also belongs to the previous three. This function is described in the action of the One Woman with her club and food offering. In addition, the function of sacrifice is evident in the myths of Sacrificial Vessel and Hear Omen, as this is expressed through their names.

14. Sexual Potency

Some goddesses convey their divine sexual potency through their erotic appearance, such as Warrior Net the fertility deity. Others express it through the gift they bestow on humans, such as the goddess Woman Corpse who metamorphosed into a plant that conferred sexual potency on those who took a dose of it. This function differs from that of fertility in the sense that sexual attraction or potency may not lead to procreation. The relative absence of the sexuality motif

from myths of female figures confirms the general rule of this classic that the sexual act and eroticism were edited out of the text.

15. Sitiological Function[66]

Sitiological myth, which has food as its central concern, occurs more frequently in the classic than any other mytheme. It describes utopias in a world of plenty, and earthly paradises and parks where deities relax when they come down on earth. In addition, sitiological myths describe miraculous plants and the food of the deities.

This mytheme is expressed in the myths of numerous female figures. The Mother Queen of the West is fed by three mythical green birds on her mountain. The One Woman is at the centre of a sericultural myth featuring a giant world mulberry tree which feeds silkworms. The four figures of Woman Sacrificer, whose emblem is a butcher's block, Woman Battleaxe with her emblematic eel, the One Woman with her food offering, and Sacrificial Vessel whose name symbolizes her function, have been discussed earlier. Two narratives of Woman Deuce relate that the land she rules with another person (a woman?) has huge crabs, and that her land is near a food-producing marsh which sustains the local population.

16. Spinsterdom

It is not clear what function the female figure named Loving Woman has, since she is only represented as one who, like her brother Loving Knight, never marries. The contrast between their erotic names and celibate function creates a paradox which the minimal text does not elucidate. It is possible that the mythic narrative disguises a taboo against sibling incest. On the other hand, the denial of their sexuality symbolizes the sunless country they rule which bears the richly symbolic name of Rule Gloom's Country. Another possible interpretation is that like other figures in ancient mythologies and religions they may be the chaste guardians of divinity.[67]

17. Storm Function

Ancient Chinese mythology and early chronicles record numerous examples of the panic among humans caused by the sound of thunder. The name of the goddess Thunder Foremother embodies the idea of one who wreaks terror, but no narrative confirms this aspect of her mythical function. The fertilizing and ludic features of the storm goddesses named the Two Daughters of God have been mentioned earlier.[68]

18. Victims of Sacred Violence: The Immolatory Function

My review of the functions of female figures has uncovered a significant number of examples of the immolatory function. This means that female figures are in some cases themselves the victims of sacred violence. The mythic narratives do not mention the perpetrators of violence against divine women, nor is any cause given. This function may be viewed as the reversal of the functions examined thus far in the sense that these myths of victim goddesses represent failure rather than omnipotent success.

The myth of the goddess Woman Lovely provides uniquely detailed information about her fate. One of her names in her metamorphosed state, Victim Bird, underscores her immolatory function. Her myth relates that she drowned while playing in the East Sea, and she then metamorphosed into a bird, more commonly named Sprite Guard (Ching Wei). She was the daughter of the God Flame (Yen Ti), who also died when the God Yellow's weapon of water extinguished Flame's elemental weapon of fire in their cosmic battle for supreme control of the universe.[69] The myth of Woman Lovely may therefore share with that of Flame the motif of the antithetical archetypes of fire and water. It is possible to construe a transgression motif in her myth, since her ludic bath in the East Sea may be read as the violation of a divine boundary. Her myth relates that after drowning and becoming a bird, she was doomed to the eternal task of damming the sea. Her task may be interpreted as the punishment inflicted by the sea god (unnamed). Certainly, the dual themes of metamorphosis and punishment feature in several other myths.[70]

The myth of the female corpse deity named the Corpse of Woman Deuce, provides the cause of her death. She was immolated on a mountain top in the world conflagration when the ten suns all rose on the same day. Her mythic narrative does not say whether this was self-immolation or a ritual exposure violently enforced on her.[71] Another corpse deity, Woman Corpse, is said to have died on Mount Motherinlaw-merry, but no details are given in her narrative. Woman Corpse metamorphosed into a plant with erotic properties. Her metamorphosis may be read as part of a punishment motif in her myth. Even more minimal is the myth of the Corpse of the Yellow Giantess, but it may also belong to this motif group.

Although the myth of the Nine Queens occurs three times in the text, no details of their death are provided. Only the burial place (sited variously) is mentioned, and their cosmological grave position on the mountain's north side. Their divine consort Shun (Hibiscus) lies buried on the south side. The hallowed site is marked by a paradisial utopia on earth. The number nine in

this myth reflects the privileged value attached to it in the ancient culture of Ch'u (central southern China). Numerologically, it denoted a celestial archetype embodying ideas of divinity, the sky, and musical harmony.[72] The number nine in their burial myth raises these questions: Did the female figures die in a joint ritual killing on the death of the god Hibiscus? If so, can their myth be read as the vestige of an archaic ritual in the southern culture of Ch'u? Does the myth sanction the sacrificial slaughter of living female consorts on the death of a male ruler in prehistorical times? What their myth does suggest is a numerological model for an archaic system of polygamy, and the eufunctional practice of nine consorts for a divinized ruler.

The deformity motif is present in the myth of the goddess-human named Breathe-out, who is described as having no arms and her feet are "doubled back and joined to the top of her head." Unfortunately it appears in a garbled passage narrating central themes of a celestial axis, sunset, and the separation of sky and earth. This deity shares with the sun and moon goddesses the motif of breathing in her name -- Breath Blend, Ever Breath, and Breathe-out -- and so she has been included among female figures here. Whereas the first two perform active roles in the motion of the sun and moon, Breathe-out enacts a passively immolatory function. Since her myth is linked to the myth of the setting of the sun and moon, their waning and expiring may be symbolically represented in her punitive pose.[73]

The immolatory function occurs in a myth which is minimally present in the name, Silkmulberry-GodsDaughter. Interpretative data may be deduced by comparing her myth to that of Woman Lovely. Her name proclaims that she is the daughter of a god, and parallels with Woman Lovely suggest that she died committing a transgression and was metamorphosed into a beneficial tree. There is linguistic support for this reconstruction of her myth: her name, Silkmulberry (*Sang*), is a pun for "mourning" (*sang*).

Some generalizations are now presented based on the foregoing analysis of the eighteen functions of female mythical figures in the classic. Their functions include the creational and nurturing roles, punitive and sacrificial roles, and functions of cosmic control and societal rulership. They also encompass varieties of kinship roles: ancestral foundation, sexuality, celibacy, consort, and fertility. It has been shown that there is independence of female function with no male intervention. Freedom of movement characterizes female roles and activity, although female figures are bound to a specific locality. Their functions are performed outdoors in a cosmic or a natural environment.

