

Shamanism and Chinese Goddesses
~Xi wangmu and Nugua~

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Master's Degree Thesis in East Asia Studies

Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages

Faculty of Humanities

60 Credits

Spring 2010

To Juan, my loving husband

Contents

Part one:

Introduction.....	p.5
Organization of the paper.....	p.5
Definitions.....	p.6
Pre-existing scholarship.....	p.7
Scholars on the topic of shamanism.....	p.7
Use of methodology: the phenomenology of religion.....	p.9
The use of ethnological facts.....	p.10
Shamanism.....	p.12
Shamanism as a configuration of religion.....	p.14
<i>The core points of shamanism:</i>	
The axis mundi and the cosmology of the shaman.....	p.15
The ecstatic trance and use of music.....	p.16
The shaman and healing powers.....	p.17
Aiding spirits and the main spirit of the shaman.....	p.17
The costume of the shaman.....	p.19
Shamanism and divination.....	p.20
Ancestor worship.....	p.21
How to look for signs of religion.....	p.21
The burial: first indication of religion.....	p.22

Part two:

Introduction to Nugua.....	p.24
The translation of the name Nugua.....	p.25
The directional symbol of Nugua.....	p.25
Introduction to Xi wangmu.....	p.26
The translation of the name Xi wangmu.....	p.27
The directional symbol of Xi wangmu.....	p.27
Main texts.....	p.29
The problem of euhemerization.....	p.31

Part three:

Burial in China.....	p.33
Shamanism in China.....	p.34
Wu: the Chinese shaman.....	p.35
Divination in China.....	p.36
Music in China.....	p.36
Ancestor worship in China.....	p.37
Early cultures of China.....	p.38
The Yangshao culture.....	p.39
The Xinglongwa culture.....	p.41
The Dawenkou culture.....	p.42
The Longshan culture.....	p.44
The Hongshan culture.....	p.45
The Xia dynasty or the Erlitou culture.....	p.48
The Shang state.....	p.49
The wu during Shang.....	p.50

The role of women in the Shang state: Lady Hao.....	p.53
Shang and the ten suns.....	p.54
Possible origin of Xi wangmu: Western Mother.....	p.56
Nugua in Shang culture.....	p.57
Sanxingdui.....	p.58
The Zhou state.....	p.59
The wu during Zhou.....	p.60
The Chu state.....	p.62
The Warring states period.....	p.64
The Qin dynasty.....	p.65
The Han dynasty.....	p.66
Xi wangmu's role during the Han dynasty.....	p.67
Xi wangmu and the millenarian cult.....	p.69
Nugua in the Han dynasty.....	p.71

Part four:

Texts referring to Xi wangmu.....	p.73
Xi wangmu: ecstatic trance.....	p.77
Xi wangmu: main spirit and costume.....	p.77
Xi wangmu: healing powers.....	p.78
Xi wangmu: hunting magician.....	p.79
Xi wangmu: axis mundi.....	p.79
Xi wangmu's aiding spirits.....	p.80
The three birds.....	p.80
The three legged crow.....	p.81
The fox with nine tails.....	p.81
The toad.....	p.83
The Hare.....	p.84
Xian and other companions.....	p.84
Xi wangmu: music.....	p.85
Xi wangmu: divination.....	p.85
Texts referring to Nugua.....	p.86
Nugua: ecstatic trance.....	p.90
Nugua: axis mundi.....	p.90
Nugua: main spirit and costume.....	p.90
Nugua: healing powers.....	p.92
Nugua and aiding spirits.....	p.92
Nugua: divination.....	p.93
Nugua: Music.....	p.94
Conclusion.....	p.95
Reference.....	p.97

I intend in my thesis to examine the shamanistic traits of the Chinese goddesses Xi wangmu and Nugua. I will base my research on the early mythological accounts of these two goddesses and in addition make use of iconography. I start from the earliest evidence of these two goddesses and end with the Han Dynasty. I will also present a historical background and early archeological findings in general to place shamanism in China. My methodology of choice is phenomenology of religion which is used to find the core points of shamanism. My theory is that Xi wangmu and Nugua are strongly rooted in the shamanistic tradition.

Organization of the Paper

This paper is divided into four parts. In the first part I will start with giving definitions of a few key words, then continue on to describe pre-existing scholarship on the topic of Chinese shamanism. This will be followed by an introduction of scholars who has written about shamanism in general. These scholars I will use in defining what shamanism is. I will continue with a presentation of phenomenology of religion, and then discuss the use of ethnological facts in regards to shamanism in past cultures. After which I will give a general introduction to shamanism and then deal with each element in a more detailed form. This again is followed by a general description of how to determine early religious symbols. In the second part I will give an introduction of the two goddesses in question, so as to give a general idea about their features. The next segment will be a short presentation of Chinese texts that will appear in this paper and the problem of euhemerization. The third part starts with a presentation of early burial and shamanism in China. Then I will present the *wu* which is most likely the equivalent of the Chinese shaman. This will be followed by a presentation of ancestor worship and divination in China. I will then go on to present early cultures in China ending with the Han dynasty. Unfortunately all cultures can not be mentioned as China is a vast country that has housed a multitude of different cultures. In this segment the *wu*, divination, ancestor worship, shamanistic symbols, and so on will be presented in greater depth.

I will in general use the pinyin system of transcription, but the Wade-Giles system will be present in some quotations and names of scholars.

This segment will also contain the early appearances of Nugua and Xi wangmu. The fourth part will deal in depth with Xi wangmu and Nugua. First early texts that make mention of these goddesses are presented. I will then give an analysis of the shamanistic traits of Xi wangmu and Nugua based on the texts and iconography.

Definitions

Shaman: The word shaman is derived from the Tungusic term šaman. The shaman performs religious ceremonies. The shaman is someone who is thought to be capable to see what others can not, the spirits and gods of the cosmos. The type of rites practiced and the cosmological understanding are the basis for the definition of shamanism.

Soul: The word soul can be interchanged with 'spirit'. The soul is believed to be a sort of disembodied energy. This energy makes up the emotional nature or sense of identity that an individual, animal, or an object has. The soul's existence is not threatened by the physical destruction of the entity it inhabits. On some occasions the soul is thought to leave its object and return. Especially when the term spirit is used it can also denote an energy that is not necessarily connected to a previous corporeal form. Usually in these cases the spirit is seen as something divine.

Animism: The word 'anima' comes from Greek and means 'soul'. Animism is a notion that all things have a soul. Edward Tylor described animism as a doctrine of spiritual beings (Tylor, 1958, p.1). Man, animals, plants, mountains and so on is seen to possess a spirit.

Phenomenology of religion: One approach to the study of religion is the phenomenology of religion. Phenomenology of religion searches for cross-cultural religious expressions. In phenomenology of religion emphasis is put on what is perceived by senses in contrast to what is the actual reality (Morris, 1998, p.176). Mircea Eliade and Åke Hultkrantz are the most famous scholars of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. Lee Irwin is a current scholar that makes use of phenomenology of religion in his research.

Pre-existing Scholarship

Scholarly approaches to the study of early Chinese shamanism written in English are not numerous as far as I can tell, but there seems to be a growing interest on the topic. Sarah Milledge Nelson published recently a very interesting book about shamanism and the making of states in East Asia entitled “Shamanism and the origin of states” (2008). She puts a focus on the shaman as a community leader. Michael Loewe has written a book about the religious beliefs of the Han state called “Faith, myth and reason in Han China” (2005) and deals with shamanism in several chapters. Anne Birrell has written at length about Chinese mythology and translated many early Chinese texts such as “Chinese mythology” (1993) and “The Classic of Mountains and the Sea” (1999). There has long been an understanding of the state of Chu as deeply rooted in shamanistic beliefs and several scholars have written on this subject for instance in the book “Defining Chu” (1999). Suzanne E. Cahill has written the book “Transcendence and divine passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China” (1993). As the title suggests this is after the time period I am interested in, but she also looks at the origin of Xi wangmu. Lee Irwin has written a comparative study on goddesses in China entitled “Divinity and salvation: the great goddesses of China” (1990). Both Nüwa and Xi wangmu are a part of this. In addition to this come books that deal with early Chinese religion and history in more general terms, and texts on early art. To mention a few; “The search for ancient China” (DeBaine-Francfort, 1998), “China in the early bronze age” (Thorp, 2006), “The Chinese Neolithic” (Liu, 2007), “Art in China” (Clunas, 1997) and so on. Regarding Asian shamanism Sidky published the book “Haunted by the Archaic shaman: Himalayan *Jhākris* and the discourse on shamanism” (2008).

Scholars on the Topic of Shamanism

S. Shirokogoroff (1887-1939) was a Russian ethnographer who did studies on the Tungus in Siberia in the early twentieth century. He published the books “General theory of shamanism among the Tungus” (1924), “What is shamanism?” (1924), and “Psycomental complex of the Tungus” (1935). Sidky makes use of Shirokogoroff in his work (Sidky, 2008).

M. Eliade (1907-1986) was a Romanian scholar of religion. His theories on shamanism have greatly influenced the field and created paradigms. Eliade presented in his book “Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy” what he understood as the common traits of shamanism.

Eliade is a highly debated scholar often criticized as an armchair savant. Not helped by his works which is written in an almost prosaic manner. A large part of the works of Eliade does not stand up to scientific standard. However according to Sidky in regards to shamanism is Eliade “still considered the foremost authority on the subject by many.” (Sidky, 2008, p.30). Eliade’s understanding of shamanism still holds high regards with some scholars of religious history. Such as Drury who bases much of his studies of shamanism on the work of Eliade on the same subject (Drury, 1989). Meredith B. McGuire refers to Eliade when she describes the religious experience of the shaman (McGuire, 1997, p.18). James also refers to Eliade in regards to the concept of the *axis mundi* (James, 1995, p.20). Birrell in her translation of *Shanhaijing* (1999) dedicates her work to the memory of Georges Dumézil and Mircea Eliade.

Å. Hultkrantz (1920-2006) was a Swedish professor of history of religions that focused on shamanism. His work belongs to the Phenomenology of religion and is similar to that of Eliade. Hultkrantz is however not as widely criticized as Eliade. Major uses Hultkrantz as basis when he discusses Chu shamanism (Major, 1999).

S.M. Nelson (1931-) is an archeologist and Professor at the University of Denver who writes on the topic of shamanism in East Asia. Nelson’s main critique of Eliade is that he did not recognize the shaman as community leader. She argues that by the time ethnological facts were collected shamans especially in Siberia had lost their former role as leaders of their group (Nelson, 2008, p.52-53).

A. Kehoe (1934-) is an anthropologist that has worked mainly with Native American history. She is strongly critical of Eliade and to a lesser extent Hultkrantz. Her main point of critique seems to be Eliade’s and Hultkrantz’s “repressed romantic fantasies”. Under which the creation of the noble savage with “deep spirituality” is to be found (Kehoe, 1997, p.388). Also the fact that Eliade considered shamanism to be from the Paleolithic period and thus current shamanism is an unchanged continuation from that time (Kehoe, 1997, p.378). Further more that their definition of shamanism is not suitable for certain groups in America below the subarctic region.

H. Sidky (1956-) is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Miami University. In his book “Haunted by the Archaic shaman: Himalayan *Jhākris* and the discourse on shamanism” (2008) he presents his studies on the Nepalese shamans (*Jhākris*). Kehoe declares

that his work is “an important, significant contribution to anthropology and comparative religions. Combining firsthand ethnography with in-depth scholarly discussion of shamanism” (Kehoe in Sidky, 2008). Sidky compares his conclusions with the work of S. Shirokogoroff.

Use of Methodology: the Phenomenology of Religion

Within the phenomenology of religion the goal is to study religious phenomenon as they are, and explain their meaning and intention. Phenomenology of religion is a comparative study. Similar phenomena are collected from all over the world or specific regions, and then the scholar attempts to decipher the deeper meaning of the phenomena. The idea being that the essence of the individual phenomenon is best understood in a universal structure. They believe that the true intent of the religious phenomenon becomes blurred when too much focus is put on the historical, sociological or psychological aspect.

I have chosen to use phenomenology of religions as my methodology. I am not denying that religion has a social function or that the historical context is unimportant. However my use of phenomenology of religion is due to my search of the essence of shamanism, and how one can retrace this essence in later mythology. Phenomenology of religion searches for cross-cultural religious expressions and shamanism is undoubtedly a cross-cultural phenomenon. I would argue that shamanism appeared in China in a time period of which it would be difficult to place it in a historical context, as our knowledge of the era is limited. Therefore I feel that phenomenology of religion is a logical approach to the problem. I will use the works of the scholars mentioned above to find the essence of shamanism. Eliade is no longer in much use due to the flaws in his work. I have chosen to use him here because if you strip the nonsense away and simply look at the core points of shamanism as he described them they are still usable. Indeed as far as I can tell neither Kehoe nor Sidky deviates from Eliade's and Hultkrantz's core points on shamanism, at least not as I have used the material here. This is despite the fact that both of them are very critical to Eliade and to a lesser degree Hultkrantz.

Phenomenology of religion has received some criticism. Gilhus states that one of the greatest flaws in the phenomenology of religion is that too much focus is put on the phenomenon ‘religion’, and as such the culture surrounding the religion is not given enough prominence (Gilhus, 1984, p.32). Morris stresses that to accept religion only on its own terms is to reject that it has any ideological function (Morris, 1998, p.177). I agree with this, and if I was to do a study of modern Chinese religion I would not make use of phenomenology of

religion. However, as stated before, when dealing with shamanism I find phenomenology of religion to be the best approach.

The Use of Ethnological facts

The basis of the definition of shamanism is studies made in Siberia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this area several studies were done on hunting civilizations. The findings of these studies became generalized and applied to other regions and long past cultures. Eliade claimed that the Central and North Asia regions showed the “most complete manifestation” of shamanism (Eliade, 1974, p.6). He stated that current ethnological facts (“current” in this situation being the early years of his life) could be used in the study of shamanism from ancient times. Eliade argued that as hunting civilizations shares the same type of economy they are probable to share some of the same ideology. Based on this he believed there was grounds to compare prehistoric cultures with ethnological facts (Eliade, 1979, p.15). “The importance of an archaic religious idea is likewise confirmed by its ability to survive into later periods.” (Eliade, 1979, p.16). So Eliade considered shamanism to be a world wide phenomenon and because of this he argued that it must have had its roots in the Paleolithic period, possibly being the first religion of all humanity. Sidky is strongly opposed to Eliade’s idea about shamanism being a very old tradition that reached back to Paleolithic times. He bases his opinion on Shirokogoroff who claimed that Tungus shamanism was a recent phenomenon that could not be traced further back than the medieval period. Shirokogoroff argued that Tungus shamanism was heavily influenced by Buddhism and so would have appeared after Buddhism (Sidky, 2008, p.13). However E.J. Lindgren who also did ethnographic studies on the Tungus culture in the same time period stated “Their traditional religion, shamanism, has hitherto held its own against Buddhist influences in the surrounding areas” (Lindgren, 1939). According to Sidky and Kehoe already by the time Western scholars started their anthropological studies of Siberian shamanism social and religious change had begun (Sidky, 2008, p.3-5) (Kehoe, 1997). Thus they conclude that it can not tell us anything about shamanism in earlier periods. Kehoe is further critical about Eliade’s belief that current shamanism was an unchanged continuation. She considers this to be a European view that only Western cultures experiences changes, while “primitive” cultures are stagnant (Kehoe, 1997, p.378). Of course change occurs in societies regardless of it being a hunting or a farming civilization. But is it an impossible concept that certain

cultures can have a religious continuation for several centuries? The first problem I see here is that certain scholars consider a continuation in religion as a bad thing while change is a positive thing. I find this hard to accept. I find religious change to be neither a positive nor a negative occurrence. Further more I find the supposed great changes in especially Middle Eastern religion to be exaggerated. Large parts of the Bible for instance have roots in Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology. The greatest change is the movement from several gods to one god. Change in religion in Europe was a result of an intentional desire to convert other people which often was done by force and violence. Would the Norse religion have continued into our time period if not for the active spread of Christianity, which indeed was enforced? I believe so. Further more in Norway where Christianity has been the main religion for centuries no great changes has occurred other then a shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. Even though the country has gone from having among the world's lowest living standards to the highest the institution of the church has changed very little. Even in such an exceptionally rapidly changing society the structure of the ritual performance of the religion has been mainly kept intact, but the content has changed to some degree. For instance the role of the priest can now be performed by a woman, which would have been impossible 500 years ago. Further more one could argue that Christianity is in decline in Norway, due to a large reduction in the amount of people who regularly partake in the religious ceremonies. Nonetheless the churches are full during important holidays like Christmas. Also most Norwegians consider themselves to be Christians and will perform rites of passage like baptism, confirmation, marriage and funeral in the church. Even though there exist secular alternatives. So the fact that the Church is not greatly visited on an average Sunday has not affected the religion. Thus I do not find it unlikely that the role of the shaman can be a more constant institution over centuries in areas that do not experience strong influence from other religions. Such it has been with the role of the priest in Norway.

Sidky compares his collection of ethnological facts from Nepal with the works of Sergei Shirokogoroff. In general Sidky's findings are very similar to the findings of Shirokogoroff (Sidky, 2008, p.13). Sidky states "Shirokogoroff diagnostic attributes certainly closely fit the Nepalese ethnographic setting" (Sidky, 2008, p.209). He also states "As a widespread, dynamic and flourishing tradition, Nepalese shamanism can provide many insights into the broader picture of Asiatic shamanism as well as shamanism in general" (Sidky, 2008, p.xiv). What is interesting here is that Sidky first claims that shamanism in Siberia was in decline, and then goes on to claim that the findings of Shirokogoroff are strikingly similar to his findings in Nepal (Sidky, 2008, p.13). Yet approximately 80 years has

past between the declining Siberian shamanistic culture and the current “flourishing” shamanistic culture in Nepal. In addition Nepal is an agrarian culture not a nomadic hunting culture like the Tungus.

The question then becomes can studies on shamanism in Siberia tell us anything about older cultures? I believe they can, though I would not go as far as the Paleolithic period. Both the earlier studies in Siberia and Sidky’s recent study from Nepal have core points that are very similar to archeological findings in China. To be able to say anything about an extinct culture of which nothing but artifacts is left archeologists must make use of analogy. They use behavior in the present to explain behavior in the past. One must extrapolate back to ancient cultures. Without the use of analogy one can say nothing about past cultures that do not have written texts. Therefore I will base my analysis on the core points of shamanism and make analogies to the Chinese past.

Shamanism

To define shamanism is no easy task. There exists controversy as to what shamanism is and how it originated, and in what geographical area it is found. A few scholars even operate with the concept of *shamanisms*. They usually place shamanism in a wide geographical area. On the other side a minority of scholars are of the opinion that shamanism is an academic illusion. Nonetheless as I see it cross-cultural similarities do exist. As far as I can tell the scholars that believe that shamanism is a viable concept make up the large majority. However what geographical area that the notion of shamanism can be used within is highly debated. Some believe it is only usable in Siberia and the arctic regions, others again widen the area to parts of Asia or Asia in general, others see it as a Eurasian concept, while others again use shamanism on a world wide basis. I believe that one can with a degree of certainty talk of Eurasian shamanism. I do not have extensive enough knowledge about the topic to place shamanism outside this region, however it might be possible.

According to Hultkrantz is the essence of shamanism a series of symbols which express it. Some symbols of shamanism have their root in separate historical developments and are less essential. However other symbols reoccur cross-culturally and as such make up the essence of shamanism (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.11). I will here give a short presentation of the core findings of shamanism. After which each element will be presented more extensively.

