Wu: female shamans in ancient China *Max Dashú*

'We rise to heaven and brush away the comets,' said a shamaness in her song. [Eliade, 451]

Dancing women, possibly masked: black-clay figures from late Zhou era

The strong pattern of female shamans in eastern Asia has been erased from the history that most people know. Yet women predominated in shamanism of ancient China, Japan, and Korea, and have persisted into modern times in eastern Siberia, Korea, Manchuria, Okinawa, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Here I'll survey female shamans in China's earliest written records, its ancient art and ritual culture, classical literature, historical records, legends, and temple practices.

Old sources show the *Wu* performing invocation, divination, dream interpretation, healing, exorcism, driving off evil spirits, and performing ecstatic rain dances. Dramatic descriptions recount the powers of the *wu* in their ecstasies: "they could become invisible, they slashed themselves with knives and swords, cut their tongues, swallowed swords, and spat fire, were carried off on a cloud that shone as if with lighning. The female *wu* danced whirling dances, spoke the language of spirits, and around them objects rose it the air and knocked together." [Eliade, 454, citing DeGroot, *The Religious System of China*, VI, 1212]

The character for *wu* depicts shamans dancing around a pillar, or the long sleeves of a shaman's robe swirling as she dances. Some archaic Da Chuan forms show hands making an offering which is received from above. Possibly the oldest glyph from which the *wu* character arose represents a

quadant of the directions (*sifang*), and was also influenced by a glyph meaning "dance," showing a person with outstretched arms in long sleeves. Dallas

McCurley interprets it as representing a whirling dance that transported shamans to altered states of consciousness. [McCurley, 136]

Shang dynasty oracle bone signs: hands make offerings being received from above; two figures dance around a central pillar, or a shaman's arms in a long-sleeved dance robe. The two characters at the right read *wu* / *mo* "shaman"; the first is archaic and, at far right, the classic character *wu*.

Ancient oracle bone inscriptions use *wu* most frequently in relation to spirit sacrifices and for calls to "bring the *wu*." One Shang oracle bone was inscribed, "divination, the *wu* proclaims…" Another mentions a group of nine *wu* who did a ritual dance before sacrifices. [Boileau, 350, 355-6] Other inscriptions refer to the female shamans Yang, Fang, and Fan performing rain-making ceremonies. The political prominence of these early *wu* is underlined by Edward Schafer, who points to "traditions of Shang 'ministers' called 'the shaman(ess) so-and-so'." [Schafer 1951: 132, 162]

The oldest Chinese dictionary, *Shuowen Jiezi*, equates *wu* with *zhu*, a ritual invocator, and with *ling*, "spiritual, divine." It underlines the female signification of *wu*: "*wu* is a *zhu* (invoker or priest), a woman who is able to render [herself] invisible, and with dance to invoke gods to come down. The character symbolizes the appearance of a person dancing with two sleeves." [Erickson, 52. Another translation of this passage runs, "An Invoker. A woman who can serve the invisible, and by posturing bring down the spirits. Depicts a person with two sleeves posturing." (Schafer 1951: 152-3)]

The *Shouwen* also refers to "an inspired shaman serving the spirits with jade." Another word with the sound *wu* (but written with a different character) means "to dance." The relationship of these two words has been much discussed, since dance looms large in descriptions of the *wu*. The shamanic character *wu* also appears in many compound words, combined with other radicals signifying "woman," old woman," "male," "spirit" and "immortal." The *wu* radical also acts as meaning-signifier in the characters for *xi*, "male shaman," for "yarrow" (whose stalks were and are used in divination with the *I Jing)*, and in the most archaic form of the character *yi*, "doctor" (and here the "shaman" radical was later replaced by that of "wine," indicating a shift away from ritual to medicaments).


Masked dancer, late Zhou

The title *Wu* also figures in legendary place-names. "Snake Wu mountain" appears in the ancient *Shanhai Jing* as the home of the shamanic goddess Xi Wangmu. This book also says that *wu* live on Mount Divinepower, "where the hundred drugs are to be found." Another passage describes them as possessing the herb of immortality. [Birrell 2000:174, 141] Real place-names survive too: the celebrated Mount Wu, dwelling of the Divine Woman, and the famous Wu Gorge of the Yangtze.

Written histories about the archaic Xia-Yin times focus on the powers of shamanic kings like Yao, Shun, and Yü. "It was said that Shun was the first person to journey to the sky, and he was taught by the daughter of his predecessor, Yao." [Eva Wong, Online] Reading through these masculinizing lines, we deduce that a woman was the first to attain shamanic flight. Elsewhere this female precedence is clearly stated: "The emperor Yao's daughters, Nü Ying and O Huang, revealed to Shun the art of flying 'like a bird'." [Eliade, 448 & n. 84. From a gloss in Sima Tian in E. Chavannes, tr., *Les Memoires Historiques de Se-ma-Ts'ien*, I, 74]

The *Lie Nü Chuan* explains further that the daughters of Yao came to his aid during his ordeals—imposed by cruel parents—in a deep well and in a high granary. As Granet summarized it,

Shun knew what awaited him in the granary and the well: he asked advice from his wives, the daughters of Yao. If he descended to the ground without accident, it was because they taught him the Art (Gong) of the Bird ; if he came out of the earth, it was that they had taught him the Art of the Dragon. We even know that Shun succeeded in these magical feats by dressing in the robes of Bird Work (Gong) or those of the Dragon. [Granet, 127]

The word *gong* is the same as in chigong and kungfu; it "designates magic, all its techniques, *feminine works, musical art*." (emphasis in original) Granet adds that this account of women teaching shamanic arts is only found in the *Lie Nü Chuan*: "it is no longer found in modern editions." He too cites the commentary on Sima Tian saying that the daughters of Yao taught their husband Shun the Art of the Bird. Yet another source says that in his ordeal of the well, the two sisters advised him, "Take off your clothes and put on the Dragon work; [that is how] you will get out of it." [Granet, 346-47, n. 693]

Wu in flowing sleeves chanting and wielding serpents: lacquered wood from Chu

Most Chinese literature dwells on the exploits of Shun and ignores the two shamanic sisters who married him. But they were remembered in much later times in southern Hunan, where they had a temple, and peaks were named after them. By the 9th century they were syncretized with the ancient river goddess known as the Lady of the Xiang. [Schafer 1973: 86-87, 50, 176]

Two versions of Fu Hao's seal show her in ritual

Although she does not seem to have been called a *wu*, the best-known female ritualist of Shang times deserves a mention. Fu Hao personally inscribed oracle bones and presided over divinations and other rituals. Her personal seal shows a woman making ritual offerings to spirits. Tortoise shells inscribed with the characters "prepared by Fu Hao" prove her status as an important diviner. Married to the king, Fu Hao was also his best general. Her tomb is the richest Shang find ever discovered. It was filled with a massive collection of bronze offering vessels, half of them inscribed with her name, including the colossal Si Mu Wu *ding*. Hundreds of jade vessels and thousands of other treasures were found in her grave. [http://history.cultural-china.com/en/48History10355.html] Among them were "small bronze mirrors and knives" not found in other burials, and little jades with possible ritual functions. Sarah Nelson remarks, "While no evidence points to [the king] Wu Ding performing ecstatic rituals, perhaps Lady Hao was the shaman." [Nelson, 160]

Jade objects were important in ritual. The *Zhouli* says, "Blue Jade *Bi* to worship the heaven, Yellow Jade *Cong* to worship the earth." (*Cong* is pronounced tsoong.) Commentators say that the circular *bi* and the squared cylindrical *cong* symbolized Heaven and Earth. The *cong* has an extremely long history, going back to the neolithic Liangzhu culture (circa 3300 BCE), and replicas persist into the Song dynasty. But while great emphasis is placed on the emperor and his ceremonial acts as Son of Heaven, little attention has been given to the ancient queens who are mentioned as keepers of the *cong*: "several sorts of *cong* mentioned in *Zhou Li*

were used in rituals involving the women of the royal house." [Willets, 58] More remains to be revealed about these ancient Earth jades, with their masks and graded layers in patterns that recall the later Kun trigram.

The *cong* is said to be a shaman's tool that 'encapsulates the principal elements of the shamanistic cosmology.' [Nelson, 137, quoting Chang 1994a: 66]

Eva Wong highlights the *wu* women as healers. "We are told that, in the healing ceremony, the shamaness grasped a green snake in her right hand and a red snake in her left hand and climbed into the mountains to gather the herbs that would restore life and health to a sick or dying person." Wong explains the central importance of dancing and singing in the rainmaking ceremony: "The Chinese word for spirit (*ling*) consists of three radicals: one meaning rain, another (showing three mouths) chanting, and the third, shaman." [Wong, Online] This word *ling* is used for shamans in the Nine Songs of Chu.

Wu in long-sleeved robe with flaming torch or staff invoking animal spirit. Lacquer painting from Chu.