Gender differentiation is evident in the role specialization of female figures. That is, male figures do not also perform female functions. Specialized knowledge is implied for certain functions. Ambiguity of role is evident with some female figures; they may perform a positive (e.g. nurturing) role at the same time as a negative (e.g. destructive) role. Polyfunctionality is present in some cases. The major finding in this analysis of the wealth of data is that female figures exercised an exclusive monopoly of crucial functions. These are expressed in myths of which the central concerns are female control of cosmology, ancestral foundation, fertility, sacrifice, and female self-rule. These major functions demonstrate that female figures were empowered and invested with symbolic authority.

Power Imagery[74]

Gender imagery in the classic uses emblems of power in the mythic representation of the female. Power imagery takes the form of warrior attributes, weaponry, ferocious animalian aspect, wild human appearance, anomalous natural phenomena, giganticism, power play, numerology, sensory and erotic imagery, and symbolic markers of authority. Gendered emblems constitute the visual manifestation of the abstract concepts of power and authority exercised by female figures. They reinforce the significance of their mythological functions. This is a large subject, and I only present here a brief resume of its main modes of expression.

The data may be organized into the categories of physical, material, natural, and metaphorical attributes. Physical features include the animalian and the wild human aspects. These are both seen in the representation of one of the most powerful figures, the Mother Queen of the West. Her animalian features of tigress fangs and leopard's tail reveal her as a ruthless goddess of prey. Wildness is also shown by her tangled hair and non-verbal whistling call.[75] Animalian features also occur but to a lesser degree in the description of the people of Junior Wife of the Rain Master who wear and carry venomous snakes.

Empowerment expressed through giganticism is portrayed in the figures of Cry Giantess Skygate and the Corpse of the Yellow Giantess.

The emblem of military force is seen in several attributes of the fertility goddess Warrior Net, through her two names (her second name denotes a hunting weapon) and the fierce stinging insects which guard her sacred mountain. She also has a savage animalian aspect with her panther markings.

Physical empowerment is conveyed in the myth of the creative divinity Woman Kua, through the synecdoche of her guts, which she transforms into ten deities. It constitutes a graphic image of the mytheme of the cosmological human body.

Material emblems of power and authority are seen in the symbols of monarchy and supremacy. The regal authority of the Mother Queen of the West is shown in the three symbols of her throne, her victory headdress (or crown), and her staff (or scepter). The staff or scepter denotes supremacy in physical strength and fighting prowess. This attribute is linked to the myth of the goddess the One Woman, whose club, emblematic of primeval force, indicates her superiority in hunting and killing. The name of the goddess Woman Battleaxe denotes a military weapon, but she is also linked to sacrificial activity, as is her dyadic partner Woman Sacrificer through her attribute of a butcher's block. Another weapon is the elemental force of water, which is used by Woman Droughtghoul in her withholding power.

Natural phenomena empowers many female figures. For example, the two daughters of the goddess Lady Climb Liken, Evening Bright and Torch Glare, manifest their divinity through brilliant light. The bathing myth of the sun and moon goddesses denote the cosmological power of purification. Turbulent water is the outward sign of the divine power play of the Two Daughters of God. Water also has a fertilizing connotation in the myth of the Country of Women.[76]

Plant imagery occurs in the myths of Shaman Motherinlaw with her divine drugs and Woman Corpse with her sexual dodder attribute. Giganticism in nature is seen in the portrayal of female divinities, for example in the myth of the One Woman and the huge world mulberry tree. Nature as an emblem of divine harmony is represented in the utopian paradise myths of the Mother Queen of the West and the Nine Queens.

Metaphorical constructs convey the abstract concepts of fertility, eroticism, duality, sitiology, and sensory effects by which female deities display their power. Sensory and erotic features are vividly evoked in the depiction of Warrior Net with her tiny waist, white teeth, tinkling ear jewels, and jade-like voice, and in the name of her sacred mountain, Mount Greenwaist.

Chromatic imagery conveys aspects of female power. For example, the goddess Corpse of Woman Deuce wears green clothes, denoting the aspiration for regenerative water during the world drought. The green clothes of Woman Droughtghoul emblematize her power to control

irrigating water. The same emblem of the goddess Sacrificial Vessel may signify her descent from a river god. The name Mount Greenwaist has been mentioned above. Chromatic imagery includes the colour yellow. It is seen in the myths of the Corpse of the Yellow Giantess, and it informs the late myth of the fertilizing yellow pool in the all-female society of the Country of Women.

Auditory imagery has been noted in the non-verbal whistling of the Mother Queen of the West and in the erotic ear ornaments and voice of Warrior Net. It is marginally evident in the names of Thunder Foremother and Hear Omen. The power of thunder to invoke cosmic terror has been noted.

The metaphor of duality is evident in the myths of the Two Daughters of God, the two women representing the Country of Women, and the dyadic sacrificer-goddesses. These dualities may be interpreted as a form of female power-sharing, following the interpretative model of Georges Dumézil.[77]

Sitiological imagery is present in the myths of Woman Deuce and her huge crab, Knight Homage with her abundant seafood and grain crops, and in the visions of paradisial plenty associated with several goddesses. These myths express the divine power to control the sources and production of food. The myth of the cosmological human body inherent in the myth of the Guts of Woman Kua may also belong to this category in the sense that the guts process food that is consumed. On the other hand, a different interpretation may be offered for this myth, since the guts were perceived to be the seat of the emotions in ancient and traditional writings. Thus the myth may denote the power of divine sensibility to move and influence humankind.[78]

These major examples of power imagery have several purposes. They present abstract concepts through metonymic constructs. They combine complex levels of meaning as a way of clarifying ambiguous, complementary, or antithetical ideas. They enliven the narrative episodes with aesthetic details. Most importantly, power imagery reinforces and dramatizes the significance of diverse female-gendered figures and their functions.

Other Uses of Female Gender

Other uses of female gender are evident in the classic, such as in geographical names, natural objects and creatures, in sacrificial ritual, and in clan names. The text has preserved numerous gendered place-names which otherwise would have been lost to the historical record.[79] Thirty-

five have survived, of which the following are interesting examples: the River She-whale (animalian), Mount Girlsbed (sexual), the hornetmother wasp (vicious insect), Mount Breedheir (procreation). Some natural objects are gendered, for example the yellow briar which acts as a contraceptive. Passages describing sacrificial ritual (in Books One to Five only) specify the female gender of the victim, such as a sow or ewe. The use of female gender in clan names occurs in three surnames in the text, the graphs for which are formed with the female signifier (*nü*): Charm (Yao), Beauty (Ch'i), and Fierce (Chiang). The graph for "surname" (*hsing*) is itself formed by the female signifier plus the graph for "birth" (*sheng*). Moreover, the term for "clan" (*shih*) is used in female titles, and is used with feminine names, such as the "Wife Clan" (*Ch'i Shih*). Thus a basic connection is observable between female gender and kinship terms, in which the feminine is a privileged concept. These examples of feminization in geographical names, the names of natural objects, in sacrificial ritual, and clan names reinforce the value attached to the concept of the female in this classic.