First of all shamanism requires belief in souls and a divide into different realms of existence. The shaman is an individual whose soul can pass from one cosmic region to another and by doing so can communicate with the spirits. Shirokogoroff (1935) defined the shaman as someone who did the following “mastered spirits, who at their will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits in their own interests, particularly helping other people, who suffer from spirits” (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.271).

To do this requires an ecstatic trance as a means to travel to the realm of the spirits. The world consists of the three cosmic zones which are connected through a central axis. The central axis is a breach between the different cosmic regions and it is through this opening that the shaman’s soul travels to the spirit world. The central axis can take the shape of a tree, a mountain, a ziggurat, a tent pole and so. But the mountain and the tree are the most common. Further more the shaman requires the help of the aiding spirits and the main spirit that resides within the shaman. Most often these spirits take on animal form, even if they are ancestral spirits. Thus shamanistic beliefs have strong animal symbolism. According to Drury is shamanism simply applied animism or animism in practice. As all of nature possess spirits that are interconnected with each other an intermediary is necessary to communicate with the different levels of the cosmos (Drury, 1989, p.5). Shirokogoroff stated “a special system of animism lies at the basis of shamanism” (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.274). Nelson agrees to some degree as she states “Animism may underlie some shamanistic beliefs, such as the belief in spirits of mountains and rivers, wind, and rain” (Nelson, 2008, p.63).

The shaman is a socially recognized part-time ritual intercessor, a healer, problem solver, and interpreter of the world, whose calling is involuntary and involves a transformative initiatory crisis. His repertoire consists of dramatic public performances involving drumming, singing, and dancing in which he is the musicant. He has the ability to access ASC at will (without drugs) and enters into a distinctive mode of interaction with paranormal beings of various classes. The embodiment (adhesion) of spirits does not result in the replacement of the shaman’s consciousness. He has mastery over spirit helpers and uses that power for the benefit of clients. The shaman has distinctive specialized paraphernalia: the drum, costume, headdress, metal bells, and beads. Finally, he commands a body of specialized knowledge transmitted orally from teacher to pupil according to tradition. (Sidky, 2008, p.209). (ASC: altered state of consciousness)

The shaman has a special costume to draw the attention of the spirits and the spectators. Music is another essential feature of shamanism. It is a rhythmic way to call up the spirits, so the spirits can help the shaman on his way to the spirit realm. Drums tend to be the instrument of choice, but other musical instruments can also do the job. Further more the shaman has another way to connect with the spirits through the art of divination. Divination is useful

when one is seeking information from the spirit world. Finally the shaman can with the help of the spirits become a healer.

That ethnographic Finn-Ugric and Siberian Shamanism and American Subarctic shamanism are historically related seems indubitable. They share a suite of elements including use of the single-headed hand-held drum, icons of spirits hung from the shaman's costume (so that they jingle and clang as the shaman dances) and in the tent, the technique of inducing trance by increasing the rapidity of the drumbeats while performing dancing movements that often become frenzied, and preparing for the seance by fasting and, immediately prior to the drumming-dancing stage, ingesting a mind-altering substance-mushrooms, tobacco, vodka. Eurasians shamans' souls leave their bodies, and the tent, during the trance and journey to alternative realms in the multi-layered cosmos, where they meet and actively seek to ally with (struggle with or propitiate) spirits who can assist in the shaman's task of healing and divining. Eurasian shamans do not usually transform into animals, they may fly as a bird, their long fringes serving as feathered wings and/or assisted by a flying spirit, or tunnel or swim, but they seem to be more or less ambiguously anthropomorphic in their soul travels. (Kehoe, 1997, p.380-381).

Shamanism as a Configuration of Religion

Eliade stated that shamanism is found to coexist with other religious expressions (Eliade, 1974, p.5). Hultkrantz agreed with this and stated that shamanism is no religion, but a religious configuration (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.11). According to Eliade can shamanism be seen as the mystic element of several different religions, and as such the shaman is not necessary in all religious activity of that group. The shaman is only required for some of the religious ritual practices (Eliade, 1974, p.8). However the shaman has several tasks connected with his or her vocation.

The Core Points of Shamanism

The Axis Mundi and the Cosmology of the Shaman

Shamanism requires a certain cosmology that makes the contact between the spirits and the shaman possible. The world is usually divided into three cosmic zones. The three levels are made up of sky, earth and underworld which are connected through a central axis. The central axis is like an opening between the different planes. It is through this opening that the shaman travels to the spirit world. The shaman has the knowledge of how to pass from one cosmic region to another (Eliade, 1974, p.259). Hultkrantz was of the same opinion, however he stated that not all shamans have an underworld to go to. Although the typical divide are our world, the upper world and the lower world (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.13). According to Sidky the Nepalese shamans (Jhākris) operates with the same type of cosmos.

To carry out their supernatural mandate to aid people against harmful forces, *Jhākris* are compelled to navigate the heavens, earth, and the realms of the underworld. This is a multitiered universe, which is analogous to the Siberian shaman's cosmos, consisting of an upper, middle, and lower worlds, with each level further subdivided into additional planes that extend spatially in four cardinal directions. (Sidky, 2008, p.116)

The spirit travel is often understood as a magical flight and as such bird symbolism tends to be associated with shamanistic beliefs. Eliade stressed the importance of the “ascensional symbolism” when it comes to birds (Eliade, 1974, p.177). Kehoe mentioned that the shaman may fly as a bird or be assisted by flying spirits (Kehoe, 1997, p.381).

The central axis is often seen as the centre of the world and is also called an *axis mundi*. Further more this axis mundi frequently takes on the form of a mountain, a tree, a ziggurat, a tent pole and so on (Eliade, 1974, p.264-265). Sidky also states that the axis mundi is a link between the upper, middle, and lower worlds. Often represented by a mountain or a cosmic tree. Interestingly enough when discussing the cosmos of the Nepalese shaman he refers to Eliade's concept of the three realms and axis mundi. He completely dismisses the works of Eliade yet points to his work (Sidky, 2008, p.117). On occasion the symbolism of World Tree and the Central Mountain can coincide, and as such complement each other (Eliade, 1974, p.269). In the case of a World Tree the thought is that the branches touch the sky and the root reach down to the underworld. As Eliade perceived it the World Tree was a

symbol of the eternal cosmic regeneration. Thus the tree can also be seen as a symbol of fertility, life and immortality (Eliade, 1974, p.270-271).

The Ecstatic Trance and use of Music

When Eliade described shamanism in its essence he used the term “technique of ecstasy” (Eliade, 1974, p.4). Usually the terms ecstasy or trance are used to describe the phenomenon, but some, like Sidky, prefer the term “altered state of consciousness” (ASC) (Sidky, 2008, p.89). I will however use the first mentioned terms. The ecstatic trance is a vehicle the shaman uses to travel to the realm of the spirits and by being there obtains vital information for his or hers people (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.19). Nelson states that the shaman’s soul must communicate with the spirits and this is done through trance (Nelson, 2008, p.58).

Shirokogoroff asserted that “extasy usually turns into a half-delirious hysterical condition” (Shirokogoroff , 1935, p.274). The ecstatic trance is a sort of dance that can contain shuddering, violent shaking, fainting, heavy breathing, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, a glassy stare, and insensitivity to pain, cold and heat. The onlookers will get a sensation of the shaman being in an altered stage of consciousness. During the ecstatic trance it is believed that the soul of the shaman leaves his or her body. When the soul has left the body it either ascends to the sky or descends to the underworld. The ecstatic trance is a part of a ceremony which Nelson calls a séance. “The activities of séance include music, dancing, trancing, and audience involvement, as well magic and special effects.” (Nelson, 2008, p.67). Sidky states “The *Jhākri* beckons spirits and divinities from all quarters by drumming, singing songs, dancing, and reciting mantras. He dramatically embodies these supernatural beings in order to remedy problems” (Sidky, 2008, p.163). He further states that “Shirokogoroff’s observations regarding the ASC-inducing methods of the Tungus shamans fit the Nepalese case perfectly” (Sidky, 2008, p.90).

In almost all forms of shamanic performances, when the ecstasy of the shaman and the excitation of the audience are needed...several technical methods for bringing up a necessary psychic condition of the shaman and audience are used. These are rhythmic effects, music of the performance, particularly rhythmic movements, dancing, drumming and production of various noises with the costume, also singing and reciting, and the contents of the texts of the performance, i.e., descriptions in words of the relations between the shaman and the spirits, the people and the spirits. (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.325).

A typical feature of shamanism is the use of music as a means to help the spirit travel. It is a rhythmic way to call up the spirits. Drums are the most typical musical instruments. In

addition sometimes the shaman has bells or other noisy objects sewn on the costume. Rattles can also be used. This is agreed upon by Eliade, Hultkrantz, Sidky, Kehoe and Nelson.

We will get back to the other elements of the ceremony later. Sometimes the shaman ingests narcotics or alcohol to help with the trance as mentioned by Kehoe. This is usually not the case in Nepal and we have no evidence of this from China either.

The Shaman and Healing Powers

The very spirit travel might also be used when trying to heal someone from sickness. Therefore there exists a difference between a medicine man and a healing shaman (Eliade, 1974, p.5). Nelson states that one important aspect of the shaman is the role as the healer, which is done with the help of the spirits (Nelson, 2008, p.59). Sidky claims that “He has mastery over spirit helpers and uses that power for the benefit of clients.” (Sidky, 2008, p.209). Kehoe states that the shaman has spirits who can assist in the task of healing (Kehoe, 1997, p.381). Hultkrantz claimed that when concerning the shaman’s role as a doctor there exist two main theories of disease. Soul loss and Intrusion. Soul loss is when the patient’s soul has disappeared, either due to an evil spirit stealing it or the soul has become lost somehow. Then the shaman must travel to the spirit world and try to retrieve the soul. Intrusion is when the patient has been invaded by something. According to Shirokogoroff a part of the shaman’s task is “the expulsion of the spirits” (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.271). The shaman solves this problem by summoning the aiding spirits to help extract whatever is invading the patient (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.16).

The Aiding Spirits and the Main Spirit of the Shaman

Eliade stated that all shamans have helping and teaching spirits (Eliade, 1974, p.88-89). Hultkrantz was clearly of the same opinion as he declared “The ecstatic who attains the other world without the help of spirits is certainly no shaman” (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.19). The aiding spirits brings with them the supernatural power that the shaman requires to make contact with the other world. More often than not are the familiar spirits of the shaman in animal form. One can also find other type of spirits, such as wood spirits, earth spirits, ancestral spirits and fire spirits. For instance the shaman is considered to be a master of fire. Like the Nepalese shamans who eat burning wicks and dance on hot coals as a demonstration of power (Sidky,

2008, p.103). Further more the shaman can incarnate the spirit of fire. Some mythology tells stories of shamans that emitted fire from their bodies during séances (Eliade, 1974, p.474). Firewalking is a cross-cultural phenomenon that is also found in cultures without shamanism.

When it comes to the animal familiars they play a vital role in preparing the shamanic séance. According to Eliade is the shamanic séance impossible without the familiar animals. Hultkrantz did not limit the aiding spirits that are necessary for the trance to animals only. However he stated that the majority of such spirits are animals (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.19). The animals or other aiding spirits help the shaman on the journey to the spirit realm. The shaman will often imitate the animals in question through movements and sound before entering into trance. When imitating the animals the shaman sometimes make use of props, for instance an animal mask or elaborate headgear. The shaman is taking possession of her friendly animal spirits, often using a secret language of the animals. The secret animal language that the shaman has to learn is based on the actual sounds that the animals in question make. Eliade claimed that this symbolizes the death of the human shaman, and the transformation into an animal (Eliade, 1974, p.88-89). According to sidky the shamans in Nepal have animal spirits and the ability to “transform” into animals. In regards to animal transformation and incarnate of spirits the most common animals are tigers, birds, and insects. The shaman has a special relationship to the wild animals. Other important spirits in Nepal are a therianthrope forest god, the Lord of the Beasts and a primordial shaman (sidky, 2008, p.30).

The shaman in his travels to the realm of the spirits encounter there several different types of spirits. A small number of the spirits he or she comes in contact with become familiars to the shaman. The group of familiars can be divided in two, on the one side there are spirits that the shaman has control over and that helps him in his missions, while on the other side there are spirits that are more powerful then the shaman and as such can protect and teach the shaman. Great celestial sprits are also found, but these are rarely seen as the shaman’s familiar spirits (Eliade, 1974, p.88-89). The shaman does also run into other spirits and not all of them wish the shaman well. Sidky quotes a shaman (jhākris) he encountered “Evil and dangerous spirits of the wilderness that jhākris must fight and control” (sidky, 2008, p.30).

Hultkrantz stated that the spirit of the greatest significance is the one that “takes up his abode inside the shaman” (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.19). This is the main spirit that resides within the shaman and often this spirit is thought to be that of an ancestor or predecessor of the shaman. But still this ‘free-soul’ of the shaman regularly takes on an animal form. This I would argue show the merging of animism and ancestor worship.

When it comes to worship of the aiding spirits the greatest difference is found in the group of protecting and teaching spirits. The familiar spirits of the shaman are seldom the object of veneration. The more powerful spirits on the other hand are worshiped. However should one of the spirits in the shamans entourage feel offended, then the shaman too will suffer.

The Costume of the Shaman

Eliade concluded that all shamans wear a special costume that makes up a religious hierophany (Eliade, 1974, p.145). The outfit differs from the profane space that surround the shaman and it contains spiritual forces. The costume is a necessity for the travel into the spirit world (Eliade, 1974, p.147). Shirokogoroff stated “Various paraphernalia are found used by shamans during the performances. It is supposed that without these paraphernalia shamanizing is impossible, and therefore the persons who have no such paraphernalia cannot function as shamans” (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.272). Nelson states that the costume of the shaman is intended to get the attention of the spirits and the humans (Nelson, 2008, p.69). Therefore the costume can be both spectacular and noisy. The costume can be made up of animal skins and furs, bird feathers, colorful clothing and so on (Eliade, 1974, p.259). Most often the costume includes elaborate headgear such as antlers or hats with animal symbols. Sidky states that the Nepalese shaman (Jhākri) has a distinct costume that is considered to have magical properties. The costume consists of a white long-sleeved robe with a cloth belt and headgear (he mentions three types), beads and necklaces, and brass bells. One of the types of headgears is a crown, another made of peacock feathers, and, a headband with porcupine quills over which a long cotton turban is tied with two ends hanging in the back. He further states that Eliade would have interpreted the headgear made of feathers as an indication of the magical flight, while Sidky claims that Nepalese shamans only consider them as decorative ornaments of the gods (Sidky, 2008, p.86-88).

Sometimes the magical costume of the shaman comprises a mask. The mask is then a symbol of a mythical personage. Such as an ancestor, an animal or a deity (Eliade, 1974, p.167-168). Hultkrantz suggested that the costume of the shaman represents an aiding spirit or the animal form of the main spirit within the shaman (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.16). Nelson agrees with this to some degree as she states the costume can indicate the animal spirit helpers (Nelson, 2008, p.70).

Shamanism and Divination

Divination is an ancient technique that has been practiced far and wide. The goal of divination is to foretell the future or the wishes of ancestors or other spirits. Divination can be practiced without the presence of shamanism.

Shirokogoroff considered divination to be an essential part of the shaman's task (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.315). Eliade believed that the tradition of divination was especially connected with shamanism. "Divination itself is a technique particularly adapted to actualizing the spiritual realities that are the basis of shamanism or to facilitating contact with them." (Eliade, 1974, p.165). Hultkrantz felt that Eliade did not put enough emphasis on the divination aspect of shamanism (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.20). Both Eliade and Hultkrantz dealt mainly with scapulimancy in their work. Scapulimancy is performed by exposing the shoulder blade of an animal to a heat source that result in cracks. These cracks are then interpreted. The cracks are supposedly a message from the spirit world (Fairbank, 2002, p.34). The same is also done to tortoise shell. One should keep in mind that often the word "scapulimancy" is wrongly used to cover divination with tortoise shells. Shirokogoroff claimed that scapulimancy was the typical form of divination in China and Mongolia. Early in the twentieth century groups in Mongolia used the shoulder bone of a sheep or a ram for divination (Shirokogoroff, 1935, p.315) (Eliade, 1974, p.164). According to Field is the practice still ongoing in Mongolia today (Field, 2008, p.26).

However in Nepal divination is not performed this way. One form of divination is rice divination where rice is placed upon the drum used by the shaman and then the drum is gently thumped from below so the rice align in patterns. Then the pattern is interpreted. Sidky also states that the Nepalese shaman uses divination prior to a healing ceremony. Often the internal organs of sacrificial animals, such as the spleen of a goat or the liver of a chicken are used to foretell what ails the patient in question (Sidky, 2008, p.165).

Since my focus is China I will only deal with bone or tortoise shell divination. According to Ching the Chinese shaman asked a question on behalf of someone then the diviner reads the cracks made by a hot point. Then the diviner relays this information of the future so the seeker can take appropriate action. According to Ching, the diviner possesses some special bond with the spirits, who help with the undertaking of deciphering the cracks (Ching, 1993, p.26). I guess this would be a good way to avoid blame if your divination did not turn out as foretold. The spirits could have misled you due to discontent.

Ancestor Worship

I will consider ancestor worship as religion or as an element of religion. It goes beyond paying homage to those who once lived. Ancestor veneration is connected to ideas about an after-life and that the dead are not completely gone. Perhaps it is a comfort that when we die, we do not entirely disappear from our family and familiar surroundings. Also we might have some new powers. Further more we will leave a mark, our names will not be forgotten, because will we be remembered through the veneration of our family. Ancestral worship is not an uncommon cultural phenomenon, it has been found all over the world.

I would argue that there is a very close connection between animism and ancestor worship. The soul of the deceased is thought not to perish with the body. Instead the soul continues on in the spirit world, where it could possibly help the living if given enough attention and gifts.

Ancestor spirits can also play a role in the life of a future shaman. Eliade pointed out that more often than not it is the ancestors of the upcoming shaman that makes contact and informs of the new vocation he or she is to embrace. Therefore it can be argued that the manner, in which the shaman receives her vocation, can be connected to ancestor cults (Eliade, 1974, p.25). Sidky mentions that when a Nepalese shaman is approached by an individual that has experienced to be “seized” by spirits. The shaman must then determine whether or not this individual has been contacted by a god or ancestral spirit to take on the calling of the role as shaman or has suffered an attack by evil spirits. A tool to help unravel this question is rice divination (Sidky, 2008, p.64).

How to Look For Signs of Religion

Religion is often stated to be the fundamental difference between us and other living creatures. Humanity seems to have an innate desire for something greater, something that underlies the cosmos. Eliade expressed the view that what truly differentiates humans from animals is the instinct for transcendence (Eliade, 1981, p.1). Archeologists, historians and paleontologist have long pondered how religion came about. When did man become a religious creature and what are the earliest signs of religion? Some scholars see early art work as the first signs of religious belief, and that many of such objects are lost to us as they could have been made of perishable materials. Art and decoration are connected with

symbolism, and are therefore seen as result of religious behavior (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.833). Eliade perceived art as a magical transcendence of the object (Eliade, 1981, p.1). Making it more than mere decoration. For instance Jones et.al. state that some of the earliest archaeological evidence of religion consists of sculptured images of female figures excavated in hundreds of the Upper Paleolithic sites throughout Europe and northern Asia (Jones et.al., 2005, p.3583). These figurines are usually called mother goddesses. However, it must be stated that not all scholars subscribe to this belief, as they consider art as a result of humans esthetic desires. However it seems to me that what all agree on is the religious significance of burial. At the same time burial is often connected with art as we shall see in the next segment.