The *Liji* (Book of Rites) referred to the ceremonial dances called *yue*; they combined music and movement with regalia: "shields, axes, feathers, and oxtails." The *Lushi chunqiu* described the harmonizing and unifying power that arose from these rites. As Dallas McCurley explains, "throughout the cosmos, everything both resonated and responded to other resonations… that if one strikes a bell of a particular note, all other bells of that same note, regardless of octave, will resonate." [McCurley, 142] The Chinese used sounding stones and chimes in ceremonies. "When I knock on the musical stones, the hundred animals all dance." [Karlgren 1946: 258, in Nelson, 114]

Many scholars see Chinese shamanism as underlying what developed into Taoism. [Schipper, 6] The Taoist word for ecstasy, *kuei-ju*, "coming in of a spirit," was derived from shamanic possession: "For it was said of a sorceress in trance and speaking in the name of a *shen*: 'this body is that of the sorceress, but the spirit is that of the god." (The word *shen* is ungendered in Chinese.) The *wu* prepared herself to receive divinity by purifying herself with perfumed water, putting on ceremonial robes, and making offerings. Then, "with a flower in her hand, she mimed her journey by a dance accompanied by music and songs, to the sound of drums and flutes, until she fell exhausted. This was the moment of the presence of the god who answered through her mouth." [H. Maspero, in Eliade, 453]

One of the oldest, comprehensive descriptions of the *wu* appears in the 3rd century BCE *Guoyü*:

Anciently, men and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were so perspicacious, single-minded, and reverential that their understanding enabled them to make meaningful

collation of what lies above and below, and their insight to illumine what is distant and profound. Therefore the spirits would descend upon them. The possessors of such powers were, if men, called [*xi*] (shamans), and, if women, *wu* (shamanesses). It is they who supervised the positions of the spirits at the ceremonies, sacrificed to them, and otherwise handled religious matters. As a consequence, the spheres of the divine and the profane were kept distinct. The spirits sent down blessings on the people, and accepted from them their offerings. There were no natural calamities. [Bodde, 390-1]

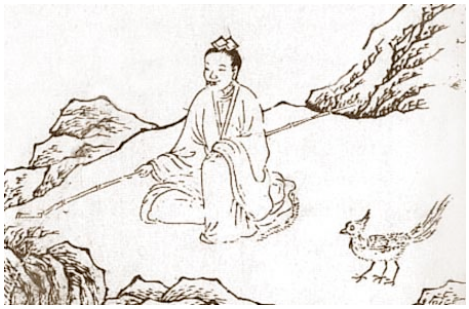
Later, says this old classic, the divine and profane became intermixed, causing misfortune, so that the communication between Heaven and Earth had to be cut. This lost connection to the divine world is an extremely widespread theme. [See Anne Solomon (1997) on the San in South Africa, where the primeval connection is lost between animals and humans, not heaven and earth.]

The above translation of the *Guoyü* neatly reverses the primary gendering of *wu* as female, using English words that imply that the word "shaman" is masculine and only secondarily applies to women ("shamaness," "shamanka.") But in Chinese, the more ancient character *wu* is incorporated as a signifier into the word *xi*, demonstrating that the explicitly masculine term is derived from the feminine, and not vice versa. However, not long after the *Guoyü* was written, we find the authors of the *Zhouli* regendering the concept, as "male *wu*" and "female *wu*." Later writers often used the binom *nan-wu*, "male *wu*," because *wu* by itself still implied female identity, or the collective *wu-xi*. Other sources continued to reflect a female gendering of *wu*: "the old songs and rituals found in the *Li Sao* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* … contain descriptions of male shamans impersonating women." [Laughlin and Wong, 1999 p. 152] Another old source, the *I Jing,* says of hexagram 58, "Dui is marshy-fertile, a youngest daughter, a shaman." [Schafer 1951: 155]

Mythic representations: Xi Wangmu as shamanic tigress

The theme of tiger-shapeshifters is ancient in China. In the *I Jing*, a line from Hexagram 49, *Ge*, reads "The great man tiger-changes." [The word is actually "person," not "man."] This theme is found across south and east Asia. As early as 2400 BCE, Indus Valley seals depict tiger-women, and in one case, a horned woman shaman dancing with tigers. *Yü* bronzes of the early Shang dynasty were cast in the form of a tigress clasping children in her paws—clan ancestress or a shamanic initiator?—and tigers flank the head of a child being born on a colossal *fangding*. The *taotie* sign represents tigers on innumerable Shang and Zhou offering vessels—and on ritual masks. [See Dashu 2010, online]

Tiger traits have long been associated with Xi Wangmu, goddess of the West—a direction associated with the tiger in the Chinese Concordance. The second chapter of the *Shanhai Jing* says that Xi Wangmu has tigers' teeth and a leopard's tail, her wild hair being crowned with a head-ornament (at right). Then comes a significant description of

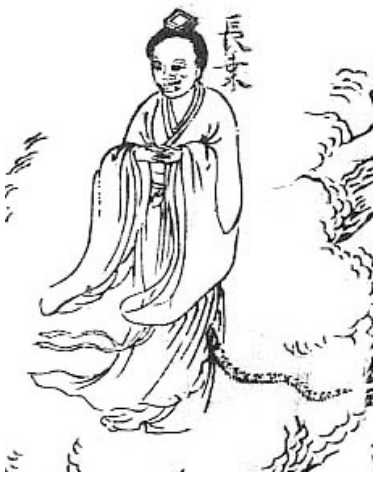


Xi Wangmu with tiger teeth and tail in 18th century edition of the *Shanhai Jing*

the divine woman-tigress: that she "excels at whistling." [Remi, 100] Other translators render this line as "is fond of roaring" or "is good at screaming." The discrepancy comes from the fact that the character in question, *xiào,* does not translate easily. It is associated with "a clear, prolonged sound" that issues from the throats of sages, shamans, and immortals. (It may well have resembled Tuvan throat singing.) X*iào* was compared to the cry of a phoenix, a long sigh, and a zither. Its melodic sound conveyed much more than mere words, and had the power to rouse winds and call spirits. Taoist scriptures also refer to the *xiào*, and in the *Songs of Chu* it appears "as a shamanistic ritual for calling back the soul of the deceased." [Sun Ji, 1996. Thanks to Yun of China History Forum for this cite.]

Xi Wangmu is seated on Snake Wu mountain in the 12th chapter of the *Shanhai Jing*. Three azure birds bring fruits to her; they belong to her host of shamanic spirits and emissaries, along with the three-legged raven, the nine-tailed fox, and the elixir-pounding hare. In chapter 16, we learn of "the mountain of Wangmu" in the western wilderness. And again, on the great mountain Kunlun is a spirit with a human face and a tiger's body and tail. Once more, Xiwangmu has a tiger teeth and tail; here she is described as living in a mountain cave that "contains a thousand things." [Remi, 575-78]

Mathieu Remi observes of Xi Wangmu's tigress form, "There are good reasons for thinking that here we have a description of a shaman in trance." He points to Chinese scholars who compare her staff to the staff of sorcerers. [Remi, 100, 481] Suzanne Cahill draws the same conclusion, calling attention to modern parallels: "The stool, headdress, and staff—still part of the shaman's paraphernalia in Taiwan today—reflect her shamanistic side." [Cahill, 19] As we'll see, the staff also appears in the hands of women dancing or running in ceremonial scenes on Warring States bronzes.

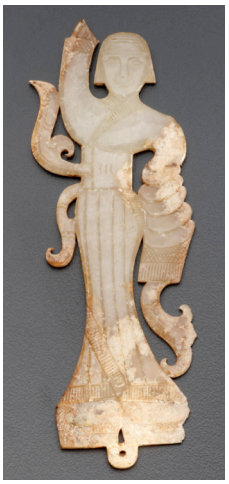


The tiger was not the only animal that figured in Chinese myth and shamanic culture. The cries of animals were compared with particular musical sounds and instruments. Lizards were said to have invented drums by pounding on their own bellies, and various literary references indicate that lizard skins were used as drumheads. The phoenix, seen as a creature of wind, was said to have originated wind instruments. The pheasant was thought to be able to perceive thunder that humans could not hear. A poem in the *Xia xiao zheng* declares, "When it thunders, the pheasant will flap its wings and cry, the thunder is passed on." [, 14] These lines have been linked "with pheasant dances (possibly performed by females) to provoke thunder." [Sterckx, 9-14]

Wu represented in ancient art: ceramics, jade, brick, and bronze

Archaeology also provides rich evidence of female shamanism in ancient China. We've already touched on the oracle bones. In the late Zhou period, many black-clay figurines show dynamically dancing women. Panels on bronzes show women officiating in ceremonies during the Warring States era. In the Han, as Susan Erickson has shown, jade plaques, tomb bricks, and bronzes depict female dancers whirling their long sleeves, often in ceremonial, funerary and even cosmological contexts.

The women are carved in powerful movement, usually with one sleeve flowing above the head. One piece shows them as "dancers who leap upon a series of low drums…" [Erickson, 45-47]



A painted silk was found in a tomb at Jinqueshan, Shandong "in which the dancer participates in a ritual involving the journey of the soul after death." A female sleeve dancer is shown with her arms raised, surrounded by musicians. In the panel above, the deceased woman is seated inside a house and approached by others holding offerings. Beyond, in the sky, are the sun-raven and moon-frog in their orbs, just as in the famous painted woman's shroud at Mawangdui. Both compositions have the heavens above and reptilian beings in the lower panel. At Mawandui, the serpentine goddess Nü Wa flies at the center of the upper panel, flanked by the solar and lunar beings and geese; beneath her are dragons, deer, and other spirits. [Erickson, 48-9]

Wu dancing and drumming outdoors, with two-bird drum stand. Bronze from Pingdu, Shangdong

Erickson astutely remarks that the funerary and cosmological contexts mean that the sleeve dancer of Jinqueshan "is not just the skilled and beautiful performer" shown in some Han art: "rather, she enacts her role in a space between the bright celestial regions, where the sun and moon are eternal, and the darkness of the underworld. She is part of the vertical axis by which the soul travels to the heavens." [50]

She backs this interpretation up with *wu* ceremonial scenes on bronze vessels created before the Han dynasty. A bowl in the Shanghai museum shows women with preparing offerings inside a stepped temple. Outside, two women approach holding vessels or other objects, and two other women perform the sleeve dance among trees as another woman plays a drum resting on two birds. One of these drum stands, with two phoenixes standing on two tigers, was found in a tomb at Zuoyang, Hubei, dating to the same time period as the bowl, about 475-221 BCE. Several others have been found in ancient Chu. [Nelson, 163] Above the dancers, another woman plays gongs suspended from the ceiling of a building. Except for her, all wear a feathered ritual headdress.

I've studied several other bronzes with similar scenes of *wu* from the Warring States period, such as the "Curtis vase" in the Louvre. Women are depicted dancing, running with staffs, beating drums and also gongs suspended from the roof beams, blowing on trumpets, and making offerings with ritual bronzes inside stepped and pillared temples. They often wear horned headdresses, and a few of them wear swords strapped to their sides. Some scenes show large birds amidst the women, possibly

phoenixes, or other animal figures. A lacquered painting from Tomb I at Zhang Tai Guan, Honan, shows a priestess holding a torch or staff while conjuring an animal spirit.