Liminal Gender Constructs

Liminal gender constructs constitute a major concern in the analysis of myth in classical Chinese texts, and none more so than in this text. Liminality is evident in androgeny, parthenogenesis, ungendered figures, and ambiguous gender. Examples of androgeny are the easiest to classify since they are identified by the formula in the text: "it is by nature both female and male" (*tzu wei p'in mou*).[80] They include the birds rare-me and elephant-snake, the feline animal the sort, and the deity White Hound. Examples of parthenogenesis occur with male figures who give birth to (*sheng*) a new generation of deities, using the same formula as for females giving birth. Many of these examples are to be found in Book Eighteen.

The category of ungendered figures refers to mythical figures whose gender is not ascertainable through their title, name, or context. Many of these figures are unknown outside this text. Since classical Chinese syntax does distinguish between masculine or feminine gender in pronouns, verbs, or adjectives, the determination of the gender identity of these figures awaits further research.[81]

The category of ambiguous gender differs from the previous case in the sense that although gender indications are present in the title and context of certain mythical figures, scholarly opinion is divided concerning their gender identity. Two examples will suffice. They

are the figures of the earth deity Sovereign Earth (Hou T'u) and the grain deity Sovereign Millet (Hou Chi).[82] The earth deity was not developed in classical Chinese mythology, but became a primary cult figure in the state religion of the early Han empire, *ca.* 100 B.C. By contrast, the grain deity was a major mythological figure, but did not enjoy a cult status in the ancient religious system to the same extent as the earth deity. The title *Hou* (Sovereign) in historical texts and in political practice came to be attached to female consorts or empresses. The title used for the emperor or male ruler from the third century B.C. was appropriated from mythological titles that had designated only deities, such as the titles *Huang* and *Ti*. Generally speaking, the term *Ti* in classical mythology denotes a male deity. The question arises, was the term *Hou* generally used in early myth narratives to denote a female deity? It is my belief that the term *Hou* designates a major goddess, and this feminized concept was so attached to the title that it transferred easily to the title of human female consorts and rulers in the early imperial era. This conjecture is supported by a comparison between the two Chinese figures and earth and corn deities in world mythologies, where it is found that their gender is for the most part female. If my conjecture is correct, then both Sovereign Earth (who plays a minor role in mythology) and Sovereign Millet (who is a major figure) should be included among my gender list of female figures in the classic. The subject of gender liminality in this text and in classical texts generally merits a detailed inquiry in future research.

Conclusions

My analysis of thirty-seven female-gendered figures out of a total of 204 in the classic reveals the highest number of female mythical figures in any classical Chinese text. Uniquely, this female-gender list is substantiated by the evidence of names and titles and also confirmed in many cases through narrative context. Early sinological arguments that the title *Nü* (Woman, the most frequent female designation in this text) does not signify female but male gender must be dismissed on the basis of the evidence presented here. For many female figures this text constitutes the *locus classicus*. As such it survives as a rare and valuable gender document. In view of this unprecedented textual evidence for so many female figures, readers and scholars will need to revise their ideas of the gender identification of many of the remaining figures in the text, who are assumed to be male. For they may be classifiable as female, liminal gender, or male.

My discussion of the eighteen functions of female figures demonstrates that through their exercise of power, control, authority, and influence, they occupy a crucial position in the mythological construct of the classic. My detailed reconstruction of female-gender roles and activities allows some generalizations. Gender-differentiated role specialization is the general rule. This means that female figures perform cosmological and divine functions independently of male figures. It also means that male figures do not replicate female functions. My analysis of functions shows that in terms of power, authority, and value, a hierarchization of function and role is established which privileges the female. My survey of the use of power imagery in the representation of female figures confirms and reinforces this hierarchization of prestige and power.

The positioning of the female in the foreground of concepts of power and authority is further emphasized by numerous indicators of feminization. This means that female gender is so pervasive in other categories besides mythical figures that it serves as a major motif in the text. Thus the hierarchization of function and role, taken in conjunction with the motif of feminization creates a unique discourse on gender in classical mythology.

Going beyond these generalizations there are a number of significant questions which emerge. I will single out two of the most important for special mention here. One concerns the ways in which the male superseded the role and function of female mythical figures in the historical era. The other concerns the ways in which woman was written out of the mythological record. I will deal briefly with the second question first. Male-gendered authorship of classical writings is the key to understanding the ways in which woman was eliminated from canonical literature in antiquity and in the medieval era. The great age of classical writing extends from *ca.* 600 B.C. to around the first century B.C. It includes philosophy, poetry, history, and prophetic and eclectic works, and these form the medium by which classical myth was transmitted. They originated with male authors and male-dominated schools of thought, and reflect the patriarchal ideology which became encoded into the cultural tradition up to the early twentieth century. Females were socially removed from the role of actively shaping and transmitting the sacred mythic narratives. Myths of female figures were thus mediated by male authors and in the process it is a reasonable hypothesis that they underwent a transformational shift. Among the classical texts, the *Classic of Mountains of Seas* is the exception to the general rule of a shift in gender emphasis. This is no doubt due to the fact that this classic was not the

product of any philosophical or ideological school, but existed on the margins of textuality. If we take this text as our standard for gender symmetry, in which male and female gender is given more or less equal value (in some cases with greater value attached to the female), and compare this with other texts and their treatment of the gender issue, a trend is discernible of minimalizing the role of women. This is demonstrated in most classical texts, in postclassical works, and, especially, in the representation of myth in funeral art.

The earliest trend toward writing woman out of mythology is seen in the way female figures that had exercised pristine independence became linked to male deities. (This trend is perceptible within the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, as I noted before.) In her later representation, for example. Woman Kua was linked to the male god Prostrate Victim (Fu Hsi) as a divine couple emblematizing mating and marriage through their intertwined tails.[83] Similarly, the Mother Queen of the West was paired with the Father King of the East.[84] Primeval goddesses were demythologized and stripped of their divine potency. For example, Woman Kua was recast as a socialized human figure in the role of the first wife in a later myth of the first marriage.[85] Power imagery was weakened in the representation of the Mother Queen of the West to the point where her wild aspect became domesticated to conform to the model of a human empress, who receives a Han emperor in audience and exchanges poetic dialog instead of emitting the wild whistling calls of her former mountain eyrie.[86]

Some texts dramatized the break between myth and religion. For example, a passage in a Taoist chapter of the second century B.C. text *Master Huai-nan* describes how the emblematic crown of the "Old One of the West" (Hsi Lao) snaps.[87] This figure is identified as the Mother Queen of the West. The same chapter recounts how Woman Kua becomes subordinated to a new deity in the Taoist pantheon. It tells how after she had saved the world and humankind from the great deluge and conflagration, she was assumed into heaven where she has an audience with almighty god and comes to rest for eternity at the feet of the Supreme Ancestor (T'ai Tsu), both of whom are male figures.[88] The *Master Huai-nan* is a male-authored text of the Taoist school of philosophy. The latter deity is a mythopoeic manipulative invention of Taoism.