The Burial: First Indication of Religion

Burials with pottery and jewelry are by most scholars seen as the first indications of religion, as it can be interpreted as a belief in an afterlife. The burial indicates an emotional bond between the tribe and the deceased. Further more the objects left with the corps indicate a belief in the afterlife or a final travel (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.833). This is a logical conclusion since a dead person would have no need for jewelry and other objects. Moreover in a time when making these things would be quite an effort and departing with these objects a great loss shows the enormous desire to “send off” the deceased with gifts for the afterlife. Further more that early graves have a tendency to face east, which Eliade believes is a desire to connect the soul with the course of the sun. The sun rises every morning and as such can symbolize rebirth (Eliade, 1979, p.10-11).

Why do we bury our dead? As I see it intentional burial says something about the people who carry out the burial. A minimum requirement in dealing with a dead body is to put a distance between your living space and the corps. A dead body will attract scavengers and parasites and decomposition gives of a distinct smell. So if you constantly move around, and a tribe member suddenly falls down dead, you can just keep on walking. If the tribe on the other hand lives on a regular spot you have a problem. The body needs to be moved. Then the tribe can drag it outside the habitat, and just leave it there. But humans do not do this, we burn it, bury it or do something else with it. Now I just referred to the dead tribe member as “it”, but the deceased was a member of that group. Here enters the wide scale of human emotions. The dead still carry significance to us. So for instance we bury to keep the dead close to us. We

care for the deceased. Even tribes who move around take care of their dead. There are a few examples of cultures that leave the deceased out in the open for scavenges to eat. Eliade pointed out that in Tibet and Iran there were once custom to do so. When the bones were picked clean they would be retreated and venerated (Eliade, 1974, p.163). This has also been the tradition in certain tribes in North America. We seem unwilling to just walk away from the deceased.

Introduction to Nugua

Nugua (Nü-wa or Nü Kua) is mythological female figure in Chinese history. She is portrayed as half snake and half woman. Claims have been made that she is on some occasions portrayed as half dragon. I have found little support for this. She is however often associated with dragons. Ching states that Nugua has a human head on top of a snake's body, while Hawkes claims only the legs are replaced by a serpent's tail (Ching, 1993, p.26) (Hawkes, 1959, p.51). As far as I can tell she is in the early years portrayed as a snake with a female head, however as time passes she is presented with an upper body as well. As both the snake and the dragon have been connected with the element of water in China, she is associated with rain, storm, clouds and water in general. This I feel also indicates that she is a weather controller. According to Irwin is Nugua a representation of all female water spirits (Irwin, 1990, p.55).

All higher primates show a physiological reaction of fear when encountering a snake (Wang and Whitfield, 1999, p.74). Nonetheless snakes are common motifs in mythology from all over the world. The oldest ritual site found as of yet is in a cave in the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana. Here a large rock was discovered that had been shaped like a python. The site has been dated to 70 000 BC and is thus approximately from the same time period as humans started the migration from Africa (Vogt, 2006). This shows the very early use of snake symbolism. More recent examples are the two Greek deities Medusa and Asclepius. She has serpent hair and he has a snake-entwined staff. This staff is still an icon of medicine today. In Norse mythology one finds the Midgardsorm which is a giant snake that surrounds the world.

Birrell states that Nugua was originally seen as an independent major cosmogonic goddess (Birrell, 1993, p. 164). Nugua has been portrayed as savior of the world when certain doom was waiting. She has also been designated the creator of men, as she puts yellow earth together. Not unlike the Sumerian goddess Nammu who supposedly created men from clay (Motz, 1997, p.92). Mud, earth, and sand are often the basis of the creation of man in myths. Further more Nugua has been described as the first reigning queen. She is also known to go through metamorphosis. This is possibly a result of her link to the snake and its shedding of skin. From the Han dynasty onwards she is frequently depicted with a male counterpart Fuxi. He too is part snake and their tails are usually intertwined in depictions.

The Translation of the Name Nugua

The first part of the name, *nu*, stems from the word for woman or girl. Birrell calls *nu* a stopgap name used as a prefix in names of goddesses and mythical females (Birrell, 1993, p. 307). The second part, *gua*, denotes a snail-like creature. This graph also contains the signifier for woman, however if this signifier is removed, we are left with a graph that means ‘to cut meat away from the bones’ (Birrell, 1999, p. 223). To perform scapulimancy you first need to clean the bones for meat. Which might indicate that the name refers to a shaman, as an important task of the shaman is divination. In China divination was done by the art of scapulimancy. Still the female signifier is present which leads us to the snail-like creature. Most adult snails have coiled shells, while slugs (who also are snails) have no shells. Snails exist in water and on land. Those on land glide along the surface they are moving on. Nugua is often presented as half snake and half human. I feel snakes and snails look somewhat alike. Their bodies are narrow and elongated with a surface that seems shiny or slimy. The greatest difference in appearance is the shell of some of the snails, these shells are usually coiled in style. Which again remind me of a coiled up serpent. Keeping in mind that *gua* means snail-like, it could be an indication of her animal side. Why her name translates to ‘female snail-like creature’ and not ‘female snake creature’ is of course a puzzle.

The Directional Symbol of Nugua

According to Irwin have all Chinese divinities certain sacred geographical locations (Irwin, 1990, p.56). Major states Chinese cultures early on took an interest in directionality and assigned importance to it. The earliest evidence of the use of animal emblems for directions stems from 4000 BC. In northern Henan at a grave in Puyang the corps was flanked by shell mosaic of a dragon and a tiger. The dragon of the east and the tiger of the west seem to have appeared before the two other directions were given animal emblems. As in this grave there was no marking of south and north. Major also points to a Neolithic bone plaque inscribed with an eight-pointed shape that symbolizes the eight points of the compass (Major, 1999, p.125).

In Han iconography Nugua is frequently portrayed as holding a compass. Her compass is circular in shape and is divided into four quadrants. This is not a compass of the type that can be used for navigation at sea which was a later invention. However what she holds in her

hands is described as a compass due to its shape. Nevertheless it is possible that the Chinese early on used a magnetic mineral that aligns itself to Earth's magnetic field and thus worked as a compass. Irwin believes that the compass symbolizes the earth itself and the four directions, and as such social and cultural organization. She holds the world in her hands and can create stability and order out of the original chaos (Birrell, 1993, p.33) (Irwin, 1990, p.55). As we know the dragon is associated with the east. The serpent on the other side is the directional emblem of the north. But Major states that during the Shang Dynasty the snake was an emblem of celestial divinity and centrality, and the link between the snake and the north first occurred during the late Warring States and early Han period (Major, 1999, p.129). Nüwa is generally associated with the centre and so I believe must have had an earlier origin when snakes were still considered the emblem of the centre. I therefore also find it more logical that Nüwa indeed is half snake and not half dragon, as the dragon on a very early stage was connected with the east.

Introduction to Xi Wangmu

Xi wangmu (Hsi wangmu) or 'Queen Mother of the West' is a Chinese goddess that in the early years is described as half beast and half human. She has the fangs of a tiger and the tail of a leopard. Her hair is white and unkempt. She wears a crown made of jade and she resides on a mountain. Which mountain varies from text to text, but she is generally associated with the Kunlun Mountain or mountain range. Her land was thought to exist apart from the profane world, yet it was assumed possible to make ones way there (Cahill, 1993) (Birrell, 1993). She has usually been depicted with an entourage that varies from time to time. Among these are the most common ones a hare with a mortar and pestle, a nine-tailed fox, one three legged bird or three birds, and a toad. Others that may appear in depictions are one or more tigers, men with animal masks or heads, skinny long haired men with wings, dragons, and servants (Lullo, 2005, p.393) (James, 1995, p.20). They may appear in any combination, though the hare seems always to be present. Birrell and Irwin state that Xi wangmu originally was an avenging goddess of plague and calamity (Birrell, 1993, 173) (Irwin, 1990, p.58). However during the Han dynasty she was assumed to have the ability to provide immortality for man or at least longevity (Loewe, 2005, p.32). From funerary art it seems she was thought to guide the soul of the deceased heavenward (James, 1995, p.27). The Queen Mother of the West was the central figure of the first recorded millenarian movement in China in the year 3 BC (Ebrey, 2003, p.71). She was eventually coupled with a male partner and lost her animal

features. According to Despeux and Kohn is Xi wangmu the oldest Daoist deity (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, p.27).

The Translation of the Name Xi Wangmu

Paul R. Goldin claims the standard translation, Queen Mother of the West, to be misleading. Since she has never been presented as the mother of a ruler (Goldin, 2002, p.83). “Wangmu is a cultic term referring specifically to the powerful spirit of a deceased paternal grandmother. So Xi wangmu probably means “Spirit-Mother of the West”. *Erya* (c.300-200 BC), the oldest Chinese dictionary, defines her as “Deceased Paternal Grandmother of the West” (Goldin, 2002, p.85). So Wangmu refers to one’s deceased grandmother, in other words when she has become a spirit. Wang can also indicate “great” or “lordly”, so “great mother” might also be a possibility, thus indicating goddess (Goldin, 2002, p.83). Dubs stated that in popular usage she was called merely “the Mother” (Dubs, 1942, p.222). Cahill argues that the use of the word “mother” suggests a lineage function, as the ancestress of all humanity. This might indicate a previous connection with fertility cults. But, as mentioned earlier, the mother might refer to ancestress, and thus only be a part of the ancestor worship. They could perhaps also coincide. Ching points out that none of these early texts describe Xi wangmu as a fertility goddess, yet she thinks the archaeological findings say otherwise. However the texts do portrait her as linked to life and motherhood (Ching, 1993, p.25). Though her ability to save mankind seems to be a later invention, as she possibly started out as a goddess that controls evil forces.

According to Irwin she also goes by the name Jinmu or the Golden Mother. Sometimes extended to the Golden Mother of the Tortoise (Irwin, 1990, p.56). Irwin further suggests that the last mentioned name can be connected to turtle shell divination, what he sees as an early shamanistic practice (Irwin, 1990, p.57).

Even though Spirit Mother of the West might be a better translation of Xi wangmu, I will nonetheless make use of the standard translation of ‘Queen Mother of the West’.

The Directional Symbol of Xi Wangmu

The Queen Mother of the West, as her name clearly states, is connected to the west. The west is in China associated with the tiger and the color white. The tiger again is connected to death.

According to Wang and Whitfield is the tiger “the prototype of a man-eating animal in Chinese culture” (Wang and Whitfield, 1999, p.73).

In a grain bin in Çatal Hüyük an enthroned obese female with large breasts and a protruding abdomen was found. Corpulent female figurines have been found in deposits as old as forty thousand years continuing into the early Neolithic period (Jones et.al, 2005, p.3584). They have been termed as venuses or mother goddesses. The figurine in the grain bin stems from 5700 BC. What is interesting in our context is that on each side of the throne we find two sizeable leopards (Barstow, 1978, p.13). As Xi wangmu has been depicted on a tiger throne (James, 1995, p.25). This brings us to the early combination of female goddesses and dangerous feline animals. According to Motz this clearly shows the goddess as “a protectress and mistress of wild beasts” (Motz, 1997, p.103). Could Xi wangmu have originated as a mother goddess? I do not believe so. The mother goddesses presented with wild beasts tend to portrait as obese and can therefore be seen as a symbol of ‘Mother Earth’. Xi wangmu did not give life to the animals, but she holds an influence over them. I do not think the deity The Queen Mother of the West appeared as early as the mother goddesses and she seems so strongly rooted in shamanism that her animal side becomes a part of the spirit world. That is not to say that these early mother goddesses could not have existed in a shamanistic culture. They might very well have, but they seem to belong to stronger fertility worship then what I can find in the cult surrounding Xi wangmu.

Main Texts

I would like to introduce the main texts that I will make use of in my analysis. Before I do that I will give a short definition of myth. Myth can be defined in many ways and discussed at length. I will however take a short cut and define myth accordingly: Myths are traditional stories a people tell themselves that are concerning divinities and supernatural things.

The *Guoyu* (Conversations of the states) is a compilation of important conversations and speeches from royal houses of various states. Its contents are assumed to stem from the eighth to the fifth century BC. The *Guoyu* was probably compiled between 500-400 BC (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.78).

Chu ci, songs from Chu, has preserved a great deal of information concerning various deities and shamanistic practices. The oldest parts may date from the third century BC, the youngest from year 5 BC. The relationships between the shaman and the gods or the spirits are on occasion depicted in highly erotic terms. The work is historically attributed to what Lévy calls “the quasi-legendary figure Qu Yuan (c.340-278)” (Lévy, 2000, p.62). However Lévy further states the following about Li sao “..the only one of these poems that modern criticism still attributes to Qu Yuan.” (Lévy, 2000, p.62). *Chu ci* was later provided with commentary by Wang Yi (d.158AD). *Tien wen* is one of the seventeen chapters in *Chu ci*. Hawkes dates this part to the fourth century BC. Some scholars put it in the Han Dynasty, but Hawkes dismisses this as the unknown author of *Tien wen* shows much greater knowledge of the Shang and Chu cultures than any Han literati ever did. According to Hawkes the cryptic style of the text and the references made to stories lost to us clearly indicates an earlier time than the Han (Hawkes, 1959, p.45). *Tien wen* is probably not as old as Hawkes had wished. *Tien wen* consists of several questions related to deities, kings and cosmos. We do not know the meaning of this collection of questions that go unanswered, but Idema and Haft believe it to be a ritual catechism, while Hawkes suggests that they could be something as simple as playful riddles (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.96) (Hawkes, 1959, p.46).

Zhuangzi or Master Zhuang is a philosophical text which is one of the most important within the Daoistic tradition. It is ascribed to be partly written by Zhuang Zhou somewhere around 369-286 BC (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.86).

Huainanzi or Master Huainan is a text written under the patronage of the prince of Huainan, Liu An (179-122 BC). This text is often classified as Daoistic in style, even though it is an eclectic work (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.91). Roth states “In the Huai-nan Tzu, the Confucian, Legalist, and Mohist ideas are removed from their unique philosophical traditions and placed in a Taoist cosmological and political framework” (Roth, 1992, p.19). Major states that the Huainanzi has significantly older roots than that of the Han dynasty. He further claims that the text has a close connection to religion of the Chu state (Major, 1999, p.128).

Shanhaijing or the “Classic of Mountains and Seas” is the oldest written source for descriptions of spirits and strange beings in China. Shanhaijing is divided into eighteen books. Birrell believes the first five books stem from the third century BC, books six to thirteen she states are from the year 6 BC, books fourteen to seventeen from the first century AD and the final book she places in the first or second century AD (Birrell, 1999, p.xv-xvi). While James suggests that the oldest part might date back as far as fourth century BC (James, 1995, p.18).

Shiji or Records of the Grand Historian was an attempt during the Han Dynasty to compile all of China’s history from ancient times to the reign of Emperor Wu (r.140-87 BC). It was started by Sima Tan and completed by his son Sima Qian (145-c.85 BC) (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.79). It has had a profound effect on the understanding of Chinese history to this very day.

Han Shu or the Book of Han. The chief compiler of this history book was Ban Gu (32-92 AD). His father, Ban Biao (3-54 AD), had begun the work in an attempt to create a sequel to the Shiji. When Ban Gu died the text had not yet been completed, however his sister Ban Zhao finished the book. In comparison to the Shiji the Han Shu has greater historical accuracy (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.80).

Lie Nu Zhuan (Biographies of exemplary woman) was compiled by the imperial librarian Liu Xiang (79-8 BC) of the Han Dynasty (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.79). Liu Xiang was a

Confucian scholar that wrote the text as an instruction to the Emperor. According to Linduff was the goal to show the need to control the power of women, in particular those females found at court. The text is also a guide to how women should be; virtuous, chaste and obedient. However among the 125 biographies of women mentioned in the text, those who are dated as the earliest are not described as submissive, but rather confident and independent. It should be added that their male counterparts first appear when these ancient females are in need of male restrictions. So though they are strong this could end badly if not their partners step in and restrain them (Linduff, 2003, p.61). Linduff describes the earliest females in Lie Nu Zhuan as part of the legendary tales of the text, and within this part of the text women are described as more powerful and important than later in the text. For instance are the early women presented as performers of divination (Linduff, 2003, p.62).

Fengsutongyi (c.185 AD), translates into “popular customs and traditions”, was an attempt by the Han literati to compile old oral traditions (Irwin, 1990, p.54).

The Problem of Euhemerization

Girardot claims like many others that the study of early religion in China is clouded by the later historicized and moralized editing (euhemerization) of the Confucians in power especially during the Former Han period (206 BC-8 AD). Girardot points out that B. Karlgren describes the texts from the Zhou dynasty as “free texts” not yet tampered with by Confucian scholars and thus gives us a more realistic picture of the thoughts and beliefs of the peoples living in China in earlier times. Unfortunately the amount of texts from this period is limited and fragmented. This situation is probably to some extent a result of a book burning during the Qin dynasty. However Girardot states that Daoist scholars have in a larger degree preserved the early myths (Girardot 1976, p.295). Eliade agreed with the view that Daoism is the greatest source of shamanism in China. He believed that Daoism systemized and elaborated the shamanic ideology and technique (Eliade, 1974, p.450). Girardot is of the opinion that obstacles created by euhemerization can be overcome by the use of historical, sociological, and anthropological methods of analysis. Using what we know about the historical setting these myths existed in, and by collecting all fragments of a myth in both classical and popular sources one might be able to retrieve the original intent of the myth. Like the historian Ku Chieh-Kang, who has recovered the past of the Huang Di, Yao, Shun,

Yu and so on which by Confucian scholars became titled sage emperors, great men not gods, and in his opinion refound their original status as divine beings associated with independent mythological traditions (Girardot, 1976, p.296). Karlgren states that any source of mythology that dates from the Han dynasty on ward is of absolute no use to those studying early myth and should therefore be discarded as sources (Girardot, 1976, p.297). Karlgren has been criticized for this rigid separation in time (221BC) for what is and is not authentic mythological material (Girardot, 1976, p.297). Among his critiques is Eberhard who states that even though the Confucian scholars of the Han dynasty had rationalistic concerns, they were still drawing upon a long lasting oral tradition that would in most parts preserve archaic mythological themes. Also I would like to mention the *Guicang* which is historically considered to be a Shang dynasty divination manual. For a long time one only had fragments that had been collected and these were by most scholars considered unauthentic until a new discovery was made. In 1993 a somewhat damaged bamboo-slip version of the *Guicang* was uncovered in a Qin dynasty tomb in the village of Wangjiatai (Field, 2008, p.35). Proving that even though the original text was lost the small fragments collected was not a result of later fantasy. Further more, one should not forget that Daoist texts contain extensive amounts of mythic materials, both before and after the Han dynasty. In addition these texts would most likely be to a greater extent influenced by the popular oral tradition (Girardot, 1976, p.297). I find it likely that the Daoist texts have in a greater degree preserved the original myths.

Burial in China

The earliest archaeological signs of an intentional burial in China stems from the Upper Paleolithic period, the grave sites were found in the Upper Cave locality at Zhoukoudian. The find stems from c. 19.000 BC. The remains of the skeletons unearthed here were stained with red ochre. In addition was perforated stone beads found at the same place (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.715). Eliade pointed out the earliest signs of belief of an afterlife come from the remains of skeletons with traces of ocher. Ocher is possibly a symbol of blood and hence life. This is a custom that have been found in Africa, Europe, America, Australia, and of course China. So the painting of corpses in red seems to be an early universal trait, making it a cross-cultural symbol of blood and life. Eliade felt that the red ocher alone indicates a belief in survival after death (Eliade, 1979, p.10-11). As archaeologists in Africa have found graves tens of thousand years old containing traces of ocher and other natural pigments, colorful dyes that are still used to paint the deceased for ritualistic and aesthetic purposes in some areas in Africa today. Often personal objects are found with the deceased, such as pendants, shells, necklaces and other types of jewelry.