Wu dance, drum, make offerings. Bronze *hu*, the Louvre.

A bronze *lian* from Liulige, Henan, shows sleeve dancers with a drummer, a trumpeter, and a procession of figures carrying offerings or wands toward several large footed bronzes. To the left is a forest with animals, including an animal-headed hunter and a phantasmic two-bodied creature with a human face. Kiyohiko Munakata has suggested that this scene may represent "the theme of the 'summons of the soul,' as part of a funeral ritual." The song "Summons of the Soul" recalls how long-sleeved dancers "throw themselves into the Whirling Chu" as they entice the soul of the dead to return to its "old abode." [Erickson, 50, 53]

Erickson concludes that the jade plaque figures from tombs "can best be understood as an attempt to capture the posture of the shamaness as described in poetry of the Han and pre-Han periods." Their iconic postures reflect their spirtual power:

The dancer as invoker who communicated with spirits was the vehicle through which the soul could find safe passage to immortality. The jade plaque figures found in Western Han-period tombs may be reminders of the ritual dance performed for the deceased, and they continued to offer protection and guidance for the soul.. [Erickson, 53]

A special category of *siwu* were in charge of funerals and performed sacrifices to the dead. One text says these *wu* performed an exorcism involving the dead person's clothing to avert evil. But other sources describe them staying outdoors during the funeral, which was conducted by the *zhu* priest, and show lords avoiding contact with them. The *Zuozhuan* tells how duke Xiang came to honor duke Kang of the kingdom of Chu. A female *wu* protectively sprinkled him with a peach branch and reeds, then the duke was forced to bring grave-clothes with his own hands. This funerary contamination causes him to be "deeply troubled." [Boileau, 362]

Shrinkage and Persecution

In the Zhou dynasty, (northern) Chinese society was already patriarchal and hierarchical. Women were losing ground in the official religion of the aristocracy, if not among the people. Male *zhu* invocators now carried out a large share of the ceremonies, and other male officials performed other

priestly duties. This hierarchy of officials is how the rulers "maintained their control of religious order, if necessary, against every kind of ecstatic or anarchic religious manifestation." [David Keightly, in Boileau, 357] References to the *wu* grow increasingly negative as China becomes increasingly militarized and imperial China. Independent shamans, especially the women, were seen as uncontrolled and therefore a threat to the intensifying social hierarchy.

Archaeologist Ying Wang writes that aristocratic women's burials at Jin show a demotion over the course of the Zhou period. She says that "in Phase I (tenth century B.C.E.), the wives' status might have been relatively higher," but in Phase II (around the mid-800s) a new ritual system began to cut down women's ritual activity: "Beginning in this period, the wives' status was lowered because of the ritual reforms imposed by the Zhou court." Wang observes that the number of bronze ritual vessels in female graves decreased. Her data suggests that women were facing ritual limitations that men did not, and were "ritually ranked lower than men." [Wang, 196]

In the Confucian *Zhouli* (Book of Rites) the gendered terminology of shamans changes, abandoning *wu* and *xi* for "female *wu*" and "male *wu*." The men are now placed first and described as presiding in sacrifices to the deities of mountains and rivers; "in winter, they make offerings (or shoot arrows) in the great temple hall… in the spring, they are in charge of protecting the country from disease." [Boileau, 359] As for the women:

> **Female shamans shall be in charge of seasonal purification and anointing with aromatics, and in times of drought shall dance the Yü.** [Schafer 1951: 157]

Also, "in great calamities of the state, they pray, sing and wail." [Boileau, 359] They "cause the spirits to descend at funerary services, and most enigmatically, the directors of wu led them 'in enacting the long-standing practices of the wu…" [Nelson, 153, citing Falkenhausen 1995: 294] What those practices were, no one knows.

Wu making offerings in a temple, playing drums and gongs, and dancing with staves amidst birds. Bronze of late Zhou or Warring States era. Among southern peoples shamanic rites persisted longer; official repression pushed them out of public leadership in the north.

The male *wu* along with *zhu* invocators precede the king in condolence ceremonies, while the female *wu* precede the queen. "The only [courtly] activities in which the *wu* take part alone are

healing according to their own special techniques and the dance for drought." [Boileau, 359] The courtly sources show that the *wu* are still present, but male priests have begun to manage and even to displace them. This happened as the state began to assert control over the shamans. In the Zhou period, the Ministry of Spring began to regulating them and place them within strict hierarchies: "various kinds of shamans, including the *wu*, were incorporated into divisions of this elaborate bureaucratic office and made answerable to ascending levels of managing officials." These official shamans answered to and "embodied the authority of a centralizing state." [McCurley, 138] The Biaoji of Liji directly tells us that for the Shang people spirits were honored, and "more important than ceremony," but in Zhou times, "they honored the ceremonies, and kept the spirits at a distance." [Nelson, 143]

Confucian hostility toward the *wu* led to increased constriction of their sphere and outright repression of their sacred rites during and after the Han dynasty. Edward Schafer comments: "… the Chou ruling class was particularly hostile to women in government, and regarded the ancient fertility rites as impure. This anti-female tendency was even more marked in the state of Lu, where Confucius approved of the official rain-ceremony in which men alone participated. There was, within ancient China, a heterogeneity of culture areas, with female shamans favored in some, males in others." In the Tai culture, for example, the shamans were female, but among the Yao they were male. For a long time, Chinese texts often referred to shamans collectively as *wu-xi*, meaning both females and males.

Confucians regarded the ceremonies of some states such as Cheng as scandalous because women danced and mixed with men. [Schafer 1951: 158. He suggests that the word *xi* ("male shaman") may have originated in the Chu dialect, since it appears in the *Chu yü*.] Confucians frequently accused those they opposed with improperly consorting with women. They were even more outraged about female shamans who held public offices, denouncing the ceremonies led by *wu* as "depraved cults." "That the female Wu were still numerous in the 2nd century we know from … Wang Fu, who bitterly complained of the large number of women in his time who took up the profession." [Seaman, 231; quoting Needham 1956:127] In the same vein was the complaint by Wang Chung:

Among men the dead speak through living persons whom they throw in a trance, and the *wu*, thrumming their black chords, call down souls of the dead, which then speak through the mouths of the *wu*. But whatever these people say is always falsehood. [Eliade, 454]

The process of eliminating female shamans was long and irregular. Every now and again they regained ground: "Under Han Kao Tsu they were extensively employed (*Shih chi* 28.7 a-b), but under Wu Ti they were severely persecuted, although they had powerful connections within the ranks of the aristocracy… The second emperor of later Zhao, Shih hu (A.D. 334-349) employed a host of female astrologers (*nü tai-shih*), and the foster mother of his Heir Apparent 'first attained her advancement through shamanistic arts'." (*Zhin shu* 106.2 a-b)" [Schafer 1951: 157, n. 80]

Female shamans played central roles among the ancient Tuobas from central Asia, who founded the Northern Wei dynasty in 386. Under their rule, female shamans were restored in Chinese state

ceremonies—at least for a while. These shamans presided over a great sky sacrifice, held in the fourth month, and other rites with drumming. [Beldick, 25] But as the ruling group became confucianized, the exclusions resumed with greater severity. In 472 the Tuoba emperor Wen "forbade Wu mediums to participate in the sacrifices of the state religion." Soon his successor emperor Gao Ze prohibited the *wu* and *xi* from soothsaying with help from spirits, whether the heavenly *shen* or the terrestrial *gui*. [*Wei shu*, 7.I.1.21, in Seaman, 232; Schafer, 157, n. 80, gives also 108a.2a-b] As the *wu* were driven out of their ancient religious role at the state level, and were persecuted for their ceremonies among the people, they gradually began to converge with emerging Taoism, which itself had a "shamanistic substratum." [Schipper, 55]

Edward Schafer has tracked the demotion of the *wu* better than any source I've yet found:

In later centuries, the shamaness was gradually removed from the official hierarchy, and forced to practise her divine arts among the people, like the European witch. Yet she retained a small place in the government at least until the Sui Dynasty. The Office of the Grand Diviner (*Tai-bu shu*) of that period employed various kinds of augurs, and sixteen male shamans (*nan-xi*) and eight female shamans (*nü-wu*). [Schafer 1951: 157]

Later, in the Tang dynasty, this office lists only 'fifteen shamanistic masters' (*wu-shih*). Schafer noted that the title *wu* was used in these courtly registers, but now seems to be applied to men: "The number 'fifteen' suggests that the eight shamanesses of Sui had been removed—the fifteen shamans of Tang, plus a director, would constitute the sixteen *xi* [male shamans] of Sui." However, the title *wu*, "with its usual feminine connotations," continued to be used for women, and was combined with other words such as *shih* ("master") in reference to known female shamans. [Schafer 1951: 157, n. 80, quoting from the *Tang shu* 48.3a, 4b-5a]

Chinee conceptions of the *wu* retained a strong female stamp: "Such was the force of tradition in respect to the basic femininity of the shaman, that male shamans in the Far East often impersonated women…. The shamans of Central and Southern China, called *tuan-kung* and *nan-wu* ["male-wu"], are men disguised as women… The male shamans (*shih-wu*) of Kuangtung in the eighteenth century impersonated beautiful girls (Li T'iao-yüan, op. cit., 1.5). Doré observes that the possessed boys of Amoy, with whom he was familiar, were occupied by female spirits…" [Schafer 1951: 159] In modern parlance these would be gay or trans shamans.