Another means by which female mythical figures were erased from the mythological record is the masculinization of their gender. This occurs in the myth of the sun goddess Breath Blend. Her myth was restructured by the anonymous male author(s) of a text purporting to record the ancient history of the Chinese people. Entitled the *Book of Documents* (*Shu ching*) or

the *Ancient History (Shang shu)* it has a spurious historicity. In its first two chapters it seeks to promote the neomyth of the first government. Selected mythical figures from the classical tradition are given new roles and humanized functions in the mythopoeic bureaucracy. The ancient sun goddess is masculinized and her identity is replicated to form four male figures who become officials in charge of astronomy and the calendar, the brothers named Hsi (Breath), and the brothers Ho (Blend).[89]

Some female figures are combined, as is the case with the moon goddess Ever Breath, who is fused with a figure named Ever Sublime (Ch'ang O). Sentimentalization of role and function also occurs, and this is seen in the transferral of mythic identity from the pristine moon goddess Ever Breath to Ever Sublime, who is assumed up to the moon as an immortal being, together with her pet rabbit and drug of immortality.[90]

A last example of the female mythical figure's elimination from the written record is seen in a comparison between the female-gender deity list in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and the later divine pantheons. Not only are the major goddesses absent from these pantheons, but the lesser ones are removed and would have sunken into oblivion had it not been for their survival in this classic.[91]

Turning now to the other major question posed by the data in this classic, a distinct difference is observable between the role and function of female mythical figures and the role and function of women in the historical era. Generally, female mythical functions which were perceived to embody prestige and value were superseded by males in their cultural equivalence. Simply put, there is a reversal of gender roles, and a structural antithesis between public and domestic domains is established. For example, cultic practices, such as sacrificial slaughter and butchering were taken over by male specialists.[92] The function of punishment was transferred to male officials and in the early stages was regulated by calendrical prescriptions with male patronal deities.[93] Cosmological functions were reformulated as calendrical and astronomical sciences which were male-dominated.[94] Those mythic roles of a sociopolitical significance were transposed to males. Thus the mythic roles of ancestress, foundress, and female ruler became in the patriarchal system the male ancestor, founder, and emperor. Female roles relating to physical violence and militarism were superseded by male functionaries, both in the professional army and in popular movements.

In the historical era, from the period of around 600 B.C. with the first classical text, females roles encompassed those of mother, wife, daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, lower-grade wife, maid, and prostitute, in addition to female consort, and in only one case in antiquity a female ruler.[95] Their roles of nurturing and maintaining the domestic sphere were beset with restrictions which resulted in the marginalization of woman in traditional society.

My paper was prompted by the need to deconstruct the strong edifice of gender bias in classical writings and to rediscover the position of woman as it was expressed in mythology, particularly in the mythological system of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas.* This classic has been shown to prove an exception to the rule of male gender bias. Its representation of woman exhibits a gender symmetry, in which both genders are more or less equal in terms of function and role, but also a gender asymmetry which favours the female in terms of the prestige, value, and status attached to those roles and functions. This means that in addition to an equal division of gender roles and activities, numerically speaking, there are some indications and examples of female predominance in the text. The evidence that I have presented in my analysis of female-gendered power in the classic corroborates Engels's theory that the position of woman "has not always, everywhere, or in most respects been subordinate to that of men".[96] The data confirm Margaret Mead's early perception of the "extraordinary diversity" of gender roles throughout the cultural history of humankind.[97]

In closing, I reiterate my view that myth embodies a cultural construct which expresses in symbolic language the belief-system of an archaic, preliterate, and prehistorical society. The representation of woman in surviving mythological accounts, even allowing for a mediating shift from oral to written versions, may therefore be read as a valid expression of the prehistorical concept of woman and her role in the cosmos and human society. The myths of female figures in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* clearly reveal a receptivity in the mind of the myth-makers to the concept of female power and authority.

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Notes

1. The principal edition of the text is Hao Yi-hsing (1757-1825), ed., *Shan hai ching chien shu,* commentaries by Kuo P'u (A.D. 276-324) and Hao Yi-hsing, 18 books or chapters, Preface dated 1804, published 1809, reproduced in the *Ssu-pu pei-yao* series (1927-35), Shanghai: Chung-hua, 1927-35. Translated terms: title, *Commentarial edition of the Classic of Mountains and Seas*; series title, Complete Major Works in the Four Classical Categories, History Category; publisher, China Publishing Co. Kuo P'u's commentary was the first and is the standard commentary up to the 15th cent. Hao's commentary includes annotations by Wu Jen-ch'en (?1628-89), and Pi Yuan (1730-97), besides those of other editors. The modern edition of the text is by Yuan K'o, *Shan hai ching chiao chu* [*Critical Edition of the Classic of Mountains and Seas*], two Prefaces dated 1963 and 1978, with traditional illustrations, Shanghai: Ku-chi [Ancient works], 1980. For a complete translation, with annotation, textual history, related research publications, and a survey of the text, see Anne Birrell, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, Penguin Classics, London: Penguin Books, 1999. The text of the classic was written by anonymous authors and dates from the third century B.C. (Books 1-5), around the 2nd-1st cent. B.C. (Books 6-13), around the 1st cent. B.C. (Books 14-17), and around the 1st cent. A.D. (Book 18). The *Ssu-pu pei-yao* (henceforth SPPY) edition contains verse appraisals or captions by Kuo P'u to a set of illustrations to the classic current in his day (*T'u tsan*), available in English in Cheng Hsiao-chieh, Hui-chen Cheng, and Kenneth Lawrence Thern, *Shan Hai Ching: Legendary Geography and Wonders of Ancient China,* Taipei: Committee for Compilation and Examination of the Series of Chinese Classics, 1985, pp. 265-382. Comparativists will note that my opening statement was inspired by that of Kenneth Dover in the first paragraph of his Preface to *Greek Homosexuality,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978, rev. ed. 1989, p. vii. Dover's study of male-gendered culture and homoerotics in ancient Greece was a pioneering investigation which had an important influence on the later work of the postmodern critic Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self,* Vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality,* 3 vols., trans. from the French by Robert Hurley (1984), London: Penguin Books, 1990.

2. When I use the term "system" here, I mean the totality of references to female-gendered myths present in the text. Others have found a different system operating in the text, for example, Tu Erh-wei, *Shan hai ching shen-hua hsi-t'ung* [*The Mythological System of the Classic of Mountains and Seas*], 1960, rpt. Taipei: Taiwan hsueh-sheng, 1977. Tu uses the monomythic approach of the meteorological school of myth studies, placing an undue emphasis on lunar myth in the text.
3. My definition of myth has evolved since I first assayed to express the various theories of the term in a comprehensive format; see Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction,* 1993, rpt. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, pp. 2-5.
4. For a survey of the nature of Chinese mythic narratives, see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 17-20.
5. In the 4th cent. B.C. a predominantly male scale of social values was enunciated in the five ethico-social relationships in the *Mencius*: father/son, ruler/subject, husband/wife, the elderly/the young, and friend/friend; *Meng Tzu, T'eng Wen-kung* [*Duke Wen of T'eng* (in Shantung)], SPPY 11.11b, trans. in D.C. Lau, *Mencius,* Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1970, p. 102. Mencius expresses this gendered ideology through a mythical figure mythopoeically restructured.
6. *Biographies of Women*; *Lieh nü chuan,* attributed to Liu Hsiang (79-8 B.C.), but probably anon., 3rd-4th cent. A.D.; translated by Albert Richard O'Hara, *The Position of Women in Early China according to Lieh nü chuan,* 1945, 2d ed. Hong Kong: Orient Publishing Co., 1955.
7. For an illuminating study of this female-authored text, see Yu-shih Chen, "The Historical Template of Pan Chao's *NÜ CHIEH [Lessons for Women]*," *T'oung Pao* (Leiden) 82.4-5 (1996): 229-257.
8. I have adapted the term "gender asymmetry" and its variants from the term "sexual asymmetry" used by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman. Culture, and Society*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974, pp. 18-19. Among classical Chinese texts, a section of a text presents a not unfavorable view of mythical females; it is "Questions of Heaven [*T'ien wen*]", chapter 3 of *Songs of Ch'u* [*Ch'u Tz'u*], trans. David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu*

Yuan and Other Poets, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1985, pp. 122-51. "Questions of Heaven" is an anonymous mythological text.