Lee and Zhu point out that during the Neolithic times in China burying of the dead in cemeteries became common. The ways in which the deceased was buried vary to such an extent that several cultural traditions had to be involved (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.715). To give an example in Jiaxian there is the peculiar burial site Shuiquan that stems from 6000 BC. Here archaeologists have found 120 burial pits. The graves were organized in an east-west spatial arrangement. Between the graves of the eastern and the western section was an unoccupied area. It is unknown why this separation between burials to the east and the west was made. What is known is that the graves come from the same time period, so it was done intentionally. Lee and Zhu have made a suggestion that it could be connected with social differences. Further more in this cemetery two large pits were found in-between the graves to the east and west. Both contain fragments of reddish-brown baked clay. The larger of the two also contained pebble stones, while the other in addition contained animal bones. Lee and Zhu argue that the two pits served the purpose in ritual activities for the dead. The animal bones are probably remnants of sacrificial offerings. As Lee and Zhu see it the crisis of a deceased member of the group would lead to concerns about the group's history and its continuation.

By reiterating their relationship with the dead through ritual they start an ancestor cult (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). There will be more examples of burials in the historical segment.

Shamanism in China

Ching places shamanism in China as she states “In my opinion, ancient Chinese religion may be defined as an *ecstatic* religion, to the extent that it had an essentially shamanic character” (Ching, 1993, p.40). Nelson is also a firm believer of an early presence of shamanism in China and points out that bird symbolism was important in the Neolithic period. She further states that later writing reinforces the connection between spirits and birds (Nelson, 2008, p.157). As mentioned earlier Eliade connected bird symbolism to shamanism due to the magical flight of the shaman (Eliade, 1974, p.177). Kehoe stated that the shaman may fly as a bird or be assisted by flying spirits (Kehoe, 1997, p.381). Shamans also frequently have feathers on their costume. So I believe that it is only logical to find bird symbolism where shamanism is found. Major claims that shamanism was an important part of early Chinese religion, and that shamanism was particularly prominent in the religious culture of the state of Chu (Major, 1999, p.136). Divination, in form of scapulimancy, which plays an important part of early Chinese religion is in itself perhaps the strongest evidence of a culture with shamanistic beliefs. This song from Chu ci gives an indication of shamanistic traits.

Tighten the zither's strings and smite them in unison!
Strike the bells until the bell-stand rocks!
Let the flutes sound! Blow the pan-pipes!
See, the priestesses, 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.
(Chu ci, The Lord of the East, 11-18) (Hawkes, 1959, p.42).

Drury states that as shamanism declined in China the state of Chu continued as a stronghold of shamanism. As Confucianism became more and more influential in Chinese culture the shaman became an outcast, and sometimes even killed (Drury, 1989, p.20).

Shamanism requires the belief in souls or spirits. Sidky states that like Siberian shamanism the Nepalese shamanism have a concept of an individual having more than one soul (Sidky, 2008, p.117). According to the Huainanzi (c.150 BC) everyone has two souls. These were the upper soul, *hun*, and a lower soul, *po*. After death the *hun* will travel to the

sky, where it becomes an ancestral spirit. The po will travel to the underworld and merge with the earth (James, 1995, p.21). According to Ching was this concept already present in the Shang state (c.1600-1046 BC) (Ching, 1993, p.35).

Wu: The Chinese Shaman

There exists a debate on the etymology of the word *wu*. It seems that *wu* has several meanings. The first evidence of the character for *wu* appears on a scapula bone from the Shang state dated to 1500 BC. The character for *wu* has also been found on the hat of a figurine in Shandong. Nelson and Liu state that it is now a consensus among scholars about the *wu* being a shaman (Nelson, 2008, p.5) (Liu, 2007, p.123). Boileau on the other hand is very skeptical when it comes to the meaning of the word *wu*. He further more states that we do not have enough data on the issue to correlate Zhou writings of *wu* with Neolithic cultures. Most of the data we have on the term *wu* stems from the Eastern Zhou period (771-256 BC) (Boileau, 2002, p.376).

Both males and females have been designated as *wu* through out the Chinese history. Hurtado and Ching use the term of *wu* to only mean a female shaman without further explanation as to how they arrived at this conclusion (Hurtado, 1990, p.10). However Ching states that *wu* was originally a female shaman, but that the word in time would also encompass male shamans (Ching, 1993, p.46). Nelson too is of the opinion that *wu* originally designated a female shaman (Nelson, 2008, p.5). Birrell comments upon the names of the female goddesses mentioned in Shanhaijing and states that they show a clear function. She further states that no male deities have such an expressed function within their names. For instance we find in Shanhaijing Girl Sacrifice, Girl Killer, Girl Destroyer, and Girl Battleaxe. She suggests that it is an allusion to ritual violence (Birrell, 1999, p.xxiii). I feel this strengthens the theory about women early on being in charge of the religious domain. This will be examined closer in the segment of early Chinese history.

Yet at the same time there is no conclusive evidence of the *wu* originally being a female. If the role of *wu* in the beginning was exclusive to females, then that must have occurred at such an early date that we have not yet found evidence of it and perhaps never will. Further more the gender of the shaman may have varied within the different cultures that once existed in China.

Divination in China

Field states “.divination has been an important feature in traditional Chinese culture from its beginnings down to modern times” (Field, 2008, p.2). Scapulimancy is the oldest form of divination found in China. Shoulder bones that have been used for divination is often termed “oracle bones”. Early Chinese society is not the only one who has made use of divination through cracks produced on bone. The same phenomena have been observed in North America and Central Asia. However, the Chinese are the first as far as we know to combine writing and divination. Divination in China can be traced back to the late fourth millennium BC. Several sites belonging to the Longshan culture have revealed shoulder bones of cattle that have been used for divination (Thorp, 2006, 173) (Field, 2008, p.25). It reached its heights during the Shang period at which time turtle shells had been added to shoulder bones. This is also the first time writing is introduced to the art of divination. The oracle bones do not enlighten scholars to a large degree when it comes to Chinese mythology as they mainly are ritual propositions. They only mention names of divinities that they intended to make offerings to and thus we are left without the myths corresponding to the names mentioned. Therefore we must interpret the oracle bones inscriptions in light of later traditions (Allan, 1981, p.292). Ching suggests that the bones used in divination were of sacrificed animals. The assumption being that the spirit of the animal would be able to contact other spirits. One example would be the spirits of ancestors, as most often the questions are directed to ancestors. The state leaders would be present during the divination at the royal court (Ching, 1993, p.28). The Zhou Dynasty continued the tradition for some time before it disappeared (Ching, 1993, p.27-28). According to Loewe was a more complex form of divination practiced widely during the Han Dynasty (Loewe, 2005, p. 73). He points to literary evidence, such as the Standard Histories of the Han Dynasty, that tell of divinations that take place. However there is no physical evidence of bones or shells that were supposedly used for this purpose in the Han period (Loewe, 2005, p. 92-93).

Music

Recent archaeological findings have proven that drums were in early use in China. Liu states that pottery drums appear from c.5500 BC. The drums have been found in a broad area and vary in style. Often the drums have been found in lavish graves (Liu, 2007, p.122-123). Most

drums are made of easily perishable materials and are thus lost to us. Nonetheless remnants of drums with stretched crocodile hide have been discovered. For instance in the Neolithic Dawenkou culture (c.4100-2600 BC) and the Longshan culture (c.3000-2000 BC) (Liu, 2007, p.122) (Nelson, 2008, p.60). Drums are the most common instruments within shamanism, but there are of course other instruments as well. Field suggests that musical rattles made of tortoise shells strung together may have been used in shamanistic rituals (Field, 2008, p.22). His basis is the artifacts found in a village and grave site from the seventh millennium BC. The site in the Henan province is named Jiahu after a local modern town. Here tortoise shells have been discovered with holes bored along the edges. With string one could tie them together to make a sort of box. These boxes contained pebbles, and each box had a different amount of pebbles (Field, 2008, p.22). So one can possibly conclude that this was an early musical instrument. However at the same site there was also found thirty bone flutes that are considered as of yet the oldest musical instruments found in China (Field, 2008, p.22). A rattle is however a more likely instrument to use during a shamanistic séance, but whether or not these boxes with pebbles are musical instruments is hard to conclude.

Ancestor Worship in China

We have no means of knowing how early ancestral worship appeared. Ancestral worship can coexist with belief in other gods. As Eliade viewed it the veneration of ancestors is tied with the mythology of origins, such as the origin of life and death, the origin of the world, man and animals (Eliade, 1979, p.32). As mentioned earlier the 8000 years old burial site Shuiquan, where sacrificial offerings took place in-between the east-west spatial arranged graves. Lee and Zhu argued that the offerings were in honor of the dead, and as such one of the earliest signs of ancestor worship in China (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). Nelson states that grave goods from the Neolithic period are thought to contain evidence of ancestor worship, as remnants of feasting by the graves are found (Nelson, 2008, 65-66). It seems clear that by 2000 BC that ancestral worship had become widespread in China. It was far from the only religious expression found at the time. Nature spirits, astral spirits and other diversified deities coexisted. While Bogucki et.al state that from the Shang Dynasty onward ancestor worship had become a common practice in the Yellow River area and the surrounding regions (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.847).

In a society like that of ancient China, life was dominated by the belief in ancestral spirits. The bond between the human and the divine was especially assured by communication between the ancestral spirits and their living descendants, or communication between the human and the divine through the mediumship of diviners or shamans. The heart of all rituals was that by which such communication was maintained, and the formal celebration of the ritual reveals its ecstatically shamanic character (Ching, 1993, p.48).

Ching is clearly of the opinion that the ancestral worship in China is connected with shamanistic beliefs. I find this to be a logical conclusion. I believe shamanism and ancestor worship co-existed in ancient China, however in time as shamanism declined ancestral worship expanded.

The Early Cultures of China

The earliest evidence of pottery making stems from China. In the Hunan province inside the Yuchanyan cave pottery shards were discovered by archaeologists that are 18 000 years old (Watzman, 2009). This is a most surprising find, as it was long supposed that pottery making appeared much later and only when man had taken up a sedentary lifestyle. This is a clear indication of the early cultural development in China. Still much is lost to us when regarding these early years.

From Paleolithic origins Neolithic China developed in several centers. Indications have been found of plant domestication as early as 8000 BC in both northern and southern parts of China (Nelson, 2008, p.110). Neolithic cultures with agriculture, pottery, villages and textiles appear regularly by 5000 BC. For quite some time it was assumed that the Chinese culture had arisen solely from the Yellow River basin region. This is no longer the case as archaeologists have unearthed centers of early cultures outside this area. As mentioned earlier the focus has been put on the Yellow River Basin, and not so long ago the northeastern region of China would have been ignored. However this has begun to change. Nelson for instance states that the Neolithic cultures in Inner Mongolia and Liaoning province are essential in understanding the Chinese Neolithic as a whole (Nelson, 2008, p.111). To give an example of the cultures interaction, in Afghanistan remnants of silk that were 4000 years old was discovered. 4000 years back China was the only producer of silk and continued to be so for a very long time (Santon, 2008, p.239). In a manner of speaking the Silk Road had yet to come into "existence". So unless someone transported extremely old silk at one point in time, which I find unlikely, this clearly shows contact.

It is impossible to give an account of all the different cultures found in early China, so some cultures will unfortunately be left out.

The Yangshao Culture

c.5000 to 3000 BC (Ebrey, 2003)

In 1921 a Neolithic site at Yangshao, Henan, was discovered. The site contained stone tools and red coil-made pottery decorated in black. This led to a wider search and eventually more than fifty sites were found in Henan, following further discoveries in Shanxi and Shaanxi (Christie, 1983, p.10). This was the first Neolithic culture discovered in China. It was termed the Yangshao culture and was situated north in China along the Yellow River. More than a thousand sites of the Yangshao culture have been located (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.38). It is not a uniform culture, but consists of several sub-cultures. It is defined as “Painted pottery culture” (Fairbank, 2002, p.32). The pottery is typically decorated with geometrical designs, such as red and black with spirals, diamonds, and other geometric patterns (Ebrey, 2003, p.17-18). Eliade claimed geometrical designs supposedly are a representation of the mystical body of the ancestors (Eliade, 1979, p.31). Naturally this is a theory that never can be proven. Geometrical designs can be a result of something as simple as the lack of the painting brush which makes more detailed images easier to depict. However images of faces and fishes have also been found. On some occasions a face and a fish seem to merge (Christie, 1983, p.12). Some scholars see these figures as clan emblems (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.39). However during the shaman’s ecstatic trance the spirits enter the shaman, and mostly these spirits are assumed to have an animal form (Eliade, 1974) (Hultkrantz, 1978) (Sidky, 2008). This of course one could argue results in a merging of man and animal. This is exactly what is done here. The fish live in water which is the absolute life giver, so the fish could have been as an extension or the corporal shape of the water spirit.

The areas of habitation belonging to this culture tend to be surrounded by large ditches. Cattle were domesticated and silkworms were raised (Nelson, 2008, p.112). Indications of irrigation have also been found (Christie, 1983, p.12). Arrowheads unearthed indicate a continued hunting for wild animals with bows (Fairbank, 2002, p.32). Burials were simplistic in style. Remains of children have been found in pots buried close to the habitat. While the older deceased were in most Yangshao cultures buried further away from the

village (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.39). The graves are usually single. The dead were laid with their faces up and heads pointing west or north-west. So they face east like Eliade stated was not uncommon. Coffins were rarely used. Most graves contained three pots, in addition to stone beads, pottery bracelets, cut shells and simple ornaments. Also some group burials have been found, Christie interprets this as a sign of matriarchy. What possible connection between group burials and matriarchy there could be is unknown to me. Interestingly no signs of talismans or other objects associated with religion have been found. Further more no buildings stand clearly out as a possible temple or shrine (Christie, 1983, p.12).

Banpo is a village found in Xian, Shaanxi. It belongs to the Yangshao culture. Due to occupation layers it is assumed the village was inhabited for 2000 years. First population took place probably about 6000 years ago. The population is estimated to have been around three hundred, and early on they resided in huts in a circular formation, then developed square or rectangular houses with a planking frame that were sunk about 1 meter into the ground. One building had a length of 12 meters. There seems that the village was divided into three areas, each with its own purpose. One was pottery making, second was burial and third habitation. Domestic animals were made up of pigs, dogs and goats. The crop grown was millet. Also at the Banpo site skulls had been placed within the structure of a large house. The tradition of placing human remains in the foundations of buildings continued into the late Shang period (Nelson, 2008, p.135).

Far west of the Yangshao culture we find a sub-culture named **Majiayao** (c.3500-1500 BC). Here archeologists have found graves containing large amount of pots. In tomb 901 found in the cemetery of Liuwan, in Qinghai, a woman was buried in something as near as a wooden coffin. Inside the coffin three pots were placed by her head and one between her legs. Outside the coffin several larger pots were placed (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.40). Some pots from this area differ somewhat from the main Yangshao culture. These pots have great circles that are broken by anthropomorphic figures. These have been interpreted as shamans, divinities or tribal chiefs. There is no certainty of the meaning of these depictions, but Debaine-Francfort suggests they are symbols belonging to an old agrarian cult (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.40). This basically tells us nothing, as agrarian cults have a wide variety of symbols. I feel the anthropomorphic figures must have had a religious significance as they seem unearthly. One pot has a figure that seems to be within another figure. Which to me look like a human inside a shaman costume or a shaman who has been entered by a spirit. As mentioned earlier most

often these spirits take on animal form, but not always. Of course I am just guessing, and I presume we will never really know what the depictions are supposed to be. Also pottery from c. 3000 BC have been found with depictions with what most likely are community dances, where each dancer appears to be wearing the same costume (Nelson, 2008, p.116). This might indicate a ritual outfit for the purpose of ceremonies.

The Yangshao site **Yuanjunmiao** uncovered an unusual cemetery. The cemetery seems to have been reserved for adults, as most of the deceased are within that category. However a few graves are that of children and they have been given a more excessive send off than the rest of them. Unfortunately when it comes to the remains of children it is hard to determine their gender. That being said, the juvenile burials are in general assumed to be that of females. The main reason for this is the long hairpins found in the graves, in addition to stone beads, shells and ceramics. One grave is unique as it contains both a grown woman and a child. The woman and the girl had each their long hairpin, as well as numerous smaller ones. In the grave of the deceased a particularly large amount of beads and pottery vessels were found. Also one single pierced shell ornament. The child had a necklace made up of no less than 1147 bone beads (Nelson, 2008, p.124). Why were these female children given such lavish burials? Loewe states that the state of Qi, which was of a much later date (Qi 1046-221 BC) had a family tradition of which the first born daughter was given the title of ‘child of shaman’. She was in charge of the family’s religious rites and was not allowed to marry (Loewe, 2005, p.106). Even though there is a great separation of time between the events, I can not help but think that these female children were the first born daughters of different families that had been designated as ‘child of the shaman’. But they unfortunately died before they could take on their task, and therefore were especially honored.

Xinglongwa Culture

c.6200 to 5400 BC (Tao, 1999)

c.8000 to 5000 BC (Nelson, 2008)

The Xinglongwa culture was situated along the Inner Mongolia and Liaoning border. It is within this culture we find the earliest jade objects discovered in China. In a grave two jade

earrings were found. The find stems from c.6000 BC. Also the remains of this culture give us the earliest known depictions of dragons in China (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.720).

The main Xinglongwa site is a village that was surrounded by a ditch which was 570 meters long and the site appears to have been constructed all at once, with houses organized in orderly lines. Remains of 160 houses have been discovered (Tao, 1999, p.112). This clearly must have been a society with great abilities to conduct communal planning. Millet was grown and pigs were domesticated (Nelson, 2008, p.111). Domestication of the pig is a great success story. They are easy to handle once domesticated and reproduce at a high speed and thus are a plentiful food source.

Here the earliest figurines in China have been discovered. The figurines are made of stone and appear lumpy and simplistic in style. They are all assumed to be female as they have breasts. Further more they are found within what seems to be individual residences, especially close to the hearth. Possibly being the household goddesses. These female figurines have been interpreted in several different ways, such as fertility goddesses, fire goddesses or female ancestors (Nelson, 2008, p.120) (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.720). As far as I can tell no male figurines have been discovered in the same area. So clearly the feminine was important in religion.

Several graves have been found under the floor of the houses. One grave that has been recovered from this culture stand out, inside a house a man was buried in-between two pigs. Both sexes were represented in regards to the pigs, and they each had a length close to that of the deceased man. In addition 715 other objects which were made of ceramic, jade, bone and shell were placed in the grave. Nelson suggests that this is the grave of a shaman and as such the pigs represent aiding spirits. She further states that pig ceremonialism still is important in Korean shamanism (Nelson, 2008, p.125). According to Liu from the sixth millennium onwards parts of or whole pigs are found in graves in China. It became a widespread practice that continued into the Bronze Age (Liu, 2007, p.123).

The Dawenkou Culture

c.4100 to 2600 BC (Liu, 2007)

Traces of the Dawenkou culture have been found in Shandong, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Henan. According to Debaine-Francfort is the Dawenkou culture the missing link between the

Yangshao culture and the Longshan culture (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.43). Because the pottery is diverse, both painted, like Yangshao, and tripods and cups with perforated stems, which hint to Longshan.