Rainmaking and ritual exposure of the wu

Schafer's earlier contribution on the *wu* was a rich and detailed study of them as rain-bringers. They are described as performing rain dances, but there is more: the ritual exposure of female shamans, known as *pu wu*, went back to Shang times. Some oracle bone inscriptions show two shell glyphs over the woman character over the fire character, "showing a woman

At left, woman with shells on her head standing over fire

with shell decorations on her head standing in fire." Similar oracle bone characters of a person standing over fire are associated with rain ceremonies. The *wu* stood or sat in the sun, or were surrounded by a ring of fire. This sacrificial act was a way of calling the rains. Later sources explain it as a kind of sympathetic magic that drew water by scorching a water element, in this case the woman: "seeking yin by means of yin." [Schafer 1951: 159, 132. Elsewhere he explains that to the Chinese, "Women represented metaphysical water in human form." 1973: 9]

Shang oracle bones describe the female shamans Yang, Fang, and Fan as performing this ritual exposure. Originally, the *wu* exposed her body to sun and fire as a sacrifice for the good of the community. This is consistent with practices of shamans in North America and elsewhere; fasting and vigil with strong intention, sometimes with sacrificial bloodletting or offering bits of flesh, were done to achieve a vowed objective. If the shaman actually entered a fire, her profound trance could prevent injury, as with modern firewalkers and shamans who lick and stand on sharp blades. The *wu* may have also impersonated the *han-bo* drought demon in this rite, who, undergoing the ordeal, is compelled to bring the rain. The *han-po* was seen as a female spirit, as her other namings, *nü-bo* (woman-bo) and *han-mu* (drought-mother), show. [Schafer 1951: 132]

In ancient times, this rain-making exposure to the element is specifically connected to the female *wu* and disabled men. One of those men was Tang, founder of the Shang dynasty. After he overthrew the previous king, a terrible drought came. His diviners told him to make a human offering. Saying that whatever the wrong was, it was for the king to right it, he offered himself. He ordered a pyre and as he prepared to enter it, a great rain fell. [McCurley, 139]

Tang represents the second group described in these ritual exposures: the *wang*. The word translates as "lame" or "crooked," and in the texts it refers to disabled men. It may be that they were sacrificed—though the old accounts refer only to ritual exposure—or regarded as "ritual incarnations of the drought demon," the *han-bo*. This could imply a view of them as defective and therefore expendable beings. On the other hand, two legendary male shaman-kings were "lame": Tang the Victorious and Yü the Great. One ended a drought, the other stopped a flood, and both were celebrated as heroes and founders of dynasties.

The limping, leg-dragging "step of Yü" was regarded as a powerful spiritual act and is even today an important mystical movement in Taoist ritual. So it seems likely that disabled men formed a distinctive shamanic class, all the more so because they are frequently grouped with the *wu*, as in the expression *wu-wang*. Some scholars propose that the *wang* may have also been female. The character for *wang* does survive in a modern name for female shamans in the Amoy dialect. [Schafer 1951: 131-40, 160-61] But *wang* also has an etymological connection to the word "king," also *wang*, an this angle that has been explored by K.C. Chang and others. (But this article is about the women.)

This Chinese custom of ritual exposure persisted across the millennia. A 9th century writer lists drought-ending methods: "to expose shamans in the sun, shift the markets to new places, make dragon images of mud." Several other sources attest to exposing earthen dragons to bring rain. In the year 773, the mayor Li Kan "constructed an earthern dragon, and personally performed a

contradance (*dui-wu*) with the shamanesses and shamans (*wu-xi*)." A 12th century text describes rituals carried out by the peasantry: "when praying for rain, they are stripped naked, and wave their arms, making back and forth gestures with their hands." Here the exposure and dancing go together. These customs still survived in turn-of-the-century Gansu, when a "sorceress" stripped naked in a drought-ending ritual. [Schafer 1951: 132-37, 143-44]

Across the long centuries, ritual exposure was increasingly taken over by male officials. Schafer piles up many examples, too numerous to list, of mayors, emperors, scholars, and clergy performing this sacrificial act in order to end droughts. In each case, it is credited with causing a downpour. [Schafer, 133-40] The transfer from female shamans also carried over to religious monastics:

. . .the ancients, to relieve a drought, without fail employed female shamans; now we employ Buddhist and Taoist priests . . . if a female shaman was not obtainable, they sometimes used *nü-guan,* (Taoist 'nuns') or Buddhist 'nuns,' seeking yin by means of yin. [Tang Shun-zhi, in Schafer 1951: 159]

This Ming author frankly explains the reason for a shift from shamans to monastics: because monks were held in high regard while in his times the *wu* were despised, at least by his kind. So male officials exposed themselves to the sun and the elements—and if that failed to bring rain, they upped the ante with fire. Many stories recount that as they were about to enter the fire, the rains came.

A shamanic precedent existed for this too. Old versions of the *Chun-qiu fan-lu* call for "the shamans to recite their spells, and expose them. If this does not make it rain, pile up firewood on the sacred mountain, beat drums and burn them." (The grammar is unclear whether "them" refers to the drums or the shamans.) Other accounts refer to people building bonfires on mountaintops to bring rain. It was said that the spirit of Mt. Tai married a river princess, so whenever the river spirit sees the mountain burning, he rushes to the aid of his daughter. Schafer suggested that this story "may reflect an ancient ceremony in which the divine maiden was impersonated by a shamaness and burned on the sacred mountain." [Schafer 1951: 141-42]

By early accounts, the ritual exposure was a voluntary act by a powerful person. But there seems to be a turning point when lords began to coerce the *wu* or *wang* to perform it, and even punished them with fire if they were unable to bring rain. The *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* describes how duke Xi proposed "a ritual which consisted of burning or exposing to the sun a cripple or a *wu* in order to obtain rain." [Boileau, 364]

The duke (Xi) wanted to burn a *wu* and a cripple at the stake [sic]. Zang Wenzhong said: this is no preparation for the drought. Repair the city walls, limit your food, be economic in your consumption, be parsimonious and advise (people) to share (the food), this is what must be done. What use would be *wu* and cripple? If Heaven wanted to have them killed, why were they born at all? If they (the cripple and the *wu*) could produce drought, burning them would augment very much (the disaster). [Boileau, 363-4]

A similar story from the Warring States era appears in the *Liji* (Tangongxia):

There was a drought during the year. Duke Mu called on Xianzi and asked him about the reason for this. He said: 'Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time. I want to expose to the sun a cripple and what about that?' (Xianzi) said: 'Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time but to expose to the sun the crippled son of somebody, that would be cruel. No, this cannot be allowed.' (the duke said): 'Well, then I want to expose to the sun a *wu* and what about that?' (Xianzi) answered: 'Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time but to put one's hope on an ignorant woman and offer her to pray (for rain), no, this is too far (from reason).'

In this account, the Confucian advisor objects on what appear to be humane grounds, but he is really opposing the old shamanic culture. The author takes a jab at the ritual efficacy of "ignorant" *wu*. From these sources, Boileau projects a scapegoating sacrifice going back a long ways, even while acknowledging that the element of sacrificing the *wu* was new: "In fact, the ritual of burning cripples and female individuals at the stake is probably as old as the Shang dynasty." He points to a character in Shang oracular inscriptions "signifying 'burning a cripple at the stake' [sic], burning of an individual with a distorted spine [as a sacrifice]. When the character was accompanied by a complement (signifying 'burning an x kind of person '), this complement was a character designating a female individual, presumably a slave (f) or a female coming either from a place or a tribe..." [Boileau, 365, citing Qiu Xigui]

There are several problems here. First, Boileau fails to even consider whether the woman might have been a shaman. Second, his interpretation of these passages as execution-sacrifices conflicts with the scholarly consensus. What he renders as "burning at the stake"—no "stake" appears in the Chinese sources—is actually the words *pu* or *pulu*, meaning "expose to air/sun" or *fen* "burn, set on fire." [For a more detailed critique of Boileau, see appendix.] Thus Schafer refers to "ritual exposure" of the *wu* and lame men. [*wu-wang*, Schafer 1951] Another writer says, "Shamans had to carry out an exhausting dance within a ring of fire until, sweating profusely, the falling drops of perspiration produced the desired rain." [Unschuld, 33-34] Eva Wong interprets the rite similarly: "Often, the shaman would be exposed to the sun, using his or her suffering to 'persuade' the sacred powers to send rain." [Wong, online. See also Cass, 49; McCurley, 140]

These stories about lords proposing to burn *wu* seem to reflect a historical shift in which old shamanic customs of self-sacrifice were being turned into scapegoating executions of female *wu* and male *wang*. The coercion begins in the stories quoted above, and recurs in much later stories, when lords do threaten to burn *wu* or Daoist adepts who fail to bring rain. (Below we'll see an instance of this in a legend about the Tang era.) In ancient China, there is a visible distinction between the ruling elite's attitudes, and the values of common people who continued to seek out the *wu*. [Schafer 1951: 136; see Dashu, 2010, on popular movements around the goddess Xi Wangmu].

One last example from Schafer highlights how ritual exposure evokes the power of the female body. The *Shih Ji* tells a story about a coffer filled with frothy dragon essence at the end of the legendary Xia period. After many centuries, it reopened in the time of king Li. The dragon secretions permeated the air, filling it with powerful spirits. Female shamans were called to contain them: "king

Li had women, stripped naked, cry out at them." The female potency of the shamans, their bodies and their cries, subdues spirits that nothing else could control. [Schafer 1951:149. See his appendix for myriad examples of women unleashing power by uncovering their bodies.]

We begin to see outright persecution of the *wu*—not just demotion—during the Han dynasty, when actual witch hunts of *wu* took place. Accusations of *wu-gu* (poisonous sorcery) flew in court circles. Empress Chen Jiao was tried for employing Yue shamans in court intrigues. She was convicted and lost her position; undoubtedly her status and family influence prevented her execution. But hundreds of suspects, many *wu* certainly among them, were beheaded and their heads set out on pikes. [Loewe 1970:169] (As Eva Wong explains, Yue was a southern region famous for shamans, like Chu, and regarded as "barbarian" by northern Han people. The court persecution was thus tinged with ethnic overtones and highlights the persistence of shamanic culture in aboriginal areas.) A more severe witch hunt took place in 91 BCE, after a failed coup involving the crown prince, with more charges of *wu-gu*; this time the state was said to have executed tens of thousands over a period of nine months. [deGroot 1910 5: 836]

Kings were eager to use the *wu* for their wars and political machinations, as described in the *Yi Zhoushu Fi* (Fengbao) which calls the *wu* "vermin." The *Liutao* (Shangxian) calls on the king to stop "magical tricks, poison of the *wu* (sorcery), evil ways and curses… " [Boileau, 374-5] Working with the aristocracy was risky business—though it must have been dangerous to refuse them.