9. For a discussion of bibliographic classifications of the classic, see Riccardo Fracasso, *"Shan hai ching [The Classic of Mountains and Seas]."* in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, Early China Special Monograph Series, 2, Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993, pp. 358-59.
10. For an overview of the classification preferences of modern scholars, see Birrell, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas,* xiv, 273-77.
11. The first five books of the classic are more important for their ritualistic than their mythological content, although some major mythic episodes do appear there. Most of the important myths are recorded in Books 6 to 18.
12. Cixous identifies gendered polarities as male mind versus female body, male culture versus female nature, male activity/power versus female passivity/powerlessness, and male time/history versus female space; "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 102.
13. Cited by Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society," p. 17.
14. Cited by Alice A. Jardine in her critical analysis of Derrida; Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, pp. 184-85.
15. See for example Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, pp. 207-22.
16. For an overview of Bachofen's theory, see Jean Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society,* pp. 263-65. Jennifer W. Jay refers to the idealist social evolutionists, Jakob Bachofen, L.H. Morgan, and Friedrich Engels, in her study "Imagining Matriarchy: 'Kingdoms of Women' in Tang China", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.2 (1996): 221. Jay's article concentrates on data drawn from T'ang sources, and she mentions briefly the phenomenon of matriarchy in passages in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* Jay, p. 221.

17. Riccardo Fracasso, "The Illustrations of the *Shan hai ching* (1). From Yu's Tripods to Qing Blockprints," *Cina* 21 (1988): 93-104. Also see Hu Wen-huan (A.D. 1596), *Shan hai ching t'u* [*Illustrations of the Classic of Mountains and Seas*], Shanghai: Ku-chi, 1994.
18. Two sinologists, no doubt influenced by paternalistic traditionalism, took the curious position that the word *nü* may refer to a male deity and does not necessarily indicate a female; see Édouard Chavannes, "Annales Principales des Trois Souverains par Se-ma Tcheng," in his prolegomena to *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* [*Shih chi*], 6 vols., 1895-1905, vol. 1, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895, pp. 9-11, and notes 5, 2 ; also see Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946): 229.
19. For each of the female figures I cite the Chinese text of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* by the reference SPPY with chapter number, followed by the page number and its recto or verso, as well as the translation in Birrell, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (henceforth *Classic*). SPPY 3.16b, Birrell, *Classic*, 48; also see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 214-15.
20. SPPY 5.18b, Birrell, *Classic*, p. 81.
21. SPPY 7.2a and SPPY 16.6b, Birrell, *Classic*, 115, 176.
22. SPPY 7.2a, Birrell, *Classic*, 115.
23. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China,* Vol. 3, *Mathematics, and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth,* with the collaboration of Wang Ling, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975, p. 243, Fig. 91, "Inner ring"; "*chhou.*"
24. The citations for Nü Ch'ou are SPPY 7.2b, 14.5a, 16.4a, Birrell, *Classic,* 116, 161, 175.
25. Yi Nü-tzu (i) SPPY 8.3b, Birrell, *Classic,* 124; Yi Nü-tzu (ii) SPPY 12.1b, Birrell, *Classic,* 145.
26. SPPY 7.3a, 16.4a, Birrell, *Classic*, 116, 175.
27. SPPY 14.3a, Birrell, *Classic*, 160.
28. SPPY 16.1a-b, Birrell, *Classic*, 173; see also Birrell, *Chinese Mythology.* 33-5, 69-72, 163-65.
29. SPPY 16.6b, Birrell, *Classic*, 176.
30. SPPY 16.6b, Birrell, *Classic*, 176-77.

31. SPPY 17.5b, Birrell, *Classic*, 187.
32. SPPY 18.2a, Birrell, *Classic*, 191.
33. SPPY 18.7a, Birrell. *Classic*, 194.
34. SPPY 5.42a, Birrell, *Classic*, 100; see also Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, 167-69; for hymns to the Yangtze river goddesses, see Hawkes, *Songs of the South,* pp. 104-9.
35. SPPY 5.38b, Birrell, *Classic*, 97.
36. SPPY 16.5b, Birrell, *Classic*, 176.
37. SPPY 16.4b, Birrell, *Classic*, 175.
38. SPPY 15.5a, Birrell, *Classic*, 170.
39. SPPY 16.5a, Birrell, *Classic*, 176.
40. SPPY 16.4b, Birrell, *Classic*, 175.
41. SPPY 15.1b-2a, Birrell. *Classic*, 167. The god Foremost (Chün) implicitly heads the unstated pantheon of this text, but he is not a significant deity in other classical texts. See Birrell, *Classic*, 220-21.
42. SPPY 2.19a, 12.1a, 16.6a, Birrell, *Classic*, 24, 145, 176. See Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979, Chapter Four, "The Queen Mother of the West," pp. 86-126. My translation of this goddess's title is designed to avoid the matronly term "Queen Mother," since the goddess is portrayed as a female deity at the height of her physical and divine powers.
43. SPPY 8.4a, 13.3b, 17.1a, Birrell, *Classic*, 124, 152, 183. For the prevalence of the number nine in Ch'u culture, see Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, pp. [7]-8, titles.
44. SPPY 9.3b, Birrell, *Classic*, 128. Compare this prestige mythical title with later usage in historical texts, which underscore the servile and subordinate status of the married woman who refers to herself as "*Ch'ieh*," denoting her inferior position in relation to her husband.
45. SPPY 15.4b, Birrell, *Classic*, 170. The variety of translations for the term "*Shih*" in other classical writings derives in part from the professional skills which defined the individual so designated; for example, in the late Chou dynasty era of around 500 B.C. the *shih* was one who had perfected the "Six Arts" (*Liu yi*): ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics. For myths of Kun (Hugefish), see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*,

79-82, and Birrell, "The Four Flood Myth Traditions of Classical China" *T'oung Pao* 83.4-5 (1997): 235-41.

46. SPPY 12.4a, Birrell, *Classic*, 146-47. For other examples of the name Pi, see Birrell, *Classic*, 210. The name Teng of Teng Pi/Pei Shih signifying "Climb" appears to denote the rising of a heavenly body.