They used mostly wooden coffins and sometimes wooden chambers to bury their dead. The graves found differ in the amount of objects placed with the deceased and this indicates a hierarchical society. The graves contained necklaces and bracelets made of jade, stone, or pottery beads. Also objects made of ivory, bone, horn, and turquoise have been found in a limited amount. Some graves held over hundred objects. The more elaborate graves contained the remains of sacrificed pigs.

Dawenkou culture is the first known to depict a bird motif that later become a recurrent image in the southern cultures of China (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.44). As earlier mentioned Nelson states that bird symbolism was important in the Neolithic period in China. She further states that later texts reinforce the connection between spirits and birds (Nelson, 2008, p.157). Eliade stressed the importance of “ascensional symbolism” in shamanistic cultures (Eliade, 1974, p.177). Kehoe states that the shaman may fly as a bird or be assisted by flying spirits, which I feel would result in bird symbolism (Kehoe, 1997, p.381). Further more shamans also frequently have feathers on their costume. This makes me a firm believer of bird symbolism being an important aspect of shamanism. Also in a sizeable grave the earliest evidence of an alligator drum was discovered (Liu, 2007, p.122). This might indicate a shamanistic society. Drums are the most common instrument used as a rhythmic effect to an ecstatic trance (Shirokogoroff, 1935) (Eliade, 1974) (Hultkrantz, 1978) (Kehoe, 1997) (Nelson, 2008) (Sidky, 2008).

A somewhat bizarre discovery was also made. “Some skeletons, as often in the south, display cranial deformations associated with the ritual practice of the upper incisors” (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.44). I have not been able to find out why they would extract the teeth found on either side of the two front teeth. It is truly a strange custom and no immediate explanation comes to mind. According to Ebrey the practice of extracting teeth was later condemned as barbarian by Chinese authors (Ebrey, 2003, p.18).

The Longshan Culture

c.3000 to 2000 BC (Thorp, 2006)

Longshan culture consisted of several sub-cultures and made up a prosperous region in northern China stretching from Shandong to Shaanxi. Several hundred sites of the Longshan culture have been found in the area. Due to the area being wetter than the central loesses, settlements were often on knolls above the surrounding lowlands. The settlements were also in the beginning smaller than that of the Yangshao culture. Rice, wheat and millet were grown (Christie, 1983, p.13). During the Longshan culture the first fortified cities started appearing in Henan (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.43). “Cities are the most important landmarks for civilisation. They mark the end of prehistory and the emergence of new ways of production, social organisation and urban life” (Yu, 1999, p.95). The fact that they are fortified also indicate the increased need for protection against attack.

The Longshan culture has been termed ‘the black pottery culture’. This is because the pottery has a black burnished surface which is almost metallic in appearance. The pottery was rarely painted, however it had more elaborate designs, such as tripods, spouts, handles and pedestalled bowls and cups. It is known for its incredible thinness. The large amount of goblets and ewers indicates rituals of feasting or sacrifice (Christie, 1983, p.13) (Ebrey, 2003, p.18). According to Christie the metallic appearance of the pottery anticipate the bronze vessels of the Shang dynasty. Among these are the tripod (*li* or *ding*) and the *xian*. The tripod as the name clearly indicates has three columnars which makes it a more practical cooking vessel. The other one is a prototype for the bronze *xian*, which is a steamer.

There has been found remnants of scapulimancy in the Longshan culture (Christie, 1983, p.13) (Thorp, 2006, p.173). Scapulimancy, as mentioned earlier, is a type of divination. According to Shirokogoroff (1935), Eliade (1974), Hultkrantz (1978), Ching (1993), Sidky (2008), and Field (2008) is divination an important aspect of shamanism. Divination may be performed in different ways, but scapulimancy is a common variety. Eliade and Hultkrantz focused generally on scapulimancy and shamanism, while Ching and Field connects Chinese shamanistic cultures and scapulimancy. I believe that divination by interpreting the crack patterns made on animal shoulder blades (or tortoise shells) due to heat is a very clear sign of shamanism. While the rituals of feasting and sacrifice suggests a desire to please the spirits, possibly ancestral spirits.

The **Taosi** (c.2600-2000 BC) culture in Shanxi province is often considered to be apart of the Longshan culture. Here wooden drums with crocodile skin and pottery drums have been excavated (Liu, 2007, p.110). Nelson states that since the distance to the nearest crocodiles at this time would have been approximately five hundred miles it clearly shows that trade or migration took place. She also suggests that women might have migrated due to marriage and brought the drums with them. She further suggests that since the women possibly brought the drums, they could have been shamans (Nelson, 2008, p.114). In a grave, which were not among the most lavish ones, a copper bell was placed at the deceased's waist (Nelson, 2008, p.115). This again could indicate shamanism as Nelson believes. Bells are sewn to the costume to create more sound during the ecstatic trance, and make it easier for the spirits to notice the shaman's calling. Sidky has observed bells on the costume of Nepalese shamans (Sidky, 2008, p.209). Kehoe refers to objects on the costume that "jingle and clang" (Kehoe, 1997, p.380). In addition stone *qing* chimes have also been found (Dashun, 1999, p.47). Further more in this region graves containing whole pigs have been discovered (Liu, 2007, p.136).

The Hongshan Culture

c.4000 to 2500 BC (Nelson, 2002)

Hongshan is a culture found in Inner Mongolia and Liaoning. The Xinglongwa culture is considered the forerunner of the Hongshan culture. Here are two Neolithic ceremonial centers situated with a distance of 32.5 km kilometers between them. The centers differ greatly and must thus have had different purposes (Nelson, 2002. p.74). However they are believed to have been used by the same people. The sites are Dongshanzui and Niuheliang. The Hongshan culture's economy seemed to have been based on pigs and millet crops. Also a jade figurine of an ox has been unearthed and can indicate that this animal was also domesticated. Red thin-walled painted pottery vessels have been found (Nelson, 2002, p.76). No remnants of towns have been discovered in connection to the Hongshan culture (Nelson, 2008, p.112). This is peculiar in light of the two large ceremonial centers. However archaeological discoveries of towns might be waiting.

In **Dongshanzui** several stone platforms have been found, which have round and square stone alters. Nelson points out that in time the round ones become connected to earth and the square ones with heaven. Also some small and medium-sized female clay figurines have been unearthed. The smaller ones are naked and one of them is at the last stage of pregnancy (Nelson, 2002, p.75). Another figurine is in a sitting position with crossed legs (Nelson, 2008, p.18). One clay fragment from this figurine clearly looks like a belt. The belt has a very unusual knot, and Nelson claims a similar belt depiction have been found in North Korea. This has led Nelson to suggest that the knot has special symbolic meaning, and could possibly only have been worn by those individuals that could make contact with the spirits (Nelson, 2008, p.119). Lee and Zhu suggest that the altars in Dongshanzui were used for ritual worship of natural forces (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). Nelson believes this site could have been for rituals of life, while Niuheliang was reserved for rituals of death, as it is surrounded by tombs (Nelson, 2008, p.18).

Niuheliang is the larger of the two sites. Here are an artificially made hill and a large platform that measures 175 meters on one side and 179 meters on the other side. It might have had towers or some other kind of structure that have since collapsed. It holds pits containing broken pottery and animal bones and next to it a large painted pot with a lid was intentionally buried. The site is surrounded by several tombs (Nelson, 2008, p.14-15). But perhaps the most exiting discovery is the cluster of a semi-subterranean temple structure. This multi-chamber structure had a length of 18.4 meters. The widest part measured 6.9 meters (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). Inside a life-size female head made of clay was found that captured the world's attention. The face is smiling and has inlaid green jade eyes. It used to be apart of a whole statue. It has been dated to 3000 BC and is thus the oldest female deity statue found in China. Some, like Ching, see this as possible remnants of an archaic female goddess cult (Ching, 1993, p.25). In addition remnants of a minimum of seven statues of unbaked clay were unearthed. Most of these female statues were life-size and a few have been suggested to be that of three times life-size (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). Also fragments of statues thought to be that of a life-sized bird and a pig have been found (Nelson, 2008, p.122). As mentioned earlier I find that bird symbolism is an important aspect of shamanism. The grave that was found in the predecessor culture Xinglongwa which contained a man with two pigs, which Nelson suggested was a grave of a shaman. The pigs possibly being a symbol of the aiding spirits of the shaman. So this could have been a culture with shamanistic tendencies. Remnants of what seems to be interior decorations of the temple reveals painted geometrical

designs (Nelson, 2008, p.14). The effort it must have taken to build this temple structure would have required a workforce from a broad geographical area (Lee and Zhu, 2002, p.717). This makes it even more puzzling that no evidence of towns has been discovered. I would like to add that the temple was unearthed and then covered up again. Chinese archeologists have a tendency to take their time and wait until better techniques of preservation has been invented. This is an admirable desire to protect the cultural heritage. I live in great anticipation of what they eventually will uncover.

Due to the female statues the building have been given the name *Nushen Miao* or the Goddess Temple (Nelson, 2002, p.76). The figurines found in the Hongshan culture resemble female figurines found in cultures such as Sumer, Babylon, Egypt and so on.

The emergence of virtually every major civilization was associated in some way with goddess worship. While there may not be a single “Great Goddess” worshiped universally, the ubiquity of the phenomenon remains unbroken from Paleolithic times (Jones et.al., 2005, p.3587).

Jones et.al., state that some of the earliest archaeological evidence for the human religious impulse consists of sculptured images and cave paintings of female figures excavated in hundreds of the Upper Paleolithic sites throughout Europe and northern Asia. These female images outnumber those of male figures ten to one (Jones et.al., 2005, p.3583). The figurines have been termed as goddesses, venuses or a singular Mother Goddess. In this area female figurines have been found in deposits as old as thirty to forty thousand years old. However, they appear more frequently about twenty-five thousand years ago. Remarkably, these same goddess figurines have been unearthed from sites dated as late as the early Neolithic period. Jones et.al. state that the Neolithic goddesses who were linked to lunar mythology are derived from earlier roots. The Neolithic goddess figurines take different forms. Some are thin and geometric, representing snake and bird goddesses. These water and air deities were likely cosmic symbols of regeneration of life (Jones et.al., 2005, p.3584). What were found in the Hongshan culture are small naked and pregnant figurines that were placed in the midst of tortoises, dragons, birds and cicadas of jade (Ching, 1993, p.25). However the Hongshan culture might have worshiped a Great Mother. But I find it more likely that a collection of goddesses were venerated. The figurines and statues might have been representations of female ancestors. Suggestions have been made that Nugua might have connection with the figurines found in the Hongshan culture (Dashun, 1999, p.45). But this is hard to determine without further evidence.

The stone-mounded tombs in Niuheliang contain often only jade pendants. No pottery or tools have been found inside the graves. The pendants take the shape of tortoises, birds with spread wings, clouds, a merging of dragon and pig and the hoof of the horse. Also the peculiar perforated disk has been unearthed here (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.41). Most of the jade artifacts have a circular shape. One artifact is thought to function as a headdress and a device to contain hair (Nelson, 2002, p.75). The deceased have been found with up to thirteen jades on them. Nelson believes that the closest way to get any understanding of the ideology of the Hongshan people is through their jade art. Pointing to that water and sky seems to be of importance. Turtle and dragon are connected to water. The clouds are connected to water and the sky. Birds and circular forms may represent heaven or the sky. Which brings us back to shamanism and bird symbolism. The symbolism connected with the pig can stem from their importance in daily life and seems also to have connections with earth. Pigs were also used in sacrifice. Nelson suggests that the Hongshan culture could have affected the rest of China with their possible yin symbolism (Nelson, 2002, p.79).

Though there was no pottery inside the graves, there were placed bottomless pots around the edges of the graves. These could have been drums on which hyde has perished. Drums being, as discussed earlier, another possible sign of shamanism. The hard-fired red cylinder shaped pots had black decorations. The designs on the grave pottery give associations to plants (Nelson, 2008, p.16).

Xia Dynasty and the Erlitou Culture

c.2070 to 1600 (Thorp, 2006)

The first dynasty is considered to be *Xia*, but this is not solidly confirmed. The Erlitou culture is often considered to be remnants of the Xia state, but it is also possible that it is an early stage of the Shang culture. As there seem to be significant continuity from Xia to Shang. Nelson for instance suggests that Shang religion derived from the Xia state. As oracle bones have been found at Erlitou sites, these are however without writing (Nelson, 2008, p.146). I have mentioned earlier the close connection between scapulimancy and shamanism.

The Erlitou culture consists of more than hundred sites in Henan, Hebei, Shanxi, and Shaanxi (Thorp, 2006, 33). Within the Erlitou culture we find the first evidence in North China of cast bronze ritual vessels (Thorp, 2006, 21). Nelson claims that these bronze vessels can with almost certainty be regarded as connected with ancestor worship rituals. Further more that

these rituals were connected with shamanistic beliefs and practices (Nelson, 2008, p.147). The building design and construction reveals a great stride in engineering. Over thirty court yards have been found with pounded earth foundations and a length that reaches between 40-50 meters and 20-30 meters (Thorp, 2006, 27-28). But larger buildings have also been discovered, these have been designated as palaces. One of these palaces consists of a stamped earth platform approximately hundred meters on each side (Nelson, 2008, p.148). It does not appear that the Erlitou culture had a special area for burials. Grave goods consist habitually of pottery, the amount ranging from three to twenty objects (Thorp, 2006, 32). As we have seen most graves from the Yangshao culture contained three pottery pots. I believe that this could be an indication of offering to the three realms, heaven, earth and underworld. A symbol of the three levels of cosmos. In addition some bronze objects have been found in graves, such as vessels, bells, and plaques. Bells as we know can be connected with shamanism. Other objects placed in the grave are cowrie shells, jade and probably lacquer items (Thorp, 2006, 32).

The Shang State

c.1600 to 1046 (Thorp, 2006)

It is from the time of the *Shang* dynasty that organized political entities became basic bricks in the history of China. The period produces highly developed bronze metallurgy, pottery and written language. This is the first dynasty that has preserved written documents. Divination reached its heights during the Shang period. More than 200.000 oracle bones have been discovered (Thorp, 2006, p.176). In addition to shoulder bones, turtle shells became more frequently used. This is also the first time writing is introduced to the art of divination. So far it is estimated from remains that the Shang writers had about three thousand characters. For a language to develop that many characters takes time. Currently more and more evidence is appearing that places proto-writing in the Neolithic period (Nelson, 2008, p.131).

Loewe states that *Di* or *Shang Di* (God on High) was the main deity during the Shang period. Shang Di was an anthropomorphic god associated with the sky. According to Loewe was Shang Di seen as the supreme deity, at least by the Shang elite. In addition to Shang Di there existed a myriad of lesser gods who also went by the title 'di'. When the Shang kings

died it were thought that they became di and took their place along side the Lord on High (Loewe, 2005, p.120).

During the Shang Dynasty and large parts of the Zhou Dynasty servants were ritually killed when their masters died and were buried with them. It seems people of importance needed co-travelers to the realm of the dead. Possibly the sacrificed persons were to continue their services for the main deceased. But also their murder could be to please the gods so they give the deceased a befitting reception. Human sacrifice has occurred in many cultures through out the history of mankind. The typical way to ritually kill in the Shang state was to chop of the servants head with a special axe, then the heads and the bodies were lain in separate places in the grave. Why this separation was done is not clear to scholars as of yet. In time the human sacrifice was substituted with ceramic sculptures of people (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.848). Close to the royal tombs in Anyang have several hundred sacrificial pits been discovered that contain remnants of humans and animals. The tombs also contained large amounts of sacrificial victims (Nelson, 2008, p.154).

By the latter part of the Shang period the Zhou state was centered in the Shaanxi Province. The two states had an unstable relationship and eventually in 1046 or 1045 BC the Zhou state defeated the Shang (Blakeley, 1999, p.9-10).

The Wu during Shang

The first evidence of the character for wu appears on an oracle bone from the Shang state dated to 1500 BC. The character for wu has also been found on the hat of a figurine in Shandong (Nelson, 2008, p.5). According to Chen Mengjia was wushu, the art wu, the foundation of Shang religion (Boileau, 2002, p.376). Both males and females have been designated as wu through out the Chinese history. As mentioned earlier Nelson states that there is now a general agreement among scholars that the wu was a shaman (Nelson, 2008, p.5). From the material I have found I would agree with this assessment. Boileau however seems to be a dissident and claims that wu had several different meanings (Boileau, 2002, p.376). From the examples I will present one can to some degree agree with this. But the term wu is at least always used in connection with rituals of divination, sacrifice and dancing. All elements that can be connected with shamanism.

Oracle bone 34138 epoch IV: (the day) xinyou, cracks, appeasing the wind (by) offering in the sacrifice wu nine dogs.

From this oracle bone inscription it would seem that wu refers to a particular sacrifice. Boileau suggests that it indicates sacrifices that are connected to meteorology, such as the control of wind.

Oracle bone 5651, epoch I: (the day) bingshen cracks, the wu (offers the) sacrifice of appeasement; (the wu does not offer the) sacrifice of appeasement.

Here it would seem that wu designates a person who is in charge of a ritual. Song Zhenhao refers to **oracle bone 5648, epoch I** that contains the expression: “divination, the wu proclaims..” This has led Song to the conclusion that the wu was an individual that could be in charge of divination (Boileau, 2002, p.355). Tu Baikui believes the wu were also in charge of ritual dances prior to sacrifices. As several oracle bones mention nine wu that perform ritual dance. Perhaps the Shang state which had a very high level of development had several wu at the royal court? Certainly dancing and divination are important aspects of shamanism. I suggest that the nine wu might correspond to the nine regions of the land. When the Shang state conquered the Xia they supposedly “inherited” nine bronze tripods that were the symbols of the nine districts of China. A Zhou document also tells of these nine bronzes which they again captured from the Shang. The ownership of these symbols of the nine regions indicated a right to rule (Nelson, 2008, p.151). So perhaps a wu from each region lived at the court and participated in rituals together.

There is a debate about whether or not the Shang king was a wu and if there were other individuals at the court that also acted as wu. Chen stated that the King acted in accordance with the religious duties as a wu (Boileau, 2002, p.376). Ching too believes the roles of the king and the shaman coincided (Ching, 1993, p.46). Hurtado states that the Shang King justified his political powers through his priestly role in the worship of the high god Di, other nature deities and the royal ancestors. The royal ancestors bridged the gap between the King and the high god *Di*. To unravel whatever wishes the King’s ancestors might have, there was a group of professional diviners to intrepid this from cracked oracle bones (Hurtado, 1990, p.10). Thorp however believes that the King himself was the one who interpreted the cracks

during the Shang Dynasty (Thorp, 2006, 173). If the king was a wu does not change the fact that oracle bones are found in many areas of the Shang state. It is statistically impossible that there was a royal presence at every place divination has taken place. So divination must have also been practiced by other members of the society (Thorp, 2006, p.173).

I accept that the king had a religious function, and might have acted as a wu, but other wu existed in addition to this. Mostly because the king does not seem to have been the only one in charge of the divination. For instance Nelson mentions oracle bones that contain the names of three female wu, Lady Yang, Lady Fang, and Lady Fan (Nelson, 2008, p.223).