A *wu* appears in a story from the *Zuozhuan* as an interpreter of dreams and omens for a princely family. In 581 BCE, the lord of Jin killed two men of the Zhao family. He then had a terrifying dream in which a powerful demon accused him of wrongly killing his descendants. The demon pursued him and in the process destroyed two doors of his palace, when the duke woke up. Alarmed, he summoned the *wu* of Sangtian. She was able to tell him the entire dream. The duke asked what it all meant. She answered, "You will not taste the new wheat." He became ill. A physician told him it was untreatable; nevertheless he rewarded him richly. The duke lived long enough to see the harvest, and ordered a meal to be prepared from it.

He summoned the *wu* of Sangtian, triumphantly showed her the new wheat, then put her to death. But before tasting the wheat, a nature call sent the lord to the privy. He fell into it and died. [Boileau, 366-7]

This story can be interpreted as a curse by the *wu*—or as a vindication of her prophetic power.

Female shamans in Chinese literature

We've looked at references to the *wu* in the Shang dynasty oracle bones, the *Guoyü*, *Zhouli*, and *Shuowen*. Other mentions are scattered through ancient books. The *Ze Chuan* refers to a Wu of the Mulberry Field, who may well have performed the ritual dance performed in a mulberry grove in the *Zhuangzi*. The most famous texts related to shamanism are the Nine Songs, part of the poetic collection known as the *Chuci* (3rd to 2nd BCE). Though composed by literati, they are modeled on

shamanic incantations of the southern country of Chu and describe ceremonies in which priestesses danced to entice the spirits to descend. Many poems are filled with erotic longing, recalling the theme of spirit-marriages. In the *Yun zhong jun*, female and male shamans sing and dance, arrayed in magnificent robes and perfumes:

> **See the priestesses (*ling*), how skilled and lovely,**
> **Whirling and dipping like birds in flight**
> **Unfolding the words in time to the dancing,**
> **Pitch and beat all in perfect accord!**
> **The spirits, descending, darken the sun.** [Erickson, 53]

Another song, "The Monarch of the East," describes the laying out of offerings, then:

> **Together we lift our drumsticks**
> **And begin to beat a rhythm,**
> **Slowly and solumnly, we start our singing;**
> **Then, as we hear the pipes and zithers,**
> **Everyone joins in a loud and shrill song.**
> **The sacred shamaness is in her colorful robe;**
> **She begins to dance.**
> **The air is filled with sweet fragrance.**
> **Now the strings play louder;**
> **The five notes are sounding in harmony.**
> **Great One, enjoy and be merry with us.** [Wong, 11]

Eva Wong translates *ling* as "shamaness"; another translator renders it as "priestess." The ancient *Shuowen* dictionary glossed *ling* as *wu*. Its author Xu Shen explained that just as the *wu* used jade to worship the spirits, so the character *ling* incorporates the glyph for jade…" He added that *ling* was sometimes written with the *wu* radical. [Erickson, 51-2] Modern Sinologists define *ling* as "sorcerer, diviner, supernatural, spiritual, divine and felicitous." [Bernard Karlgren, in Erickson, 60, note 39]

Susan Erickson calls attention to the recurrent phrase *yan jian*, connoting "resplendence," in the *Chuci*: "Yet a literal translation of the phrase would be 'the *ling* bends down (*yan*) and pulls up (*jian*)." This, she points out, is exactly how the dancing women are depicted in Han dynasty jade plaques. She also notes another meaning of *jian*: lameness, which goes back to the shamanic "Step of Yü." Named after the legendary limping shaman-king, it continued to be a dance step in healing ceremonies, as a medical text found at Mawangdui attests. [Erickson, 52] It was absorbed into Taoist ritual as a dance of entry into spiritual realms, still enacted today. [Schipper, 85, 173]

In the Nine Songs, there is a moment when the *ling* performs *lian quan*, "interlinked movement." Erickson explains that *quan* and related characters "frequently describe the winding movement of dragons who pull celestial chariots or the dancing movements of water spirits." She cites a text that specifically links this movement with rituals exorcising demons. [Erickson, 52]

The Nine Songs of the *Chuci* describe music, ecstatic states and descent of spirits into entranced people who embark on spiritual journeys:

> **Harps tightly strung, the drums alternating,**
> **bells being rung, chime frames shaking,**
> **fifes sing out, pipes are blown;**
> **those who act holy ones, wholesome and comely,**
> **hover here winging, suddenly mount,**
> **reciting the lyrics joining the dance.**
> **Catching the pitch, matching the rhythms,**
> **the holy ones come, they cover the sun.**
> **In gown of green cloud and white rainbow mantle,**
> **I raise the long arrow, I shoot Heaven's Wolf,**
> **with yew-bow in hand I now sink back under,**
> **and seize the North Dipper to pour out cinnamon wine,**
> **then clutching my reins, I rush soaring high,**
> **off far through darkness voyaging east.** [Translation by Steven Owen, Online]

David Hawkes, an expert on the *Chuci*, views the theme seeking after the goddess as related to the shamanic journey through the worlds. [Schafer 1973: 52] Another song, known as *Shan Gui* (Mountain Spirit), the poet describes the shamanic journey of a *wu* on a leopard's back:

> **She rides a red leopard—striped lynxes following behind—**
> **Her chariot of magnolia arrayed with banners of cassia,**
> **Her cloak made of orchids and her girdle of azalea,**
> **Calling sweet flowers for those dear in her heart.** [Owen, online]

In this poem, the shaman is late for her mountain-top assignation, and left longing for her spirit lover. Another shaman is described as holding snakes. The Yuan you poem of the *Chuci* describes water creatures dancing: "Then the two goddesses performed the Nine Shao Songs. They lined water monsters up to join them in the dance. How their bodies coiled and writhed in undulating motion!" [Sterckx, 11] The *Songs of Chu* also refer to Kunlun mountain as a column connecting heaven and earth, endlessly deep and high. [Cahill, 47] It is the road of shamanic journeys between the worlds, associated with the goddesss Xi Wangmu.

In his book *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens*, Edward Schafer offers more valuable material on the *wu* from later periods. He discusses the extensive literature on the theme of Wu Shan, "female shaman mountain" in the Yangze gorge. A whole genre of poems sprang up on the theme *Wu shan gao*:

> **The shaman mountain is high,**

The shaman woman uncanny;
As rain, she brings the sunset, oh!
As cloud she brings the dawn.
[*Qi Ji*, in Schafer 1973: 107]

The poems show that the mountain was inhabited by a goddess associated with rainbows, mist and rains, and that a temple once stood there. We can surmise from the name Wu mountain that female shamans once presided over its ceremonies. Tang poets already refer to the sanctuary as deserted and overgrown. Schafer attributes that decline to Confucian officials who saw destroying the *wu* shrines as "an act of public morality":

Sometimes zealous magistrates destroyed them by the thousands during very brief tenures in rural towns. A notable example is that Di Ren-jie … who, after an inspection tour immediately south of the Yangze in the seventh century, was gratified to report that he had destroyed seventeen hundred unauthorized shrines in that region. [Schafer 1973: 14]

Northern mandarins carried out this demotion against southern peoples who nourished vibrant shamanic traditions. The poet Li He alludes to the "incantations and provocations" of aboriginal women along the banks of the Xiang river: "In a cool night—among the waves—she enchants that ancient dragon." [Schafer 1973:138-9, quoting from the poem, "Xiang Consort"]

Some Chinese poets, however, write with reverence of the Wu Shen Nü ("divine woman" of Mount Wu, or "shaman spirit-woman"). Sung Yü saw her as the progenitrix of the myriads of beings, as Schafer describes: "All phenomena spring from her. She is a literary version of an ancient cosmic myth—a nameless goddess of the formless mists, pregnant with possibilities. She has much in common with the Tao, while also reminding us of that great creatrix Nü Kua." It is the Divine Woman, rather than the shamans who invoke her (and even embody her) that occupies the attention of the literati. For them she is unattainable. Over and over the poets speak with mournful nostalgia for the goddess of Wu Shan who can be glimpsed but disappears out of reach. Gradually they transform the Divine Woman into a court lady and even a concubine, degrading her status and painting her in increasingly negative terms, as weak, weeping, and rejected by royal mortals. [Schafer 1973:47, 193: 33ff and passim]

In later periods, women shamans persisted in spite of the intense official hostility toward them. Ming dynasty polemics rail against old women shamans, one of the most prominent categories of "grannies" (*po*) that they disparage as unnaturally non-submissive women. The *Xie Zhaozhe Wu Zazu* shows their prestige:

Nowadays shamanism is especially prevalent in the southern regions, especially far down in Fujian and Guangzhou … When there is illness in a wealthy household the women have great respect and reverence for the shaman … They come to the house and sound gongs and ring bells without cease in the courtyard. [Cass, 49]

This description reveals that the custom of *wu* playing gongs had persisted since their first depiction in bronzes of the Warring States period, almost two thousand years before. But the author condemns them: "It is a disaster that they are not forbidden." In fact, the *wu* were outlawed over much of the Ming empire. Our source gives the official rationale for the repression: "They delude the masses… and claim to cure illness, to advance their own greed." Witch hunters said much the same about European folk healers. [Cass, 48-50]

Around 1680, the *Hong lou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber) show Chinese women channeling the spirits of dead women and casting spells. A folk belief held that the prayers of a virtuous old woman avert misfortune. Women continued to practice various spiritual professions under the names *gua gu* (diviner), *qian po* (praying woman), *shih po* (spiritualist), *yo po* (herbalist), *wen po* (midwife); and *ni gu* (Buddhist nuns) and *dao gu* (Daoist nuns) also practiced some of these arts.