47. SPPY 16.3a, Birrell, *Classic*, 174; *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 92-4.

48. Shaman Net (Wu Lo) is the tenth of a group of ten shamans mentioned in Book 16, Birrell, *Classic,* 174. The citation for Warrior Net (Wu Lo, where Wu is a different graph from that of Shaman Net) is: SPPY 5.7a, Birrell, *Classic*, 71.

49. SPPY 12.4a, Birrell, *Classic*, 146-47. The citations for Chu Lung and Chu Yin are, respectively, Birrell, *Classic*, 188, 121.

50. SPPY 18.1b, Birrell, *Classic*, 191.

51. SPPY 12.4a, Birrell, *Classic*, 146-47.

52. SPPY 17.6a, Birrell, *Classic*, 187.

53. SPPY 18.8a, Birrell, *Classic*, 195. For myths of Yen Ti, the fire god, see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 47, 130-32, 299. For the status of this deity in the classical pantheons recorded in other texts, see the comparative chart in Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946): 207.

54. SPPY 16.6a-b, Birrell, *Classic*, 176.

55. SPPY 2.19b, Birrell, *Classic*, 24. There are several interpretations of the enigmatic phrases describing this goddess's powers; they are summarized in Loewe, *Ways*, p. 90: "the five [types of] crimes" (Homer H. Dubs), epidemics and malignant spirits (Henri Maspero), constellations (Hao Yi-hsing, Karlgren, and I. Kominami); also see Loewe, *Ways*, p. 149, notes 16-17. The third century B.C. classic *The Master Kuan* (*Kuan Tzu*) listed "five types of harmful influences": "floods are one, droughts another, wind, fog, hail, and frost are another, pestilence is one, and insects another," W. Allyn Rickett, trans., *Kuan-tzu: A Repository of Early Chinese Thought; A Translation and Study of Twelve Chapters,* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965, pp. 75-6 (*Kuan Tzu*, SPPY 18/57.6a; translation slightly amended).

56. Cry Giantess Skygate, SPPY 16.4b, Birrell, *Classic*, 175; Breathe-out, SPPY 16.4b, Birrell, *Classic,* 175. In general, early Chinese cosmology represented the world as a flat,

four-sided earth covered with the canopy of the sky, earth and sky connected either by props of gigantic mountains or by cords; for a depiction of this world picture in the fourth-century B.C. text, "Questions of Heaven," see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* p. 27.

57. For the use of water as a weapon in divine warfare, see the myths of the battles between the god of war Ch'ih Yu (Jest Much) with the God Yellow and between the fire god Yen Ti (Flame God) with the God Yellow, Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* pp. 131-34.

58. For a survey of the divine powers of Woman Kua, see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* pp. 33-5, 163-65. The term "the cosmological human body" has been borrowed from William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myth and Rituals*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986, pp. 115-17; the concept of homologic sets and alloforms utilized by Bruce Lincoln in analyzing the creation myth and myth of the dying god Ymir has been valuable in attempting to decode the Woman Kua myth in this classic on the slenderest of evidence in her narrative myth; Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A study in the Ecology of Religions,* Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions, 10, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, 5-20.

59. SPPY 7.3a, Birrell, *Classic*, 116; for the two postscripts see Birrell, *Classic*, pp. 131, 155, at the end of sections Chapters 6-9 and Chapters 10-13, which are "signed" by Wang Ting, Wang Kung, and the famous bibliographer Liu Hsin, all functionaries at the Han court in the reign of Emperor Ai (r. 6-2 B.C.). Kuo P'u has this to say about the fertilizing myth of the all-female society in the Country of Women: "There is a yellow pool there where the women go in and bathe; when they come out they immediately become pregnant. If they give birth to a boy child, it suddenly dies in its third year," SPPY 7.3a, commentarial column. In her Introduction to *The Feminist Companion to Mythology,* Carolyne Larrington emphasizes that although the fertility function of female deities is a significant one, earlier scholarship tended to categorize most goddesses' functions under the label of "fertility," and in doing so obscured their other mythic and religious roles. Larrington, ed., *The Feminist Companion to Mythology,* London: Pandora, HarperCollins, 1992, ix.

60. O Huang (Sublime Grace) reference: SPPY 15.2a, Birrell, *Classic*, 167; compare this usage of creating or founding a people and country with that in the foundation myths of the Shang and Chou peoples, *Classic of Poetry*, poem nos. 245, title, and line 3, and 303,

line 2, "*Sheng min*" ([She who] Gave Birth to the People), and "*sheng Shang*" (give birth to the Shang), the Chou and Shang myths respectively. For a discussion of these two foundation myths, see Birrell, "James Legge and the Chinese Mythological Tradition," *History of Religions* 83.4 (1999): 338-44. (The *Classic of Poetry* dates from *ca.* 600 B.C.)

61. SPPY 17.5b, Birrell, *Classic,* 187. The rite describes the local people suffering from a drought calling to the goddess Woman Droughtghoul, "Goddess, go north!"

62. For a discussion of the vestigial myth of the worker gods, see Birrell, "The Four Flood Myth Traditions," pp. 228-35, which was influenced by the article by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," (originally published 1978), rpr. in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Flood Myth,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 63-4.

63. In this section, I do not include passages in Books 1-5 of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* which describe the rites of sacrifice to nature deities, because they are of ritualistic rather than mythological import. The article by Phyllis Bird on women and sacrifice in ancient Israel, "Women's Religion in Ancient Israel" in Barbara S. Lesko, ed., *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia,* Brown Judaic Studies, 166, Proceedings of the Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East, Brown University, 1987, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, pp. 283-98, especially 293-94, contains valuable insights.

64. The passage narrating the myth of Woman Sacrificer and Woman Battleaxe is very brief and somewhat garbled; the commentators have endeavoured to make sense of it, offering different interpretations of the emblem or attribute of Woman Battleaxe, suggesting it is an eel, a water-snake, or even an alligator; SPPY 7.2a. The erotic significance of the eel/snake is attached to the motif worldwide; it prompts the hypothesis that this motif might refer to the male organ, and that a ritual castration might be the myth disguised by the text that has become garbled, and by the zoological subtext that commentators seek to promote.

65. For the passage in which *chiao*=merge, have sexual relationship with occurs, see SPPY 5.42a-43a, Birrell, *Classic*, 100.

66. The sitiological function has been suggested by Bruce Lincoln's use of the term "sitiogonic" to a myth that explains the origin of food; I adopt the more general term "sitiological" to denote myths relating to food; Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle,* pp. 65-86.

67. For myths of sibling incest, see Rémi Mathieu, *Anthologie des mythes et légendes de la Chine ancienne,* Paris: Gallimard, 1989, pp. 158-59, and notes 1-2; also see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 203-4.