Wu is the only term used in Shang divination, as xi (a term used later for male shamans in the Zhou dynasty) is never mentioned in the material we have left (Nelson, 2008, p.152). There has also been suggested that female wu were not unusual and their typical assignments would be to bring rain, fertility and healing. Johnson claims the reason for associating water with the feminine stems from women being in charge of water supply, leading to women being in charge of rainmaking rituals (Johnson, 1994, p.36). As mentioned earlier Ching, Hurtado and Nelson have stated that the role of the wu was originally a female occupation (Hurtado, 1990, p.10) (Ching, 1993, p.46) (Nelson, 2008, p.5). Birrell suggests that some of the names of goddesses in the Shanhaijing alludes to ritual violence and thus connects women and religious rituals (Birrell, 1999, p.xxiii). However this is clearly not the case in Shang times as the king himself might have acted as a wu. On the other side, being a wu and interpreting the cracks on oracle bones are not necessarily the same role. Yet there is no conclusive evidence of the wu originally being a female. If the role of wu in the beginning was exclusive to females, then that must have occurred at such an early date that we have not yet found evidence of it. Further more the gender of the shaman may have varied within the different cultures that once existed in China.

My hypothesis is that the decline of the role of the professional shaman led as well to the decline of the role of women in society. Female shamans were increasingly assigned to one area of responsibility: that of rain-making. It remained an important responsibility, indeed, the official responsibility of the ruler. But as the ruler's secular duties took up increasing importance, kingship or rulership itself became more and more secularised (Ching, 1993, p.46).

According to Chen Mengjia were men originally in charge of governance, while the women controlled the religious domain. The religious domain was however taken over by the Shang kings (Boileau, 2002, p.376). This could be true, as sometimes when a society reaches a certain level of development the role of women in religion become minimalized. However

there is lack of evidence to prove that such a transition took place in the Shang court. In the next segment about the role of women in Shang we will see that women still played an important role at the court.

The Role of Women in the Shang State: Lady Hao

In Anyang a tomb belonging to a woman was found. It is thought to be the grave of *Fu Hao* or Lady Hao (c. 1250 BC), the consort of King *Wu Ding*. She is mentioned in oracle bones inscriptions, where the King asks of the fate of her pregnancies and illnesses (Ebrey, 2003, p.26-27). Also from oracle bones we have learned that she was among three of his possibly as much as sixty wives that were given a special status. These three wives were designated as “mu” or mother. The three mu consorts, Hao, Jing and Zi, lead rituals that asked of the future of the harvest. So females did in fact partake in royal rituals of divination. Linduff states that Fu Hao did not bear any male offspring which would in most cases have given her a less important role in the royal life (Linduff, 2002, p.265-266). Therefore her high status in the Shang state is puzzling. But what is most surprising are the oracle inscriptions that tell us that Lady Hao was sent out by the King to conquer hostile forces to the Shang state, and furthermore that she did so with success (Linduff, 2002, p.266). Lady Hao is supposed to have led military campaigns with as many as 13.000 soldiers (Ebrey, 2003, p.26-27). In a time when only males could aspire for high ranking positions within the state, Fu Hao’s role becomes even more intriguing.

Her grave is found outside the royal cemetery, across the river from the tomb of the King (Linduff, 2002, p.265). Her undisturbed tomb contained over 200 bronze vessels, a little under 7000 cowries shells, 750 jades and 560 stone and bone objects. Among them a drinking cup made of elephant ivory that is beautifully inlaid with turquoise. Furthermore some of her jade objects were antiques stemming from the Neolithic period (Clunas, 1997, p.19). She was buried with four bronze tigers and in addition an image of a tiger is found on a plaque in the grave (Ebrey, 2003, p.26-27) (Watson, 1995, p.55). This might indicate the importance of the Western Mother, a possible origin of Xi wangmu. In time the tiger will be explicitly linked to the Queen Mother of the West. Several bronze weapons were found in her grave and thus support the idea of her as a great army leader. Debaine-Francfort suggests that since some of the daggers came from the steppes, makes her a possible weapons collector (Debaine-

Francfort, 1998, p.39). Linduff on the other side suggests that Lady Hao might have come from one of the peoples she was sent out to conquer, and point to all the artefacts in her grave that were not of Shang origin. Lady Hao could have come from powerful clans in northern Asia that possibly controlled routes of trade for strategic metal ores and other important goods. They also breed horses. The fact that they posed a threat to the Shang state might have lead to a marriage alliance. The frontier weaponry and other artefacts may indicate that she was not of the Shang elite. This could also explain why her grave is outside the royal cemetery (Linduff, 2002, p.267).

Also in her grave a rear figurine was found, it has a female on one side and a male on the other side. Linduff suggests that this is an early indication of the philosophical system of Daoism to come. Showing that the duality of yin and yang potentially has much older roots in China than what has been assumed earlier (Linduff, 2002, p.257).

Lady Jing was unlike Fu Hao buried within the royal cemetery, and as the first wife of the King held a higher status of that of Lady Hao. Lady Jing was also buried with weaponry, but not in the amount that Lady Hao was sent of with (Linduff, 2002, p.267).

These women seem to stand out from what we have come to expect from Shang society, but there could be undiscovered graves that will tell a story of a greater role of females in the Shang royal house.

Shang and the Ten Suns

Here I need to present a myth that will be important for further understanding of the text. Allan claims that the Shang state had a myth of ten suns and that the royal house was ordered in a totemic relationship to these suns. Furthermore this myth was particular to the Shang state. When the Zhou state conquered the Shang the myth lost its earlier significance. However the myth did not disappear, but rather transformed and continued to occur in other contexts. She claims one such transformation of the myth of the ten suns is that the ancestors of the Shang came from an egg of a black bird. There is also a reference to the myth in Chu Ci and Allan also suggests that the myth could actually have originated in the state of Chu. She points to the fact that archeological findings prove the cultures were in contact with each other (Allan, 1981, p.293-294). According to Nelson is the sun a shamanistic symbol in China (Nelson, 2008, p.127). This is certainly true in Japan where the sun goddess *Amaterasu* was

worshiped in a flourishing female shamanistic culture (Nelson, 2008, p.230) (Ōbayashi, 1984, p.159).

The myth goes as follows: one day all the ten suns rose at once and scorched the earth so the crops died. Archer Yi then shot down nine of them. One possible explanation is that he shot them down, but that they did not disappear. Rather it was a warning to them to behave themselves so only one could appear at a time each day of the ten day week (Allan, 1981, p.299). While the Huainanzi portrays the incident as an ill omen at the end of the Shang Dynasty, according to Allan another text on the other hand states that the ten suns appeared at the end of the Xia Dynasty (Allan, 1981, p.303). A black bird became the symbol of the sun. The connection with the bird can strengthen the theory that the sun was a shamanistic symbol. In the Chu Ci we find the following reference to the myth:

“When Yi shot down the suns, why did the ravens shed their feathers?” (Chu ci, Tien wen, 56) (Hawkes, 1959, p.49)

In a grave from the early Han Dynasty (Tomb no.1, Mawangdui, Hunan Province) a funerary pendant was unearthed. The pendant depicts a tree with nine suns on the branches. Eight are actual orange discs, while the ninth is a black bird. A moon in the corner contains a toad. Why there are only nine symbols of the sun has caused confusion. However Allan suggests that this depiction is of the realm of the dead, as it is indeed a funerary pendant, and so the tenth sun could be in the land of the living. In this case the crow has two legs, while in other graves from the Han Dynasty there have also been found depictions of black birds with three legs. Allan believes the three legged sun bird might symbolize calendric units of a month. Ten days in a three week circular movement of a month (Allan, 1981, p.293-298). In Shanhaijing the following story is told:

Beyond the south-eastern Sea amidst the Sweets Waters is the Tribe of Xihe. There is a woman named Xihe who regularly bathes the sun in the Sweet Springs. Xihe is the wife of Di Jun. It is she who gave birth to the ten suns. (Shanhaijing, Da huang nan jing, 15/7b) (Allan, 1981, p.298).

Xihe bathes her suns in the East. Furthermore are two other females named in Shanhaijing that are the wives of Di Jun. Another wife is Chang Xi who gave birth to twelve moons, which she bathes in a pool of water in the West. The third wife, O Huang, is connected to the

world of humans. She supposedly gave birth to the Tribe of the Three-bodied People (Allan, 1981, p.299).

Possible Origin of Xi Wangmu: Western Mother

The oracle bones give us some insight into the early Chinese culture, but since divination is mainly ritual propositions it is limited what they can tell us. Only fragments can be found in the preserved collection about goddesses. *Xi mu* (Mother of the West) is mentioned alongside *Dong mu* (Mother of the East). These two goddesses in the divine hierarchy of the Shang state were recipients of sacrifices. One such oracle bone reads “Crack-making on IX. 9 day; we divined: If we make offerings to the Eastern Mother and Western Mother, there will be approval” (Cahill, 1993, p.12). The earliest mention of *Xi mu* and *Dong mu* stem from the thirteenth century BC (Birrell, 1993, p.171). The *mu* divinities are symbols of the sun and the moon, they could also indicate the rising and the setting sun. Their identity is still somewhat blurred, but some links between these and goddesses described in later sources have been made (Hurtado, 1990, p.10). In addition Bamboo records from the Shang Dynasty found in graves speak of a Mother Goddess of the West (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.848). Some scholars, like Cahill suggests that the Queen Mother of the West could be an extension of Western Mother (Cahill, 1993, p.13). The strongest connection between *Xi mu* and *Xi wangmu* is the tiger. Some sacrificial bronze vessels from the Shang dynasty have images connecting the Western Mother and the tiger. In China the tiger has been the symbol of the west. The tiger is also seen as an agent of death and connected with the travel to the spirit world. While Allan suggests that Western mother and Eastern Mother could be what the myth of Chang Xi and Xihe were based on (Allan, 1981, p.315). Allan bases her argument on her assumption that the myth of the ten suns had a fundamental place in the beliefs of the Shang elite. She argues that since Eastern Mother is more often mentioned in oracle bones during the Shang Dynasty than Western Mother, it is only natural that Eastern Mother is the goddess Xihe who gave birth to the ten suns (Allan, 1981, p.293-294). So according to Allan the logical conclusion is that the identity of Western Mother is that of Chang Xi who gave birth to the twelve moons. Chang Xi is also sometimes identified with Chang O or Heng O, the goddess that fled to the moon after having stolen the elixir of immortality from her husband Archer Yi. He was given the elixir by *Xi wangmu*. Allan states that these goddesses could possibly originate from the same original moon goddess. While Birrell claims that Chang O was not a moon goddess, but

rather the “essence of the moon” and therefore associated with the toad (Birrell, 1993, p.144). I find it more likely that Xi mu is the origin of the goddess Xi wangmu, as the goddess Chang Xi is little known. It must be mentioned that Allan has no actual proof of the significance of the myth of the ten suns in Shang times or even if it was told in the Shang state. Xi wangmu is never paired with a female counterpart of the east. She does however from the Han dynasty onward become coupled with different male deities of the east.

Nugua in Shang Culture

Irwin believes that Nugua comes from early Shang religion, as there seem to have been a worship of dragons and serpent women (Irwin, 1990, p.55). Major states that depictions of creatures that are half snake and half human are present in art from the Shang state, but he also suggests that the tradition could have started earlier. Major is not of the opinion that any of the Shang depictions of snake-humans are equivalent to Nugua. Major argues that since the snake/human motif was not as prevalent in the Zhou state, as it was in Shang and Chu, that the state of Chu took on the heir of Shang beliefs and practices, and eventually made them their own (Major, 1999, p.131). I do not subscribe to this belief, as many changes took place after the transition from Shang to Zhou. The Zhou court was not merely a copycat of the Shang court and to base such a statement on the fact that beliefs of Shang would automatically have to appear in Zhou is rather farfetched. The snake is the directional emblem of the north, however Major claims that this first occurred during the late Warring States and early Han period. He further states that under the Shang state the snake was an emblem of celestial divinity and centrality (Major, 1999, p.129). I feel that the last statement actually weakens his case as Nugua though she is half snake has never been associated with the north, but rather the centre. This again makes it more plausible that she arrived in the Shang period.

Birrell suggests that depictions of a twisted cord in Shang and pre-Shang cultures might be a reference to the builder’s cord that Nugua uses to complete her creation of men (see myth on p.89). The cord certainly becomes her emblem in later iconography (Birrell, 1993, p.33). I would think that if you depict a tool, it is likely that there exists a corresponding myth to that given tool. Since a tool in itself, though helpful it might be, usually never gets much attention in depictions. The question then becomes whether or not it is the myth of Nugua’s creation of men or some other myth? A builder’s cord is an unusual element in a myth and I would not think it could have been part of several myths. Of course the builder’s

cord could have been depicted as a celebration of progress, but I find it plausible that it is an allusion to Nugua or a proto-version of Nugua.

Sanxingdui

c. 1400 to 1000 BC (Yu, 1999, p.96)

Another archaeological site is found in Guanghan Sanxingdui, in the Sichuan Basin. It has been termed the Sanxingdui culture and it was a thriving sophisticated bronze society (Ching, 1993, p.17). Yu states that Sanxingdui was a city with a total area of 2.6 square kilometres surrounded by large city walls made of rammed earth. It even had a drainage system (Yu, 1999, p.96). Some sites found outside the city have been connected with the Sanxingdui culture, these are much older and stem from about 2700 BC (Nelson, 2008, p.168). Inside the city two pits were discovered, which are assumed to be of sacrificial significance. The pits were arranged in the shape of five stars. The first pit dates back to c.1300-1200 BC, the second from c.1100 BC (Clunas, 1997, p.19). From the two pits more than seven hundred extraordinary gold leaf objects, jade and bronze articles next to burned animal bones, elephant tusks and cowrie shells have been unearthed. The artifacts and animal remains had been ritually buried (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.66). Sanxingdui culture possessed absolute mastery of casting techniques, and some of the bronze items exceed what was made in Anyang, the Shang capital, at that point in time. Here an exceptional figure in bronze was found that have left many an onlooker baffled. The figure has large ears, protruding eyes, double pupils and measure 262 centimeters high. No other bronze figure of this height has been found from the same time period and it weighs no less then 180 kilograms (Ching, 1993, p.17) (Nelson, 2008, p.168). Also within this culture large impressive bronze trees have been unearthed (Nelson, 2008, p.157). This could have been a symbol of their world tree or axis mundi. According to Eliade, Hultkrantz, and Sidky is the world tree a symbol of the link between the upper, middle, and lower worlds which the shaman travels through (Eliade, 1974, p.264-265) (Hultkrantz, 1978, p.13) (Sidky, 2008, p.117). Certainly a lot of effort must have gone into making these astonishing trees, so I assume they must have had some great significance. Another possible sign of shamanism is the fact that birds are prominent in the iconography of the Sanxingdui culture (Nelson, 2008, p.169). Which we know is a typical

feature of shamanistic beliefs as they symbolize the magical flight of the shaman. Of course we will never know for sure, as we do not have sufficient data on the culture.

When this site was discovered it created an earthquake in Chinese archaeology as the aesthetic is strikingly different than anything else found and gave us a whole new understanding of the period. Though most of the findings are of local origin, some objects are hybrid or imported (Clunas, 1997, p.19). Such as Shang style bronze vessel. Showing according to Debaine-Francfort and Nelson that they had contact with Shang and other cultures (Debaine-Francfort, 1998, p.64-66) (Nelson, 2008, p.168). So clearly the Shang state was not alone, and must have had some impressive neighbors.

The Zhou State

Zhou: 1122 to 256 BC (Traditionally) (Fairbank, 2002)

Western Zhou: 1046 to 771 BC (Thorp, 2006)

Eastern Zhou: 771 to 256 BC (Fairbank, 2002)

When the *Zhou* dynasty replaced the Shang the worship of ancestors and nature deities continued, while the high god changed to *Tian*. Tian is the impersonal deity of Heaven. Heaven was a power with the ability to bestow the right to rule on the king. Here enters the concept of *tianming* or Heaven's mandate, which is a moral criteria for holding power. If the king ruled poorly, then Tian would confer authority to another king (Fairbank, 2002, p.40). Thus the king in power was supposedly 'blessed' by Tian and as such went by the term 'Son of God'. According to Ching was the deity Tian during the Zhou Dynasty considered to be an ancestral spirit of the royal family. Further more she states that oracle bones and the *Shijing* (Book of Odes) refer to departed kings who ascended to heaven and took their place by the Lord on high (Ching, 1993, p.17). Loewe on the other side claims that the kings were no longer thought to ascend to heaven and take their place there. Further more that this was a tradition that ended with the Shang state (Loewe, 2005, p.19).

Human sacrifices did not end with the Zhou dynasty, as an example, the governor of the upper Yellow River district was shocked to find that young girls were being sacrificed as brides for the god of the Huang He. This was done to please the god in spring time. The

governor, who found it to be barbarian, put a stop to it some time in the fifth century BC (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.847). In fact, human sacrifices continued for a long time in the southern areas of China.

The Wu during Zhou

Hurtado states that Shamanism continued to be important during the Zhou, but there are signs of a gradual decline. For instance a toning down of “excessive” ritual practices took place, such as human sacrifice. He further claims that female shamans became less and less usual (Hurtado, 1990, p.20). According to Boileau during the Zhou Dynasty the wu was seen as someone who specialized in dealing with unfortunate events. Sometimes even viewed as an evil sorcerer that had resident in the wilderness. Boileau states that it was assumed that out in the untamed nature the wu had contact with the dead and impurity. Public copulation was said to take place out there in the wilderness. The female wu would entice the gods to come to earth, when the god descended rain would fall and this was interpreted as sexual intercourse. Boileau states that the wu in Zhou times was the embodiment of malevolent aspects of nature (Boileau, 2002, p.376).

Nelson however states that during the Zhou dynasty a somewhat successful endeavor to make the wu into bureaucrats took place. The wu were given explicit tasks, and even placed under the control of an administrator. “Thus the *wu* from the Zhou period do not seem to be individuals who reached the spirits through trance and dance but followers of controlled ritual steps that began to be canonized” (Nelson, 2008, p.146). Loewe states that by the 700 BC the animal world became less prominent in art and mythology (Loewe, 2005, p.18).

Until then the higher animals served as members of the same order of existence as that of *ti* and the spirits of the deceased ancestors. They were admired for their nobility and grandeur, and they too acted as a link between the two worlds. This was at a stage before animals came to be depicted in conflict with man or at the mercy of man, or as objects whom man wished to propitiate (Loewe, 2005, p.18).

This clearly indicates a decline in shamanistic beliefs (at least at the courts), as animals play an important part in shamanistic rituals. This also supports the theory of Ching about the increased secular duties of the king led to a general secularization of the royal court. (Ching, 1993, p.46).

In the **Zuo Zhuan** (c.700-400 BC) there is a passage that states that the duke Xi wanted to burn a wu and a cripple. However the duke was advised against this as it was believed that this would have no effect and might even worsen the drought they were suffering under. A commentary on this text by Du Yu states that the wu is a female (Boileau, 2002, p.363). In a society where human sacrifices are accepted and given significant meaning, it would be logical, as I see it, to sacrifice the one person closest to the gods. The shaman has a special contact with the divine realm and would perhaps be interpreted as a sacrifice the gods would be particular satisfied with.

In the **Guoyu** it is evident that the wu is a female shaman.