Aboriginal Tiger-Women

The precedent of Xi Wangmu as a tiger-shaman in the *Shanhai Jing* (as well as many images of her in later tomb art) continued to resonate in certain regions and especially among indigenous ethnicities. The country of Chu and its shamanic customs were legendary among the Han Chinese. Kan Pao recognized that its people were descended from the aboriginal "Miao" (a Chinese word that has the same ring as "barbarian" in English). He wrote that they had the power to turn into tigers. The very name of the Chu people "is originally that of an animal that sometimes refers to large tigers." [Hammond, 68] This same power of shapeshifting into tigers was attributed to other aboriginal groups such as the Man.

A Ming writer declared that the people of Guizhou wore tiger skins. Others called them—especially the women—were-tigers. "Among places where people change to tigers, in Kweichow it is most common. The women change, but the men do not." In one story, a headman's mother was sitting alone when several tigers came into the room. She sat there in shock. The experience changed her. Shortly she began transforming into a tiger; her mouth and eyes grew large, yellow hair sprouted from her skin, and she began roaring. The tigers hung around waiting for her transformation to be complete. She escaped from her watchers and ran to the tigers, rolling on the earth a few times until she completely entered into tigress nature. In other stories, women who ran to the mountains in this state were caught in time, and special medicines arrested their transformation. [Hammond, 71]

Han stories say that the aboriginal Miao of western Yue—another land famous for shamans—could turn into tigers. They told of hunters who captured tiger-women who were recognized by their silver bracelets, a common style among indigenous women. In one of these fables, an old Miao woman got lost in the mountains. Without being aware of it, she gradually turned into a tiger woman, growing hair on her body. She "became intimate with tigers," and led them to villages to raid cattle. She had the acquired power to shapeshift into a beautiful woman, and would embrace people (men?) and

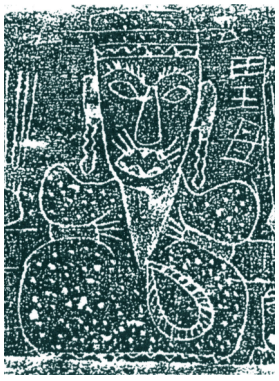
claw them to drink their blood. "People called her the protean hag." [Hammond, 69]

These stories demonize the female and the aboriginal together. Charles Hammond comments on Confucian men's fear that these groups were hostile to their social order and were "keen to overthrow it." He informs us that some of the stories were written at a time of bloody wars against the "Miao" people; one was even written by a man related to a Chinese commander who led these attacks. Many stories cast indigenous people (called "Man" and "Miao" by the Han), particularly the women, as were-tigers. But Hammond points out that "other evidence suggests that sometimes the belief in a particular were-beast is the product of a religious belief in shamans associated with the given animal." [Hammond, 71-2, 59]

Weretiger stories were told about Han people too. Hammond describes how Tang dynasty stories about weretigers are sympathetic to the men—but they demonize the females, and describe them being killed. The fear of political upheaval, especially the overturning of Confucian norms represented by empress Wu Ze Tian, led to increased emphasis on tiger-women from this period on. [Hammond, 63-4] Some stories openly express male anxiety about women's anger.

Cui Tao came to stay at an inn after being warned that it was haunted. A tiger rushed into the room. Cui Tao ran and hid. He saw the tiger take off her skin, becoming a beautiful and dignified woman. She said she was from a poor hunter family and was looking for a husband at the inn. They married, and the man threw her tiger-skin into a dry well behind the inn. Years went by; she bore a son and he was appointed to a post. Traveling to his new position, they came to the inn. The husband remarked that her skin was still there. She laughed and said, "Let me try it on." Once in her old robes, she turned back into a tiger, reared up, and devoured her husband and son. In another version, the woman gets angry when the husband jokes about the tiger skin, feeling that he is showing disrespect. [Hammond, 67]

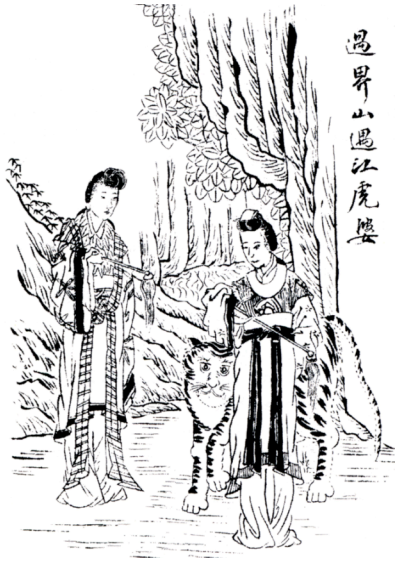
In later dynasties, the stories about tiger-women proliferate. Some are sermons against female jealousy over husbands keeping concubines. "This suggests that even as Neo-Confucianism increasingly restricts the woman's social freedom, the man's feelings of vulnerability grow in inverse proportion." In other stories, neighbors of non-conformist women accuse them of killing their animals, as in European witch hunts. "Weretigers represent a subversive female power that the patriarchal hegemony must destroy." Occasionally a favorable story comes through. A tiger comes to the aid of a beautiful widow. Living by herself, she is victimized by a man who first comes on to her, and then retaliates when she rejects him. The tiger takes him out. [Hammond, 67-8]



Xi Wangmu as tigress or leopard-woman. Tomb art at Tenzhou, Shandong.

Still other tales retain the old shamanistic theme that lies at the root of the tiger-woman myth. A young married woman, Xiao-zhu, went picking fruit in the mountains with her sister-in-law. They came to a temple, and she loved it so much that she could not bring herself to leave. On the way back, she entered it alone and remained there, refusing to return home. "When

she saw someone, she hid in the grass." The other woman disapproved of her for being an unfaithful wife to her brother. People started seeing Xiao-zhu in the temple, as a tiger in her woman's clothing upon the god's seat. Relatives came and took her home, in a woman's form, to her brother's house where they locked her in a tower. She changed back into a tiger. Hearing this, the villagers came and killed her. The next day, tigers avenged her death, forcing people to stay inside and killing several villagers. Charles Hammond comments that her relationship was not with a man, but with a spirit: "She is a shaman." [Hammond, 65]



Tiger-woman meeting with the shaman Chen Jinggu; they became sworn sisters

The shamanistic dimension is much clearer in Hokkienese legends of Jiang Hupo or Hudan, "Tiger Courage." She acquired her tiger-double in the womb, when a hunted tiger took refuge in the womb of her mother: "Shortly thereafter, she gave birth to a baby girl with a strange nature. 'Ferocious as a Tiger,' she bestowed slaps that left the imprint of a tiger's paw." Jiang Hupo refused to marry and went to study with the Old Mother of Mount Li, from whom she learned healing. She rode a golden tiger. This spirit helper had the power to bring back souls that had fled in terror—the ancient shamanic remedy for "soul loss"—and to expel poison from people who were sick or afflicted. (It also sometimes seduced travelers in the mountains.) Jiang was a Daoist and immortal, as reflected in her other name Shanyu, "mountain-born." [Baptandier, 30, 49]

Her story is related to a larger body of traditions about female Taoist wisdom seekers who refuse to marry, choosing instead to go into the mountains to practice spiritual arts. Many of these women are said to have sought out Mount Lü in the far northeast, a sanctuary which became famous as Yi Wu Lü Shan, "Mount Lü of the shaman healers." It had a southern counterpart, Mount Lu in Jiangxi, "where a tradition of female shaman healers is said to have evolved." Among them were the Taoist women Cai Xunzhen and Li Tengkong, who healed with herbs, written talismans, and energetic practices in the late 8th century. [Baptandier, 46; 15-16; 268, n. 30] A century later, Zu Yuanzhen arrives in an "extraordinary birth," and becomes a Daoist healer who attained the power of riding a dragon. She is said to have learned from the female immortals Lady Wen and Lingguan Mu. [Baptandier, 20]

A "female ritual line" was associated with both Mount Lü and Mount Lu. "It would seem that only women were admitted to Mount Lü." Male masters could not find the entrance, which could only be accessed by a ferryboat—a trait of the underworld grottos. The southern Mount Lu had a spiritual double whose peak rested in the depths of the Min river. It too was a Taoist grotto-world entered via "a magic boat at the end of a shamanic journey." These sacred mountains figure in legends about historical women shamans who became goddesses. [Baptandier, 17, 46, 59]

The Legend of Chen Jinggu

A distinct pattern exists of female shamans and other spiritual adepts being turned into goddesses, first among the common people, with small shrines, and then temples and exalted titles bestowed by state decree, centuries after their deaths. One of these shamans was Chen Jinggu, later known as the Lady of Linshui, the Goddess of Fuzhou, and Quan Yin's Fighting Daughter. She was born in 767. Early on she showed prophetic and spiritual powers. Her story became so overlaid with legend that it is difficult to make out the facts of her life. According to the legend, she was conceived from a clot of blood from Quan Yin, which floated down the water. A childless washerwoman swallowed it and conceived a female prodigy, a baby who could talk soon after birth and had many powers. This child had a spiritual double, White Snake, who sprang from a hair of Quan Yin that fell into the water at the same time.