68. SPPY, *Shan hai ching T'u tsan,* SPPY 16b (in the same volume as the text) [*The "Verse Captions" to the Classic of Mountains and Seas*] has this verse on thunder: "Thunder is the spirit of the sky;/It excites the mind and startles the eye,/So how does one protect oneself?/By a concoction of miraculous orchid./The one who presides over [thunder] is a god/Who uses his mouth, guts, and belly [to emit this noise]". SPPY 31a refers to a thunder deity named Thunder Marsh (Lei Tse); this name is so similar to that of Lei Tsu (Thunder Foremother) that it suggests a fusion of personae; the couplet reads: "The deity Thunder Marsh/Wanders at large drumming on his/her belly."

69. See n. 57 above.

70. For the theme of punishment in myths of metamorphosis, see Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 190, 214-15.

71. Edward H. Schafer's valuable study, "Ritual Exposure in Ancient China" discusses historical cases of the rite, but does not mention this myth of immolation by exposure to the sun; Schafer, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 14 (1951): 130-84.

72. For the numerological significance of nine in Ch'u culture, see Hawkes, n. 43 above. For the myth of music as the source of divine harmony and the number nine, see the narrative of K'ai, Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 83-5.

73. For the punitive binding and fettering of deities who have committed a crime, see the myth of Double Load and Peril, Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 90-1.

74. I have borrowed the term "power imagery" from the article by Carol Meyers, "Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 209-23.

75. For the representation of this goddess in the late Han dynasty, 2d cent. A.D., see Loewe, *Ways*, Plate 1 facing p. 16, and Figs. 15, 17, pp. 91, 104.

76. See n. 59 above.

77. For the mythic motif of duality, see discussion of the dual sovereignty of Mitra and Varuna by Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: Essai sur deux représentations indo-européenes de la souveraineté*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Section Religieuse, 46, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940.

78. References to the guts (*ch'ang*) as the seat of profound emotion occur frequently in early poetry, for example, in a folk-song by Emperor Wen of the Wei dynasty, the poet Ts'ao P'ei: "I think of you as you travel and love tears my guts." (His dates are A.D. 187-226.)

79. The text records over three thousand place-names; it constitutes a valuable document since it has preserved many old topographical names which were erased and changed during successive dynasties, from the early Chou dynasty, *ca.* eleventh century B.C. (which is alleged to have destroyed 1,773 units of local rule of the preceding Shang dynasty) to the Ch'in dynasty, *ca.* late third century B.C. (which witnessed a period of standardization, of pronounciation and spelling in all aspects of cultural life). See Birrell, *Classic*, pp. xvii-xix, "Naming the Place."

80. Citations for the four examples of androgeny are, respectively: SPPY 3.1b, 3.13a, 1.3a, 17.6a, Birrell, *Classic*, 35, 46, 4, 187.

81. This compares with the Sumerian language, which does not distinguish between masculine and feminine, making it difficult to draw up a gender chart from names in over 100,000 cuneiform clay tablets; Marc Van De Mieroop, "Women in the Economy of Sumer" in Lesko, ed., *Women's Earliest Records,* p. 66.

82. Concerning translations of the term *Hou* in the names of these two figures, Loewe, *Ways*, p. 97, and p. 118, renders the name Hou T'u as the female deity "Earth Queen", but Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China, Translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, Vol. 2, p. 44, renders the name as "Earth Lord," New York: Columbia UP, 1968, 2 vols.

83. See, for example, the funerary stone bas-relief from the Wu Liang Shrine in Shantung province, dating A.D. 151, reproduced from an ink rubbing in Feng Yun-p'eng and Feng Yun-yuan, *Shih suo* [*Research on Stone Carving*], Part 2 of *Chin shih suo* [*Research on Bronze and Stone Carvings*], 12 vols., 1821, rpt. Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1934, Chapter 4 (unnumbered pages), reproduced in Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, Fig. 4, p. [70], where Woman Kua appears with the male deity Fu Hsi, with linked tails.

84. See the line drawing based on stone carvings dating from around the 3d cent. A.D. in the funerary art of the Yi-nan, Shantung tomb, in Loewe, *Ways*, Fig. 21, p. 123, and his discussions, pp. 88, 105, 110, 121-26.

85. See Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, pp. 203-4.

86. This is how the goddess is portrayed in the romance which probably dates from the 4th cent. A.D., *The Chronicle of Emperor Mu* (trad. dating *ca.* 318 B.C.), translated by Rémi Mathieu, *Le Mu tian-zi zhuan: Traduction annotée-Étude critique,* Mémoires de 1'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 9, Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1978 [Mu t'ien-tzu chuan]. For a detailed study of the representation of the goddess in the post-classical period, see Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.

87. *Huai-nan Tzu; Huai-nan hung-lieh chi-chieh* [*A Collation of the Most Outstanding Interpretations of the Master Huai-nan* (with the text)], Liu Wen-tien, ed., 1926 rpt. Taipei: Commercial Press, 1969, *Huai-nan Tzu* 6. 13a. The complete annotated translation by Rémi Mathieu and Charles LeBlanc is due to be published shortly.

88. For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Birrell, "The Four Flood Myth Traditions," pp. 223-28.

89. See Bernhard Karlgren, "The Book of Documents" [*Shu ching*], *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 2 (in Karlgren's transliteration system Hsi and Ho are rendered Hi and Ho); in his note to this replication of the pristine deity Karlgren remarks that originally Hi-Ho was one person, but he did not take into account the early myth of the sun goddess Hsi Ho. In the text of the *Book of Documents,* the goddess is translated into four male figures, the two brothers Hsi (Karlgren's Hi), Hsi Chung and Hsi Shu, and the brothers Ho Chung and Ho Shu. These four pseudo-historical figures are illustrated in a late Ch'ing representation of the spurious history, reproduced in Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China,* Vol. 3, Fig. 86, p. 187.

90. Compare the two myths; Ever Breath (Ch'ang Hsi) SPPY 16.5a, Birrell, *Classic*, 176, and Ever Sublime (Ch'ang O), Birrell, *Chinese Mythology,* pp. 144-45, 176, where her trickster characteristic is noted.

91. See the comparative chart of classical pantheons in Karlgren, "Legends and Cults," p. 207.

92. In one of the treatises contained in his comprehensive history of ancient China written around 100 B.C., the court historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (*ca.* 145-86 B.C.) describes in considerable detail the practice of sacrificial rites from antiquity to his own day, the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han. Ssu-ma Ch'ien witnessed many of the contemporary rites. He mentions eight instances of the performance of sacrifice by male cultic experts who include the Minister of Sacrifices K'uan Shu, a male shaman, and Emperor Wu himself; Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, Vol. 2, pp. 44, 48, 53, 55, 59, 68-9. Conceptualizing mythical male deities as proto-rulers, the historian records that Fu Hsi, the Farmer God (Shen Nung), and the God Yellow (Huang Ti) all performed the major sacrifice of *Feng* and *Shan*, Watson, *Records*, Vol. 2, p. 19.