Anciently, humans and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were 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 into them. The possessors of such powers were, if men, called xi (shaman), and, if women, wu (shamanesses). Those who supervised the positions of the spirits at the ceremonies, made the vases (used to) present victims, and appropriate clothes, made the descendants of the past saints glorious, knew the (sacred) names of mountains and rivers, the principal ancestors, (dealt with) all the affairs relative to the ancestral temple, (were in charge of) the difference between father and son (in the ritual), the enforcement of respect, the proper order of ceremonies, the principles of respect and justice, the proper physical behavior, the control of fidelity and trust, offerings and purifications and manifested respect to the luminous deities, were the Zhu (invocators) officers. Those who established family and personal names, who knew what plant should be cultivated for each season, the color (of the hairs of) sacrificial animals, the different kinds of jade and textile, the different colors of (ritual) clothes, the (proper) quantity of (ritual) vessels, the rules (concerning) the order of ancestral tablets, the proper positions during sacrifices, mounds and swept soil (for sacrifices), deities of above and below, the origin of the clans and abided by the ancient rules were the Zong officers. Therefore, there were officers for Heaven, Earth, the spirits and the different things, who were called the five officers, who ruled their own domain (of competence) and did not intermingle (with each other's domain). So the people were trustful, the spirits had a luminous virtue and the people and spirits had their own realm. There was respect and no untoward familiarity. As a consequence, the spirits sent down blessing on the people, and accepted from them their offerings. There were no natural calamities. (Guoyu, chapter; Chuyuxia, 18.1A-B) (Boileau, 2002, p.356-357).

So here we are presented with individuals who have a special understanding of the upper world and lower world. This unique knowledge would be noticed by the spirits, who then would descend into the wu or the xi. Which seem to have clear resemblance with the role of the shaman. Still we should keep in mind that the Guoyu was probably compiled between 500 to 400 BC, as it also speaks of the five officers, which wu and xi are apart of, who ruled each their own domain. This supports the statement of Nelson that the wu was becoming a bureaucrat. According to Loewe from the fourth century BC onwards the philosophy of the

five elements became prominent. The five orders supposedly made up all things, both heavenly and earthly (Loewe, 2005, p.18-19). So I feel the presentation of the wu in the Guoyu is a somewhat removed from the wu of the Shang dynasty, as the religious duties of the wu seems to have changed.

Now I shall shortly return to the debate about the original gender of the wu. Nelson argues that since *xi* does not occur as early as wu and “the unmarked member of the pair is female” that the wu was female in origin (Nelson, 2008, p.5). This is of course possible, but I would not conclude in either direction. The word wu could have arrived from a group of people that only had female shamans, and the word then became adopted by other groups. So there may not have been a point in time when all the shamans were female.

The State of Chu

C.1000 to 223 BC

Chu was a state situated in central and southern China. The current Hubei province was its center, it did however stretch up into the Henan province, east to the Anhui province, south to the Hunan, and also entered into parts of Sichuan. The state has not been given its rightful place in Chinese history, as Confucian scholars of the Han Dynasty in their writing of history focused on the northern states of Xia, Shang and Zhou. Thus ignoring that Chu had once been one of the greatest kingdoms of pre-imperial China. Exactly when the state emerged is unknown, but Blakeley suggests that Chu had formed as a state before the end of the Shang. Also that Chu and Zhou had affiliations before the Zhou conquered Shang. During 900 and 800 BC the state of Zhou attacked the Chu several times. The outcome of this conflict is somewhat blurred. Blakely suggests that the Chu state went its own way, while the Zhou state experienced a decline in power that culminated with the end of Western Zhou in 771 BC (Blakeley, 1999, p.10). By this time the Zhou state was forced to move its capital further east to Luoyang, beginning the Eastern Zhou period. From this time onward the Zhou state was merely a shadow of its old self, as the real power was in the hands of other territorial states. In the power vacuum created in the aftermath of 771 BC the state of Chu was a major player for power. When Chu was at its military peak the state almost succeeded at dominating early China (Blakeley, 1999, p.13). A conflict between Chu and the up and coming state of Qin

started in the late fourth century, and ended with the collapse of Chu in 223 BC (Blakeley, 1999, p.20).

Ying was the second capital of the Chu state after Danyang. Archeology reveals that the Ying capital consisted of 16 square kilometers surrounded by walls that were more than seven meters high. Nelson states that texts tell of the Ying city that existed from 689 to 278 BC. Outside the city more than 800 graves belonging to the period have been found (Nelson, 2008, p.164). This has been a great source of knowledge about the Chu culture.

Major states that shamanism in a large degree was a formal and recognized part of Chu religion (Major, 1999, p.138). Artwork from Chu shows typical shamanistic symbols. The most common motifs are birds, snakes and deer, in a combination with quasi-human and feline figures. The deer often symbolized only by the antlers. Major particularly stresses the importance of dragons, snakes, and snake like creatures in Chu iconography and points out that this shows the strong continuation of iconographic Shang motifs in Chu culture. Chu tombs have unraveled sculptures and depictions of individuals that look very much like they are in ecstatic trance. So states that shaman-like human figures with decorative headdresses and long robes often are depicted in contact with snakes and other serpentine creatures (So, 1999, p.45). Drums of great size have been found which were mounted on beautifully detailed stands. The stands most common motif was that of long-legged birds standing on top of tigers (Nelson, 2008, p.164). “Heir to the ritual legacies of the Shang and Zhou kings in the north and rooted in the native customs of the south, Chu art served as a geographical and temporal link between the ancient Shang-Zhou traditions and the subsequent Han regimes, as well as a herald for later Chinese artistic trends.” (So, 1999, p.34). Nugua and Xi wangmu are frequently portrait in art from the Chu state (Nelson, 2008, p.165). In a Chu tomb from fourth century BC, in the Jiangling region, bamboo divination texts was found that contained a list of the three divine ancestors. These were Lao Tong, Zhu Rong and Yu Yin. According to Cook and Blakeley is Yu Yin a mysterious female that also goes by the name Yu Xiong, who traditionally is regarded as an early tribal leader of the Chu people. They suggest that Yu Xiong was a Chu manifestation of Nugua, while Zhu Rong was a manifestation of Fuxi (Cook and Blakeley, 1999, p.3). Now if they state that Yu Xiong was a Chu manifestation of Nugua then it would follow that they believe that Nugua had a place in earlier cultures. It is not uncommon that a deity goes by several names in China, Fuxi for instance has through the times been designated by many names.

Warring States Periods

403 to 221 BC

The Warring States period was as the name indicates a time of great rivalry and warfare that gave people a desire for peace. This again fostered an age of philosophers.

According to Linduff did the Confucian editing of myths start as early as the fourth Century BC. Linduff points out that the oldest Chinese texts, such as *Shijing* and *Zuo Zhuan* rarely make mention of females, as the focus is put on noble men and scholars (Linduff, 2003, p.60).

The concept of Tianming no longer served a purpose during the Warring States period as a multitude of states fought for dominion, and no single king could make a credible claim to be the 'chosen one' (Loewe, 2005, p.19).

Nelson mentions that several elite graves from the Warring States period have unearthed large metal trees with jade ornaments (Nelson, 2008, p.157). This could be a symbol of the axis mundi. But in general it is hard to determine the religious sentiments of the Warring States period. However on a Hu bronze vessel (wine vessel) two dancing female figures are depicted. They have breasts and the heads of owls. With arms outstretched and swirling skirts. One of the figures skirt curves into a bird like tail. Johnson points out that the costume of the shamans in the tribes of the Tungus in Siberia also had costumes resembling owls (Johnson, 1994, p.42). Which might be an indication that shamanism was still thriving. Also shortly prior to the Warring States period Gou Jian the King of Yue (r. 496-465 BC) built an altar in honor of Xi wangmu in his capital. Here offerings were made to the goddess in hopes of long life and happiness (Irwin, 1990. p.58).

According to Loewe from the fourth century BC onwards the philosophy of the five elements became prominent. This created a new concept of di. Divided in to five di each designated with a color, yellow, green, red, white and black. The five di supposedly made up all things, both heavenly and earthly (Loewe, 2005, p.18-19). Loewe claims that these five orders became worshiped in the cults of state during the second and first centuries BC. Among these five the power or god of yellow (Huang Di) became the most prominent, known later as the Yellow Emperor (Loewe, 2005, p.19). Eventually in time the Yellow Emperor became venerated as the ultimate ancestor and creator of the Chinese civilization.

The tomb of Zeng Hou Yi at Suixian from the late fifth century BC contained two lacquered garment boxes. The first box depicted the Northern Dipper constellation which was surrounded by the names of the twenty-eight lunar lodges. The depiction was flanked by a dragon and a tiger, symbols of East and West. The second box has two intertwined snakes with human heads, which by the Han Dynasty was a typical image of Nüwa and Fuxi. In addition there is painted two trees on the box with branches that twirl up like discs. The shorter tree has nine branches, while the larger tree has eleven branches. Amidst the trees is a bird that has been shot with an arrow from the archer on the ground (So, 1999, p.43-44).

The Qin Dynasty

221 to 206 BC

The Qin dynasty created the first true unification of China. The Emperor's goal was permanent political and cultural unification. In this process, it is assumed that some writings that were not to the state's liking were destroyed. By this China may have lost much of its cultural heritage (Ebrey, 2003, p.60). So texts mentioning the Queen Mother of the West or Nüwa might have been lost. The book burning of the first Emperor of the consolidating dynasty Qin has left us with very little information about religion in China before 221 BC. According to Bogucki et.al what we are left with is archaeological findings and inferences about post beliefs drawn from writings of the first and second century AD. But all is not lost, as of yet over 30 000 tombs that belong to the Qin and Han eras have been discovered. However only a few have so far been excavated. Logic dictates that some of these graves must contain intact wooden and silk manuscripts and in time we will know more about early Chinese culture and religion.

China in ancient times did not make up a mono culture. There existed several cultures at the same time which probably had their very own set of beliefs. The main goal of the Qin dynasty was to create a unified culture.

Han Dynasty

Western Han 206 BC to 8 AD

Eastern Han 25 to 220 AD

The Han dynasty is by many considered a time of victory for Confucianism. Confucianism became the official state ideology under the Western Han (206 BC-AD 8) with various elements from other schools of thought (Idema and Haft, 1997, p.26). There were of course exceptions like the Emperor *Wendi* (r.179-157 BC) who favored Daoism. In fact Daoism becomes an organized religion at the end of Han (Cahill, 1993, p.18). Loewe is of the opinion that from 31 BC the concept of Tian as a giver of the moral right to rule returned as part of the cults observed by the emperor's court (Loewe, 2005, p.19).

The Confucians strongly opposed human sacrifice and the belief in folk magic (Bogucki et.al., 2008, p. 848). According to Huartado in all of this shamanism did not disappear, despite official opposition. It found new support in popular religion (Huartado, 1990, p.21). However Ebrey states that the Emperor *Wudi*, who ruled from 141 to 87 BC, “welcomed to his court astrologers, alchemists, seers, and shamans” (Ebrey, 2003, p.71). Despite being considered a patron of Confucian education. Loewe states that texts written under the Han Dynasty shows a continued belief in the shaman and shamanistic powers. Shamanism was especially prominent in certain areas, such as the region of the old Chu state and the area of the former state of Qi which was situated on the Shandong peninsula. The Qi state supposedly held women in high regard, and had a family tradition of which the first born daughter was given the title of ‘child of shaman’. She was in charge of the family's religious rites. This must have been a serious and time consuming task as she was not allowed to marry (Loewe, 2005, p.106).

By the end of the Han period, the spiritual hierarchy began to take the structure of the official imperial order (Irwin, 1990, p.53). “Subsequently, the Han interest in the collection and annotation of the earlier classic sources led to the characteristic Chinese trait of “euhemerization” by which mythic elements were given appropriate historical settings and rationalized in accordance with dominant Confucian values by transforming the divine spirits into exemplary human mortals” (Irwin, 1990, p.54). They humanize the supernatural beings. For example at the end of the Han dynasty Xi wangmu's ability to give immortality is slowly changed to longevity (Birrell, 1993, p.174). Though this did not effect the general population

much. In these official Confucian circles the roles of female divinities were played down, and given roles as subordinates to the male divinities, making it difficult for the modern scholar to uncover their original status. So one must to some degree reconstruct the origin of the goddesses as their natures have been radically changed throughout the centuries.

In time poets started describing romantic love in connection with the goddesses. Their animal side disappeared, and great focus was put on beauty. The term “divine woman” came eventually to be associated with prostitute (Hurtado, 1990, p.17).

Xi Wangmu’s Role during the Han Dynasty

In the sources found in the Han dynasty, like art, literature, histories, geographies, mentioning the Queen Mother of the West increase. Different cults to the Queen Mother of the West merge into one goddess. “Her importance continually grows during the Han as she absorbs attributes and functions of many deities of diverse nature and origin” (Cahill, 1993, p.18). Xi wangmu is often depicted in Han art (Nelson, 2008, p.165). In the second century AD Xi wangmu became prominent in iconography (Loewe, 2005, p.32). She was portrayed on stone reliefs, in fresco and on bronze mirrors. Loewe argues that since such objects have been found in graves scattered around China the cult of Xi wangmu must have reached far and wide (Loewe, 2005, p.119).

During the Han period the Queen Mother of the West and here kingdom becomes associated with the exotic occident, and thus connected to the lore of the newly opening west trade and exploration along the Silk Route (Cahill, 1993, p.19). As a possible example there are several paintings from this time that shows the Queen Mother of the West sitting like the Buddha dressed in what seems to be a monk robe (Cahill, 1993, p.27). However James believes this is a separate development as she states that influence of Buddhism first appears in China in the first century AD and these depictions originated earlier then that (James, 1995, p.26-27). Bogucki et.al suggest that a military voyage to the northwestern parts of China in 113 BC not only had the mission of securing the Silk Road but also to search for the Kunlun Mountain and the Queen Mother of the West (Bogucki et.al, 2008, p.848). Her realm was a supposed place where the rivers and the trees carried the secret of deathlessness. Loewe states that Xi wangmu ability to provide immortality for man first became a fixed feature in the first century AD (Loewe, 2005, p.32).She was surrounded by mythical creatures, like a crow with

three legs, a fox with nine tails, a trance-dancing frog, an elixir-producing rabbit and very skinny longhaired men with wings (James, 1995, p.20). Han cosmologists associated her with the *yin-yang* dualism. She is possibly an androgynous deity, in whom the yin and yang cosmic forces become one. As she has been depicted with both the sun and the moon, symbols of yin and yang. However there is no evidence that this was the image of the Queen Mother of the West in the pre-Han times and the early Han (Birrell, 1993, p.172).

By the last century BC she became coupled with a male partner, the King Father of the East, *Dong wangfu*. Dubs argues that this is a result of propriety. A female goddess that created the cosmos was simply too much to take for the Confucian upper classes. Women should know their place (Dubs, 1942, p.223-224). Irwin speaks of *Dong wanggong* (The Eastern King of the Sky) as her consort. He is portrayed as having a human head on top of a tiger's body and four tails. Together they were now supposed to have engendered heaven and earth and all beings (Irwin, 1990, p.56). I would like to add that the importance of family in Confucian thought might also have something to do with this new development. Another possibility is that the *yin* and *yang* dualism became more important, and *yin* is impossible without its counterpart *yang*. According to Loewe Xi wangmu and her consort only met once a year. "...from their union the cycle of universal being drew refreshment and renewal" (Loewe, 2005, p.101). However Lullo states that the pairing of Xi wangmu and Dong wangfu was an iconographic trait of the Shandong region and was not common in the rest of the Han Empire (Lullo, 2005, p.391).

In Han art Xi wangmu is never depicted with her tiger teeth or leopard's tail. Even though my main focus is on the early known myths of Xi wangmu, there are certain attributes that are regularly connected with Xi wangmu in iconography that do not appear in any known text from either the pre-Han or the Han period. According to James was Xi wangmu from the early Han Dynasty onwards repeatedly depicted with a toad, a rabbit, and a nine tailed fox. Xian, the skinny men with long robes and wings appear to a less degree. Both the rabbit and the toad are on occasion depicted in the moon, sometimes together. The rabbit holds a mortar and a pestle, tools necessary to create the elixir of deathless (James, 1995, p.21).

In the Henan Province two tombs from the first century BC reveals a similar understanding of Xi wangmu's role. In the first tomb the Queen Mother of the West is depicted as seated on a throne wearing her crown. A man is traveling towards her on the back of a snake. In his hand he is holding a three-pronged branch. This is believed to be a representation of the deceased man to which the tomb belonged to. The other tomb, which

belonged to Bu Qianqiu, Xi wangmu is sitting in a cloud. Towards her is a man riding on a snake and a woman riding on a three-headed bird. In addition around Xi wangmu there are depictions of a white tiger, a man with wings, a blue/green dragon, the moon and two winged leopard-like creatures (Liu et al., 2005, p.256). James states “Pictures of Xiwangmu appear in Han tombs during the first century B.C. and clearly pertain to her role as the *hun* soul’s initial contact with the realm of the spirits and the spirit world..” (James, 1995, p.21). The deceased as mentioned in the two examples are traveling towards the goddess on snakes or birds. This must therefore be a symbol of the journey the hun soul makes towards the heavens.

Later Xi wangmu became the most significant Daoist goddess in the **Tang** dynasty (618-907) (Cahill, 1993, p.1). She also became worshiped as a high ancestress by Daoist cults (Cahill, 1993, p.18).

Xi wangmu and the Millenarian cult

The first recorded millenarian movement in China found place in 3 BC. It was a cult based around myths of Xi wangmu. Millenarianism is “the expectation of an imminent collapse of the entire social order and its replacement with a perfect new order” (McGuire, 1997, p.38). The expected collapse can take on cosmic dimensions in the eyes of the believers.

Xi wangmu’s worshipers came from all segments of society. Throughout the country shrines were being raised in her honor (Ebrey, 2003, p.71). Reference to imperially sponsored construction of an altar built in her honor is also found. “She emerged as the central figure of a peasant cult that arose in Shandong and swept through the country in 3 B.C.E.” (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, p.27). Loewe agrees with this and states that the millenarian cult of Xi wangmu started in the east and moved through China until it reached the Han capital city (Loewe, 2005, p.120). The millenarian cult took place close to the end of Western Han. The Han state experienced great corruption in this time period. The court was criticized for its extravagance and for the influence the eunuchs held. The average man was taxed heavily while rich landlords evaded taxation. There had been a prolonged neglect of river defences, and so the Yellow River would burst its banks from time to time (Roberts, 2006, p.33). Emperor Ai was on his accession in 7 BC only seventeen years of age. He was unfortunately not a success as a ruler and died as a cause of that in the year 1 BC. According to Paludan was he obsessed with his young lover Dong Xian, and Aidi kept showering him with gifts and titles (Paludan, 1998, p.42). Nonetheless the millenarian uprising was eventually put down.

I will now shortly examine how this millenarian cult came into being. Historically religious change is often a product of social change. So I shall now look at what social occurrence came before the cult of the Queen Mother of the West reached frenzied proportions. Typically new sectarian religious movements recruit most members among the lower classes. Because those who find themselves to be content with life rarely participate in such movements. But Charles Glock has brought forth the theory of *relative deprivation*, which takes it beyond economic deprivation. Relative deprivation covers anyone who feels disadvantaged in comparison with others. Thus you will also get participants from the higher classes. (McGuire, 1997, p.160). So let us look at the situation in early 3 BC. The people has experienced a drought, which has led to widespread hunger. Something which naturally leads to great suffering for the peasants. At the same time those among the upper classes that aspired to enter public life must embrace Confucianism (Dubs, 1938, p.435). McGuire further points out that those who are dissatisfied with the level of religiosity may be drawn to a millenarian cult (McGuire, 1997, p.162). So perhaps individuals in the higher social strata that felt kept down or not fascinated enough with Confucianism, chose to join the cult. The cult of the Queen Mother of the West gave hope of immortality to people. This is a new trait as this ability to give immortality to human beings is not mentioned in the earliest texts. I believe her popularity in 3 BC was generated by shamanistic tendencies in her cult that went well with the feelings of the common man and of those who were anti-Confucian. The fact that she could be associated with fertility gave them a good reason to worship her when suffering from drought. Shamanism was still present among the folk belief, and I see it as natural to go back to the olden ways when the new ones do not seem to be working.