Chen Jinggu in tiger-crown, wielding a horn and snake-whip

As her memorial stela recounts, Jinggu refused marriage—in some stories she escaped from the bridal palinquin on her wedding day—and traveled to Mount Lü to learn from its spiritual adepts. She became a skilled shaman, mastering rainmaking, spirit-calling, and chasing away demons. (But the legend says that she refused to learn the arts of gestation and birth, which ultimately doomed her.) She performed many healings, curing people of fevers, burns, fractures, paralysis, and other injuries and diseases. Chen Jinggu protected her Min country from demons and "trained a group of sworn sisters, forming a shamanic community of heroines." [Baptandier, 12-15, 28]

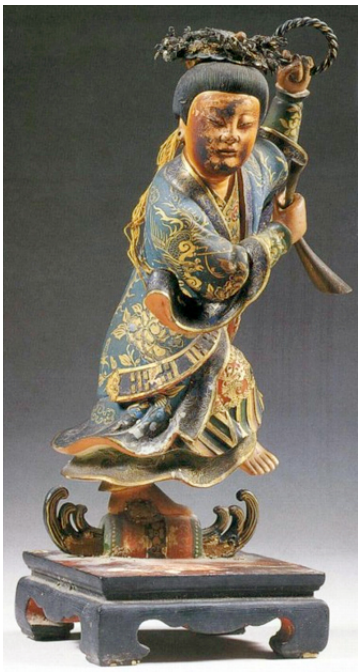
This sisterhood was headed by "three shamans trained in the ritual techniques of Mount Lü": Chen Jinggu, Lin Jiuniang, Li Sanniang. (One tradition holds that Chen was taught there by Wangmu herself, the matron goddess of shamans.) Chen also allies with the Tigress Woman Jiang Hupo, whose bed she shares while visiting Qi Shan. Brigitte Baptandier picks up on the lesbian aspects of their relationship—which the tradition itself presents as the union of two Taoist schools. She remarks on the assigning of male ritual titles to these women; they call Old Mother of Mount Li *shifu*, "master-father," and the "sworn sisters" call each other "brother." [47-8]

Jiang helps Chen to exorcise a hemp-spinning spider-demon from whom she acquires a magic pearl. Other helpers are the Rock-Press women, spirits who are first transformed by a lightning strike,

making them Thunder daughters who possess yang as well as yin, and later changed again by the power of Chen Jinggu. [Baptandier, 36, 17, 53]

The White Snake is meanwhile wreaking havoc, infiltrating the king's palace and devouring the vital essence of his concubines. Later she carries off the man to whom Chen's family had betrothed her. Chen Jinggu is forced to rescue him, drag him home, and nurse him back to health. Somehow, because of this, she ends up having to marry him. This is where the legend turns didactic. When she left Mount Lü, having refused to study birth mysteries, she disobeyed her teacher and turned around to look back after 24 steps. He predicted that when she was 24, her power would weaken. At that age, she conceives a son and goes into retreat at home to recollect her vital essences. But events force her to emerge. A terrible drought causes suffering in Min, and the king calls on 128 Daoists to bring the rain. But they fail, and are in danger of being burned alive—here's that late, punitive twist on the rain-exposure ritual. Chen Jinggu is asked to help them, and in spite of her weakened state, she agrees. [72-5, 59]

The shaman asks her mother to observe silence during her ritual, no matter what happens. She must promise not to speak or allow noises or sudden interruptions during her entranced ritual, or she will be injured in the spirit. Then she retreats to her chamber to perform a *tuotai*, "liberation from the womb." She removes the baby from her body, places it in a birthing basin and turns that over. She transforms the room using the Eight Trigrams. She enchants a pot into a tiger, a rope into a snake, and places them as guardians at the door. She leaves the house, concealing under the glamour of a lotus lake, and goes to the river to perform her rain dance. [Baptandier, 27, 75-6] But the story blames Mother Ge for breaking her silence; she does not understand her daughter's ritual practices. She is tricked by the Ravine demon, who comes to steal the embryo. Taking the form of a bird, then a youth, he manages to get Mother Ge to speak and reveal secrets that break the spells cast by her shaman daughter. Then he takes the baby to White Snake, who swallows him. [78-9]



Chen Jinggu goes to the pool where Mount Lu lies under the river, unbinds her hair, puts on her shaman's headdress and robes, and begins to dance on a straw mat that she has spread over the water. She blows a buffalo horn in her left hand and wields a ritual sword with her right. This sword cuts away demons and writes charms in the air, which the shaman vivifies by spraying them with pure water from her mouth, in the time-honored shamanic manner. She also uses a demon-binding rope, often described as snake-headed. [81-3]

Then she traced out mantic steps on the mat placed directly on the water, while dancing with her sword and blowing on the horn; she danced on the constellation of the Northern Dipper in order to perform the true magic of Mt. Lü. She pronounced secret formulas, performed the ritual, and wrote Thunder talismans in order to transform the sky. [Linshui temple stela, in Baptandier, 13-14]

As Chen Jinggu dances and chants, sending out a call to the Dragon King, the rains come down. But her flesh tears and hemorrhages from the abortion. The waters run red, and White Snake and the Ravine demon pull her and her mat into the water. From faraway Mount Lü, Master Xu knows she is in danger, and throws three stone eggs that turn into ducks. They pull her and the mat to the surface. Now riding the White Snake's head, she rides to Linshui, kills the snake, and dies. With her last breath, the shaman declared that she would become a goddess, "and I will save pregnant women in distress." [Baptandier, 81-3, 11]

The Lady of Linshui, the deified 8th-century shaman of Fuzhou

Brigitte Baptandier analyzes how in this legend, Chen Jinggu is torn apart by the decreed female fate of marriage and childbirth in spite of her attempts to escape it. She is saved from the Confucian doom of her "bad death" in childbirth by returning to Mt. Lü after her death, to learn the female arts she refused before. She ends up being tuned into a Goddess of Flowers, overseeing birth and children—even though "she was a woman who died following an abortion after rejecting marriage." Here the Taoist elevation of femaleness as the primordial origin is decisively countered by the ideology—and custom—of a deeply patriarchal society. As Baptandier puts it, "If femaleness is glorified, the myth immediately places limits on it as soon as it is taken up by women." [Baptandier, 3, 55-6, 65-73, 84]

A temple to the Lady of Linshui and her sworn sisters was dedicated in 792, at a cave sanctuary in Daqiao where an ancient python goddess was once worshipped. This much older tradition became demonized and was wrapped into the story as the White Snake antagonist of Chen Jinggu. The snake-woman was described as a death spirit who took two children yearly. Chen accordingly fought and defeated her, but died afterwards. Her mummified body was said to sit atop the python in the cave, just as she died there.

Around 1250, the Lady of Linshui was recorded in the official Register of Sacrifices. A 1710 account refers to the building of a temple "with a pavilion for her to dress up in." [Brigandier, 5] This refers to the spirit mediums who have channeled the Lady of Linshui since her death, as they do today. They are part of a larger East Asian context of Vietnamese and Korean shamans who embody and dress in the robes of the spirits.

Veneration of Chen Jinggu continued into the 20th century. In 1950, communist anti-superstition cadres defaced her statues. The Red Guards attacked the shrine again in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution. A local woman began restoring the shrine in the 1980s, arguing that the anti-superstition laws didn't apply because the goddess is real. [Baptandier, passim] Images of the Three Ladies—Chen Jinggu and her two sworn

sisters—sit above the altar in the Linshui temple today. She has eleven more temples in Taiwan, as well as nine others to the Three Ladies, where female spirit mediums enact her rites, and the White Snake is "hidden under her altar." [Baptandier, 32, 36]

More deified woman shamans and spiritual adepts

Two centuries later, another spiritual prodigy was born in coastal Fujian, circa 960. She was Lin Moniang, who was given the name "silent girl" since she did not cry at birth. She was from a fisher family. Stories describe her as a great swimmer and say that she stood on the shore in red robes to guide the fishing boats back safely. Her primary legend tells how she dreamed or had a vision while weaving of her father and brothers in danger at sea. Mazu journeyed in the spirit to rescue them from drowning. In one version, her mother awoke her and caused her to drop one brother; in the other, she walks in on her daughter who, deeply entranced, held a strand of thread in each hand and another in her mouth. Startled, she opened her mouth and lost one of the threads. The interruption caused one of her brothers to be lost. So this legend repeats the theme of maternal ignorance in Chen Jinggu's story.

Mazu protector of Taiwan

Tradition says that Lin Moniang, also known as Mazu, helped many people and died young. People started to say that she ascended to heaven and became a goddess. She became known as Tin Hau, Heavenly Queen (Tian Hou in Mandarin). Fisherfolk and sailors prayed to her for protection. Temples sprang up, with images of the goddess in red robes, sometimes flanked by her helpers, a far-seeing red two-horned spirit and an all-hearing green one-horned spirit.

Tin Hau followed a similar mythical trajectory as Chen Jinggu, being described as a daughter or reincarnation of Quan Yin. Successive imperial decrees bestowed titles on her and raised fine temples. Tin Hau achieved far wider fame and devotion than her predecessor, with temples spreading from southeast China to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Australia, San Francisco, and elsewhere in the Chinese diaspora.

San Xian Gu Shrine, Hong Kong

Other, lesser-known women were honored by their local communities. The shaman Golden Flower "was enshrined in Canton after her death by drowning." [Schafer 1951: 156] Some women of spiritual attainment were declared Buddhist saints, others Taoists immortals. Many were honored as triads of sworn sisters who vowed to never marry, such as the San Xian Gu, surnamed Pang, Zhang and He, who lived several hundred years ago. Other San Xian Gu immortal triads are revered in their own localities around southern

China, sometimes connected to women's vegetarian communities.

Another spiritually gifted woman was Lady Ying-ji of Pumei, Taiwan. When she was born sometime in the 1400s, "the whole house was permeated by a mysterious fragrance." She loved Taoist philosophy and made prophecies that came true, as well as healing by touch. She died young, as most of these latter-day female prodigies are described as doing, while sitting in meditation. [Stevens, 166-7]

While legend said that Chen Jinggu and Mazu were spiritual offspring of Quan Yin, Yü Nü Niang-niang was conceived after her parents prayed to Tian Hou (Mazu). Like her, she did not cry after she was born, in 1825. It was said that the room was filled with fragrance and the sky with multicolored clouds. Her parents named her Jade Maiden (Yü Nü), an old title of shamanic goddesses. She was devout and wise.