93. See one of the ancient manuals of ritual, *Record of Ritual* [*Li chi*], Book 4, *ca.* 3d cent. B.C. but containing older material, which prescribes autumn as the month for punishments which were to be carried out by male officers; James Legge, trans., *The LĪ KĪ, I-X,* The Sacred Books of China, The Texts of Confucianism, Vol. 27, Part 4, pp. 285, 288 (Book 4); which includes the *Calendrical Ordinances* (*Yueh ling*), pp. 249-310. There the presiding deities of the autumn months are two figures that appear also in the *Classic*, Young Brightsky (Shao Hao) and Bedrush Harvest (Ju Shou); SPPY 14.1a, 15.3a, 18.7b, Birrell, *Classic,* 159, 168, 194, narrate nurturing and genealogical myths of Young Brightsky; SPPY 7.5a, Birrell, *Classic*, 117 gives the region of the west presided over by Bedrush Harvest. The gender of these deities in the text is not substantiated by contextual evidence. But in the ritual text, *Record of Ritual*, they are presented as male gods in the patriarchal ideology of the late Chou and early Han era (3d cent. B.C.).

94. The appropriation of the persona of the female sun deity Breath Blend by the anonymous author(s) of the spurious history of antiquity has been noted above, see n. 89. For references to calendrical functions as a male specialization, see Watson, *Records*, Vol. 2, p. 34, which records how Kung-sun Ch'en supervised calendrical reform as an official pálace scholar in the early Han (*ca.* 100 B.C.), and p. 140, where the historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself states that he worked on the calendar in the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.), with one Hu Sui.

95. The single example of a female ruler in antiquity is Empress Lü of the Han (r. 187-180 B.C.); other female rulers are Empress Wu in the medieval era of the T'ang (r. A.D. 684-

705), and the de facto co-regent Dowager Empress Tz'u Hsi (regency 1856-1889). It is worth reading Ssu-ma Ch'ien's official biography of Empress Lü as an example of the demonization of the female who aspired to power and authority in the post-mythical period; Watson, *Records*, Vol. 1, pp. 321-40, especially pp. 321-23; in his summary of her career, however, Ssu-ma Ch'ien praises her competent and successful rule, "though a woman ruling in the manner of an emperor," p. 340. For an early ideological statement of female roles, see Legge, *LĪ KĪ* [*Record of Ritual*], *ca.* 3d cent. B.C., Book 10, *Rules for Women* [*Nei tse*], pp. 448-79.

96. Sacks, "Engels Revisited," p. 207.

97. Cited by Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society," p. 17.

GLOSSARY

Ai Ti (Han)	哀帝（漢）
*	
ch'ang	腸
Ch'ang Hsi	常羲
Ch'ang O	嫦娥
ch'i	妻
Ch'i Shih	妻氏
chiao	交
Ch'ih Yu	蚩尤
Chin shih suo	金石索
Ching Wei	精衛
Ching-yao chih Shan	青要之山
Chiu P'in	九嬪
Ch'ou	丑
Ch'u	楚
Ch'u Tz'u	楚辭
Chu	燭
Chu Kuang	燭光
Chu Lung	燭龍
Chu Yin	燭陰
chü	妬
Chuan Hsu	顓頊
Chün	俊／夋（帝嚳）
*	
erh nü	二女
*	
Feng, Shan	封禪
Fu	婦
Fu Hsi	伏羲
*	
Hao Yi-hsing	郝懿行

Ho	和
Ho Chung	和仲
Ho Shu	和叔
Hou	后
Hou Chi	后稷
Hou T'u	后土
hsi	覡
Hsi Chung	羲仲
Hsi Ho	羲和
Hsi Lao	西姥
Hsi Shu	羲叔
Hsi Wang Mu	西王母
Hsiao Ming	宵明
Hsien	獻
Hsu	噓
Hsu (Chuan Hsu)	頊（顓頊）
Hu Wen-huan	胡文煥
Huai-nan Tzu	淮南子
Huai-nan hung-lieh chi-chieh	淮南鴻烈集解
Huang	皇
Huang Chü chih Shih	黃.姖之尸
Huang Ti	黃帝
Huang Ti Nü	黃帝女
*	
Ju Shou	鬻收
*	
K'ai (or Ch'i)	開（啓）
Ku	姑
Kuan Tzu	管子
K'un-lun	昆侖
Kun	鯀
Kung Kung	共工
Kuo P'u	郭璞

*

Lei Tse	雷澤
Lei Tsu	雷祖
Li chi	禮記
Liang Nü-tzu	兩女子
Lieh nü chuan	列女傳
Liu Hsiang	劉向
Liu Hsin	劉歆
Liu Wen-tien	劉文典
Liu yi	六藝
Lü-hou	呂后

*

Meng Tzu	孟子
mu	母
Mu T'ien-tzu chuan	穆天子傳

*

Nei tse	內則
nü	女
Nü Chi	女祭
Nü Ch'i	女戚
Nü chieh	女誡
Nü Chien	女虔
Nü Ch'ou	女丑
Nü Ch'ou chih Shih	女丑之尸
Nü Kua	女媧
Nü Kua chih Ch'ang	女媧之腸
Nü Mieh	女蔑
Nü Pa	女魃
Nü Shih	女尸
Nü Wa	女娃
nü-tzu	女子
Nü-tzu Kuo	女子國

*

O	娥
O	阿
O Huang	娥皇
O Nü	阿女
O Nü Yuan-fu	阿女緣婦
*	
Pan Chao	班昭
Pi Yuan	畢沅
p'in	嬪
*	
Sang	桑（喪）
Shan hai ching	山海經
Shan hai ching chiao chu	山海經校注
Shan hai ching chien shu	山海經箋疏
Shan hai ching shen-hua hsi-t'ung	山海經神話系統
Shan hai ching t'u	山海經圖
Shan hai ching T'u tsan	山海經圖贊
Shao Hao	少昊
Shang shu	尚書
shen jen mien	神人面
Shen Nung	神農
sheng	生
Sheng min	生民
sheng Shang	生商
shih	士
shih	尸
Shih	氏
Shih chi	史記
Shih Ching	士敬
Shih ching	詩經
Shih suo	石索
Shu ching	書經

Shun	舜
Ssu Nü	思女
Ssu-pu pei-yao	四部備要
*	
T'ai Tsu	太祖
Teng Pei Shih	登北氏
Teng Pi Shih	登比氏
T'eng Wen-kung	滕文公
Ti	帝
Ti chih Erh Nü	帝之二女
Ti Nü chih Sang	帝女之桑
T'ien chih li	天之厲
T'ien Nü	天女
T'ien wen	天問
T'ing Yao	聽訞
Tsu	祖
Tung wang fu	東王父
Tz'u Hsi	慈禧
Tzu wei p'in mou	自爲牝牡
*	
Wa (cf. frog)	娃(蛙)
Wang Kung	王龔
Wang Ting (or Ting Wang)	望丁
Wu	武
Wu Liang	武梁
Wu Lo	武羅
Wu	巫
Wu	吳
Wu Chü T'ien-men	吳炬天門
Wu Jen-ch'en	吳任臣
Wu Ku	巫姑
Wu Ti (Han)	武帝(漢)

Wu ts'an	五殘
*	
yao	窯
Yen Ti	炎帝
Yi Nü-tzu	一女子
Yi-nan	沂南
Yuan K'o	袁珂
Yü-shih Ch'ieh	雨師妾
Yueh ling	月令

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