When a drought struck, the magistrated dreamed that a girl named Jade Maiden had the power to bring the rains. He located her and arranged for her to come pray. Then it rained. (So the old theme of rain-bringing wu still resonated, in a new cultural framework tinged with Buddhism and vegetarianism.) After that people called on her as a rainmaker and also fishermen consulted her about where to look for a good catch. She too died young, but people keep reporting that she appears to them. [Stevens, 168]

Shrine of Yü Nü Niang-niang

The influx of Buddhist themes becomes very marked, and yet the flow goes in the other direction too. Chinese goddess traditions, after all, transformed the male bodhisatva Avalokitesvara into the female boddhisatva Quan Yin. They mixed in old East Asian themes of willows and elixir vases and the woman riding on a dragon. The legend of Miao Shan is especially striking for its resemblance to the old Chinese motif of the tiger-shaman. The devout girl refuses her father's order to marry, and after he tries to punish her unfilial female disobedience by beheading, the ax breaks on her neck. A magical tiger descends and carries Miao Shan to the gates of Nirvana, where she takes her bodhisattva vows to help the suffering people. So her story preserves a nugget of archaic shamanism too.

Above: Tiger rescues Miao Shan from execution and marriage, transporting her to the gates of Nirvana where she takes her bodhisattva vows, in a foundational legend of Quan Yin.

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Note: I have altered romanization to Pinyin to avoid confusion on names for people not familiar with Chinese and all the different ways it gets rendered into Western type.

Appendix I

In his study of rainmaking sacrifices, Edward Schafer elaborated on the concepts clustered around the word *wu*: "In Shang times the words *wu* 'shaman,' *wu* 'dance,' and *wu* 'luxuriant growth,' now distinguished graphically and semantially, were identical graphially and phonetically." He also linked "a cluster of concepts "feminine,"" dance"," " shaman," " fertility," and " rain-making about the word *wu*. [1951:154] In a later work, *The Divine Woman*, he related *wu* to "mother," "dance," "fertility," "egg," and "receptacle" [1973: 13] So far, I have found no later source that evaluates or even comments on these etymologies.

Appendix II: Anti-female bias

Interpreting away the evidence for female ritual leadership is a time-honored tradition. Some of the most prestigious scholars of shamanism have indulged in it, and even made maleness a touchstone of their definition. "The vehemence with which female shamans have been denied by some prominent scholars is quite surprising," Sarah Nelson comments, "especially given the abundant ethnographic evidence of women as shamans." [Nelson, 95. Her critique of this phenomenon is excellent.]

Undoubtedly the most influential of these perspectives was that of Mircea Eliade. He struggled to explain how the name *wu*, originally used for "the woman possessed by *shen* … later became the general term for shaman in China. This might seem to prove the earlier existence there of shamanesses." He then proceeded to argue, on extremely thin evidence, for a previous bearskin-hooded shaman in hunting rituals "in which men play the leading part." [452, n. 97] This bear head-dress is first attested in the *Zhouli*, much later than the oracle bones' mention of the *wu*. Dallas McCurley states that the *fangxiangshi* who wore this costume may have even been a creation of the Zhou ministry that oversaw state-appointed shamans. [McCurley, 136] A single legend refers to a Xia king turning into a bear, but no bears appear in early bronze art. [Nelson, 158]

Eliade grouped the *wu* into his "possession" model in order to explain the undeniable prominence of women in *wu* ritual. But after acknowledging that "The proportion of women *wu* was over-whelming," he proceeded to write as if they were male: "he incarnated the spirits," "he was a healer," etc. At least Eliade—unlike many who followed—acknowledged a "preponderance of women," and recognized that their numbers dwindled as a result of historical changes. [Eliade, 454-5]

Boileau's *Wu and Shaman*

Giles Boileau attempts to minimize the female associations of the title *wu*: "whether the *wu* is a man or a woman is not known." He fails to address any of the evidence for female *wu*. [355] He is intent on minimizing and disparaging the importance of the ancient *wu*: "Admittedly, *wu* and *xi* dance, but they do so to pray for rain, and there is no mention of these dances being associated with regular

sacrifices to gods." [Boileau, 355, 358] That is drawing the line too narrow. The dances are depicted in bronzes of the Warring States period, intermingled with scenes of offerings and temples. Literary descriptions provide valuable testimony about the wu invoking deities at ceremonies, as we've seen. As Taoism expert Schipper writes, the *wu* "called down the rain by dancing, but also knew how to journey in the heavens." [Schipper, 55]

Boileau has his own distinctive way of disparaging the *wu*, going well beyond describing officialdom's undeniable hostility toward them: "She is not only linked with negativity and death in the course of her 'regular' duties, she also seems to embody nature at its worst." [365] He states that people considered the *wu* to be dangerous: "They seem to have been considered as a vehicle through which the vengeful dead act, even if (for example during funerals as seen above) they also have the duty of keeping them at bay." [369] He adds, without offering any examples, that the *wu* was "often considered an evil sorcerer." And: "the *wu* was considered a kind of embodiment of the most negative aspects of Nature." [376] By whom?

Boileau paints the *wu* as shunned figures, arguing for an "overall negativity associated with the *wu*. [355, 364-5] He gives no consideration to the considerable historical changes that took place from the Shang period to the time when Confucians were working to outflank and suppress the *wu*, which is the context for the passages he quotes as evidence. He exaggerates the ritual exposure of the *wu* as "burning at the stake," as if it had been proven to be an execution-sacrifice. (While the Shang certainly did practice funerary human sacrifice, it is far from clear whether the "burning" of wu actually means burning to death. Boileau cites Schafer as a source, while completely ignoring his many citations of eminent men who voluntarily undertook ritual exposure and were even ready to burn themselves as a rain-making offering. By withholding this information about ritual exposure as self-sacrifice by people of high prestige, while arguing that it applied only to captive women and disabled men, he presents a seriously distorted picture.

Boileau also tries to deny the presence of *wu* in the Nine Songs of Chu. On the song Monarch of the East, he writes "an examination of the text itself reveals that the character 'wu' does not appear at all, and this holds true for the whole Nine Songs." That's a technicality, since the word used is *ling*, as discussed above; the great majority of scholars recognize the shamanic significance of these texts. Next, Boileau claims, "The only connection between the Nine Songs and *wu* is the preface written during the Song dynasty by Zhuzi, which says that the Nine Songs were written by Qu Yuan as a description of the dances of *wu* and *xi* (male *wu*) performed during sacrifices." That commentary actually proves that Chinese commentators saw the *Chuci* as dealing with *wu-xi*. But that is *not* the "only connection," since the ancient *Shuowen* dictionary explicitly links *wu* and *ling*, as the Nine Songs call the dancing shamans.

These negations seem related to Boileau's masculinizing theories (following Eliade's doctrines) about shamanism itself. He goes on at length about the "two principal models" of shamanic society, hunting and herding. Then he puts forward a circular argument defining the shaman as one who takes to wife the daughter of the Forest Spirit, and thus "The shaman is in the position of the wife-taker, which is why he is structurally a male." [352-3] In a footnote, he adds,

Shamanesses exist but their talents are used mainly for cure and divination. In that case, they are shamanesses not because they are women (it would be more accurate to say in spite of it) but because they belong to the human species as opposed to being animals. The development of shamanism exerted by women is linked to the appearance of more dignified careers for men, particularly as Lamaist monks. [353, n. 23]

These views help to explain why Boileau is unhappy with the idea of female *wu* in ancient China. He does not comment on *xi* as a derivative character from *wu*, or any of the evidence for feminine predominance in the profession. [359] However, he is not the only one to leave out important information about the female *wu*. Gary Seaman, for example, selectively quotes from the *Guoyü*, including only the male *xi* and leaving out the description of the female *wu* entirely. [Seaman, 230]

Boileau also challenges the idea that the *wu* entered into altered states and embodiment of *shen*. This is worth commenting on because it is characteristic of postmodern know-nothingism:

It is tempting to interpret the receiving of the gods by the *wu* as an allusion to possession or trance. The notion of trance depends heavily on the subjective interpretation of the scholar and thus cannot form the basis of scientific studies (particularly in the case of historic civilizations, where there is no access whatsoever to living witnesses). [360]

But how can ruling out altered states of consciousness, so widely attested for the *wu* (and for that matter Daoists) form the basis for such studies? Boileau would have us ignore the testimony from Chinese literature, art, and ethnography in the name of a misguided objectivity, insisting on rationalist interpretations that fundamentally misunderstands shamanic philosophy and practice by introjecting presumptions of command:

Logically, it would not be possible for somebody to order a spirit to do something if the spirit was supposed already to have invaded his mind. Therefore, if somebody were to fall in a trance, he would have to be under the control of 'somebody' else. [360]

This goes back to Eliade's artificial distinction between "possession" and "mastery" of the spirits, which for him divides female from male shamanism. One last comment has to do with interpretation of what shamanic healing is and what it can not be:

On the point of healing, David Keightley has shown that a great many oracular inscriptions concerned with disease are in fact related to the identification of the source of physical discomfort, coming mainly from irritated ancestors, and that there is not a trace of a shamanistic-like cure; the diseases are taken care of through sacrifices... [350]

Once again, this is drawing an impossibly narrow line. Shamanic diagnosis of illness does very often involve identifying which ancestors or other spirits have been displeased, and how they may be propitiated. Ceremonies and sacrifical offerings are commonly prescribed as remedies to set things

right so that disease or other affliction may be removed. This pattern is especially marked in Asian shamanic cultures, notably in Korea, but also in Siberia and Mongolia. It is also found in South Africa, Chile, and other places. We should be well past drawing such rigid boxes around definitions of shamanism, when it is so clearly fluid in its practices and its correlations with animist philosophies, ancestor veneration, and other areas of spiritual culture are so broad. This is an area of discovery that is not ready to be nailed down, and its secrets beyond the rational never will be.

For more articles by Max Dashu, see:
www.suppressedhistories.net
and www.sourcememory.net/veleda/

Zheng Zhou, Henan, after Susan Erickson