Nugua in the Han Dynasty

In the Han dynasty the multifunctional figure of Fu Hsi frequently became associated with the goddess of Nü Kua. The two deities are represented in Han iconography as two human figures linked by serpentine lower bodies, Fu Hsi holding a carpenter's square, Nü Kua a pair of compasses, and both deities holding a length of knotted cord. Thus the primordial and independent goddess of cosmogonic myth is domesticated by Han mythographers and made to serve as the exemplar of the human institution of marriage (Birrell, 1993, p.45).

Nugua is a common motif in art from the Han state (Nelson, 2008, p.165). In early sources Nugua is presented alone, it is not until later that she becomes the consort of Fuxi. Most scholars on the topic states that this occurred in the Han dynasty, like Birrell does here. I believe this coupling started earlier as there are images of two intertwined snakes from the Chu state. Like the lacquered garment box, as mentioned earlier, that stems from late fifth century BC (So, 1999, p.43-44). However it is probable that from Han dynasty onwards it becomes a fixed feature. According to Christie appears Nugua to have been Fuxi's younger sister, until she created marriage and took the position as his wife. Christie and Irwin state that an incestuous creation mythology in connection with flooding was common in the southern Chinese tribes. I would like to add that incestuous creation mythology is also found many places outside of China. For instance in Hindu mythology the concept of primeval incest is a common one (O'Flaherty, 1975, p.25). A great flood destroys humanity and through the incestuous relationship between Nugua and Fuxi a new race begins. In Han times both Fuxi and Nugua are depicted with snake tails that are entangled into a lock. (Irwin, 1990, p.55). Fuxi is carrying a set-square (*ju*), which represent the sky. While Nugua compasses (*gui*), which is round and represents the earth. Together they make up *guiju* which is taken to mean order and proper conduct. As a symbol of yin and yang they are both needed to recreate order after the devastating flood (Christie, 1983, p.88). Another example of this yin and yang symbolism is found in a tomb in Baizhuang, Linyi County, Shandong. Here Nugua and Fuxi are presented separately on carved pictorial tomb stones. Fu xi holds the sun (*ying*) in his hands and Nugua holds the moon (*yin*) (Liu, 2005, p.206).

From some mythological records we learn that first existed the Three Sovereigns (Three August Ones) of respectively Heaven, Earth and Humankind. The three Lords ruled the lands for centuries during a time which bizarre creatures supposedly still existed (Ching, 1993, p.22-23) (Linduff, 2003, p.59-60). Who exactly these three were differs from text to text. According to Linduff had Fuxi by the end of the Han Dynasty become canonized as the first of the Three Sovereigns to appear (Linduff, 2003, p.61). Irwin on the other side claims

that Nüwa is apart of the Three August Ones and as such a bringer of civilization (Irwin, 1990, p.55). In a depiction from stone chamber two in the Wu family shrines we see a presentation of the Three Sovereigns. However four people are portrayed, as Nüwa and Fuxi are counted as one. The two others being Zhurong and Shennong (Liu and Hsu, 2005, p.171).

In medieval times and onwards Nüwa is sometimes presented as the Supreme Matchmaker (Gaomei). Thus she is the celestial controller of marriage and child birth. Ironically she forbids marriage between family members. Further more Fuxi becomes the dominant partner in the relationship, leaving Nüwa in an inferior role. Far removed from her original position (Irwin, 1990, p.56).

Texts Referring to Xi Wangmu

The *Zhuangzi* (c.300-200 BC), presents *Xi wangmu* as someone who has found the Way (Birrell, 1993, p.172). From the *Zhuangzi*: “The Queen Mother of the West obtained it and took up her seat at Shao Kuang. No one knows her beginning; no one knows her end” (6.IIa, Cahill, 1993, p.14). What she has obtained is the Way or the Dao. As Zhuangzi states nobody knows her beginning and he further states that nobody knows her end. Which one could argue makes her a mystery. However as I understand the thoughts of Daoism everything is a result of the endless transformations of Qi. Moeller states in regards to the philosophical text *Daode jing* (c.400 BC) “Thus the Dao proceeds in a circle of continuous beginnings that never end. There is neither an absolute beginning nor an absolute ending” (Moeller, 2006, p.116-117). Logic would then dictate that there would be no need to state that her origin and eventual fate is unknown. This again returns to the idea of the Queen Mother of the West being a great mystery, like the Dao itself. *Xi wangmu* might even be in this passage a symbol of the Dao. The Dao is unfathomable and unnamable. It can not be properly expressed in words, so how then do you explain it? The use of symbolism may be an easier way to teach people of the Dao. Of course Daoism absorbed a lot of different thoughts, which at times are even contradictory.

The full passage goes as follows:

“Hsi-wei got it and held up heaven and earth. Fu-hsi got it and entered into the mother of breath. The Big Dipper got it and from ancient times has never wavered. The Sun and the Moon got it and from ancient times have never rested. K’an-p’i got it and entered K’un-lun. P’ing-i got it and wandered in the great river. Chien Wu got it and lived in the great mountain. The Yellow Emperor got it and ascended to the cloudy heavens. Chuan Hsü got it and dwelt in the Dark Palace. Yü-ch’iang got it and stood at the limit of the north. The Queen Mother of the West got it and took her seat on Shao-Kuang – nobody knows her beginning, nobody knows her end. P’eng-tsu got it and lived from the age of Shun to the age of the Five Dictators. Fu Yüeh got it and became minister to Wu-ting, who extended his rule over the whole world; then Fu Yüeh climbed up to the Eastern Governor, straddled the Wincrowing Basket and the Tail, and took his place among the ranks of stars.” (Chuang Tzu, Section 6: The great and venerable teacher. P. 77-78).

All figures mentioned in this passage are divine or mythical beings. Unfortunately the myths to which Zhuangzi are referring to are in many cases unknown.

The Queen Mother of the West was described in the *Huainanzi* (c.140 BC) as a great goddess on whom cosmic order depends. This is the earliest known text that make mention of her

ability to give immortality. It tells the story of Chang O who steals the elixir of life from her husband Yi that obtained the potion from Xi wangmu (Birrell, 1993, p.174). The Queen Mother of the West is here clearly presented as a powerful deity that holds the fate of the cosmos in here hands. If it pleases her she can grant you eternal life. Such an elixir has been sought after for centuries by man kind and as of yet we have not stopped.

In the *Shanhaijing* the Queen Mother of the West is mentioned three times. She first appears in Book Two, which Birrell dates to the third century BC, her second appearance is in Book Twelve which Birrell dates to 6 BC, and finally in Book Sixteen which Birrell places in the first century AD (Birrell, 1999, p.xv).

Another three hundred and fifty leagues west is a mountain called Jade Mountain, which is where the Queen Mother of the West dwells. In appearance the Queen Mother of the West is like a human, with a panther's tail and a tigers's fangs, and she is a fine whistler. In her tangled hair she wears the sheng crown. She is the official in charge of vile plagues sent from heaven, and of the five dread evils. (Shanhaijing, 2a, Birrell, 1993, p.174).

In the 1999 Birrell translation, she uses "a leopard's tail" (Birrell, 1999, p.24). Birrell translates *sheng* with 'victory crown' and it was supposedly made of jade. Jade is a symbol of incorruptibility and eternal life. Nelson asserts that jade has been considered as sacred to the spirits (Nelson, 2008, p.157). Her crown, the *sheng*, is one of her most fixed attributes. It is a tool which she uses to weave the fabrics of the cosmos (Cahill, 1993, p.16). So we see here a duality between the creator (the sheng) and the destroyer (the tiger), indicating her total control of the cosmos.

As for the mountain of the serpent shamans, on top of it is a person brandishing a cup as she stands facing east. One source calls it the Tortoise Mountain. The Queen Mother of the West leans on a stool; moreover, she wears a sheng and carries a staff. To the south are three blue birds who take food for the Queen Mother of the West, north of the K'un-lun barrens" (*Shanhaijing*, 12.Ia, Cahill, 1993, p.19).

Here she is clearly connected to shamanism as the name of the mountain indicates. The mountain is by some called the "Tortoise Mountain". Tortoise shells as we know have been used for divination. We also get the description of the mountain as being a place where one finds serpent shamans. This again strengthens the symbol of the serpent in China as connected to shamanism. This is interesting in regards to Nugua. Xi wangmu or someone else faces east

while holding up a cup, perhaps a ritual vessel. In this passage she also wears the crown and has a staff which I would state makes her appear as royalty. This could perhaps strengthen the theory of Nelson as the shaman being a ruler. She is after all on top of the mountain where other shamans also are found. She might be the chief shaman. Sidky states that in Nepalese shamanism the spirit of the primordial shaman is important (Sidky, 2008, p.31). So it seems logical that Xi wangmu was seen as a primordial shaman. We are also introduced to her three birds, which bring her food. She is a deity or spirit that requires sustenance. This again might have a connection to the evidence we have found in China of ritual feasting next to graves.

Beyond it, there is Mount Flamingfire. If you throw something at it, it immediately burns up. There is someone wearing a victory headdress. She has tiger fangs and a panther's tail. She lives in a cave. Her name is Queen Mother of the West. This mountain possesses all the myriad creatures that there are on earth (Shanhaijing, Book sixteen, Great Wilderness: the West) (Birrell, 1999, p.176).

In this segment she is placed on Mount Flamingfire. Birrell has made the suggestion that this denotes a volcanic mountain. Her animal side is described again and her residence is placed inside a cave. How a volcanic mountain could possibly be the place of a representation of all the animals on the earth is a peculiar problem indeed. But myths do not always make sense. Perhaps it is not a volcano, but rather surrounded by fire. In any case the mountain holds all the creatures of the world making her the "Lady of the beasts". As the shaman she is the charmer of animals. In addition Eliade mentioned that the shaman is seen as a master of fire (Eliade, 1974, p.474). According to Sidky the Nepalese shamans eat burning wicks and dance on hot coals as a demonstration of power (Sidky, 2008, p.103).

In *Shiji* (145-c.85 BC) we find a poem called the "Fu on The Mighty One". One part tells of Xi wangmu.

"Behold!" cries the Mighty one, "the Queen Mother of the West,
With her hair of silvery white
And her burden of hairpins, living in a cave!
Fortunately she has her three-legged crow to bring her food.
Yet if she must live in this state forever,
Though it be for ten thousand ages, what joy can she find?"
(Shi Ji, 116, The account of the southwestern barbarians) (Sima Qian, 1993, p.299)

Here there seems to be some concern that her immortality might eventually make her bored. It also indicates that she can not leave her mountain. In this passage she is also placed in a cave and luckily has a bird with three legs that fetch her food. Xi wangmu hair is described as

white, which is fitting as the color of the west is white. Instead of a sheng she has hairpins. The hairpins remind me of the children buried with hairpins in the Yangshao site of Yuanjunmiao, which I argue were little shamans to be but died prematurely.

Just before the fall of the Western Han, a peasant cult in the honor of the Queen Mother of the West is interpreted as a sign of the heavens diminishing support of the royal family and a rise in the power of *yin* by the authors of the *Han Shu* (first century AD). The north-eastern provinces had suffered a drought and rebellions broke out. This was the beginning of the collapse of the Western Han (Cahill, 1993, p.21). According to the *Han Shu* there were times when the worship of Xi wangmu reached hysterical proportions:

People were running about in a state of alarm, holding stalks of hemp they passed from one to another, saying they were delivering the wand of the edict of the Queen Mother of the West. Thousand of people converge on the roads, some with dishevelled hair and barefoot... . They passed through twenty-six commanderies and principalities on their way to the capital... [Even those who stayed home in their villages] became caught up in the enthusiasm, holding services, setting up gambling boards for lucky throws, and singing and dancing in worship of the Queen Mother. They also passed around texts reading “The Mother tells the people that those who wear this talisman will not die (Han shu, Ebrey, 2003, p.73)

Again her ability to bestow immortality to humans is mentioned. Like herself some of the supporters have unkempt hair, as we shall see is a possible suggestion of shamanism due to ecstatic trance. Singing, dancing and games of chance have been associated to the worship of Xi wangmu.

Chu ci (c.400-5 BC) does not describe the Queen Mother of the West but rather her mountain range Kunlun.

Where is K'un-lun with its Hanging Garden? How many miles high are its ninefold walls? Who goes through the gates in its four sides? When the north-east one opens, what wind is it that passes through? What land does the sun not reach to? How does the Torch Dragon light it? (Chu ci, Tien wen, 35-55) (Hawkes, 1959, p.49).

“What land does the sun not reach to?” The Kunlun mountain range is a magical place so far away that it is not reached by the sun. Instead it is illuminated by the Torch Dragon. The first question seems to contain the answer to some of the later questions. This is not the only

example of questions containing answers in Tian wen. It might be referring to Xi wangmu when asking “Who goes through the gates in its four sides?”.

Xi Wangmu and Ecstatic Trance

To reach the realm of the spirits the shaman must enter an ecstatic trance. Without communication with the spirits one is no shaman. Xi wangmu is a deity, and as Goldin argues Xi wangmu probably is best translated into “Spirit-Mother of the West” (Goldin, 2002, p.85). So she is definitely a spirit. Then the question becomes would a spirit have any need for ecstatic trance? Her land was thought possible to reach, even though it existed apart from the profane world. But does she travel freely among the three levels of cosmos? It does not seem likely, as she seems fixed to her mountain. But it appears to me that the mountain is an access point that she controls. We should keep in mind that the corporal form of the human shaman is fixed to earth but that the soul travels freely. So if she is a primordial shaman then it is only natural that she stays on her mountain, and sends of her spirit helpers.

One can argue that Xi wangmu herself could be said to show signs of ecstatic trance. Cahill draws the link between dishevelled hair and the shamanistic trance (Cahill, 1993, p.17). Hair has a tendency to give the same associations cross-culturally. In other words there exist certain patterned social responses. Edmund Leach says long hair symbolizes unrestrained sexuality. While C.R. Hall claims long hair represents being outside society (Morris, 1987, p.221). But these theories say nothing about long unkempt hair. As we read in Han Shu both the Queen Mother of the West and her worshipers had dishevelled hair. The messy hair could also be a symbol of her uncivilized nature as half beast. On the other side she is considered to be the oldest Daoistic goddess, and Daoism does not condemn sexuality as many other religions do. Perhaps the clearest sign of this ecstatic trance is found in Xi wangmu’s entourage where we find the trance-dancing toad. The first time I read about the depictions of the trance-dancing toad I wondered how on earth do you depict such a thing? However after seeing the depictions I am left with no doubt that the toad is indeed in an ecstatic trance.

Xi wangmu: Main Spirit and ‘Costume’

Xi wangmu is described as a goddess with a human body, a tail of a leopard, and the teeth of a tiger. The Queen Mother of the West is half beast and half human. She could be seen as a

savage goddess living among wild beasts. But she is usually also presented as wearing a crown made of jade. This gives her a more civilized aspect. Cahill claims Shanhaijing has elements that present the Queen Mother of the West as a shamanistic deity due to her special headdress, leopard's tail, and tiger's teeth that are similar to the costumes worn by Chinese shamans (Cahill, 1993, p.16). I would argue that her appearance would equal the main spirit in a shaman. The main spirit is the spirit that takes up its abode inside the shaman. This main spirit usually takes animal form. In this case a feline creature. The wearer of the shaman's costume becomes what he or she displays. Xi wangmu's 'costume' is her tiger's teeth and leopard's tail. Shamans in Nepal believe that they can transform themselves into tigers or incarnate tiger spirits (Sidky, 2008, p.3). Xi wangmu has in addition the crown which makes her a queen. Also it should be mentioned that the Nepalese shamans have three types of headgear one of which is a crown (Sidky, 2008, p.88). Both the tiger and the leopard are feline creatures that are typically solitary animals. The Queen Mother of the West is most often in the early references portrait alone, only visited by her helpers. Further more the tiger and the leopard are both excellent hunters. Which shows her fierceness and great powers. The leopard is in addition a nocturnal creature and Xi wangmu resides in a land so far away it is not reached by the sunlight. But since the tiger is the symbol of the west I would think that the tiger is her most important part. In Han art she is sometime in the Shandong area depicted with wings (James, 1995, p.28). This could be an association to the magical flight of the shaman.

Healing Powers

One important aspect of the shaman's role is the ability to heal. I would think that the healing of a deity would be on a grander scale than that of a human shaman. In the Shanhaijing Xi wangmu appears as a powerful mountain goddess, which controls evil influences like diseases and natural disasters. According to Birrell her charge of "Catastrophes from the Sky and the Five Destructive Forces" portrays the Queen Mother of the West as an avenging goddess (Birrell, 1993, p.173) (Birrell, 1999, p.24). Irwin agrees with this, but also points out that this changed with time as he states "As an early goddess of plague and calamity, she later became the goddess of long life (thus withholding her more primal powers)" (Irwin, 1990, p.58). Certainly by the Han Dynasty she was seen to have the ability to save humans from plague

and disaster and even give immortality. Something that seems obvious in regards to the millenarian peasant rebellion that broke out in her honor in the year 3 BC. Irwin also states that Xi wangmu is associated with water, due her capability to rescue man from drought (Irwin, 1990, p.65). But if we go back to her original role as a goddess of plague and natural disasters, she would surely have the ability to choose on whom she would let such terrible things happen to. So if she is not healing, she can at least refrain from letting disasters occur if she is pleased with the attention she is receiving from the humans.

Xi Wangmu as Hunting Magician

The shaman has a role as a hunting magician, both as a diviner and as a charmer of animals. In the Shanhaijing the Queen Mother of the West is described as “a fine whistler”. This could possibly be a sign of her role as a charmer of animals. I would argue this due to the fact that some domesticated animals responds to whistling. Cahill on the other hand states that skilled whistling signifies breath control and also communication with spirits (Cahill, 1993, p.16). In Book Sixteen of the Shanhaijing she is placed on Mount Flamingfire that contains all the different animals found in the world. Since she is on top of the mountain it makes her the ‘lady of the beasts’, the one who controls the animals. Birrell places Book Sixteen in the first century AD (Birrell, 1999, p.xv). In a tomb from ca. 100 AD she is depicted with a hunting scene (James, 1995, p.26). So this seems to make her a hunting magician. In Nepalese shamanism there is a spirit called the ‘Lord of the beasts’ (Sidky, 2008, p.31). I feel therefore that this closely connects her with shamanism. She also has on some occasions three birds and on other occasions one black bird with three legs that bring her food. So clearly she has some power over animals. Whistling can also easily sound like bird song, which brings us back to the magical flight of the shaman.

Axis Mundi

As Hultkrantz and Eliade pointed out the concept of the world pillar is a world-wide phenomenon in shamanism. The mountain is a favored feature as being a high geographical point, which makes it closer to heaven and yet at the same time close to the underworld. The

axis mundi is a necessity to access the spirit world. Only shamans know how to use this access point. The axis mundi is placed in sacred space and eternal time and connects the different cosmic levels. Xi wangmu is in general associated with the Kunlun Mountain, even though she has also been placed on several different mountains. In the Shanhaijing she is placed on Jade Mountain, Mount Flamingfire and the Mountain of the Serpent Shamans in the Kunlun mountain range.

Her mountain realm is designated as being in the west, and it is said to be the sacred mountain range of K'un-lun. This is an *axis mundi*, a holy place poised equally between sky and land, Heaven and earth, and is visited by gods. It is a paradise for mortals who have been favored with the gift of eternal life and those who have a communion with the gods (Birrell, 1993, p.172).

Xi wangmu is a mountain goddess and as such controls the access point to the other realms. This I would argue gives her role as a shaman or as a spirit with the ability to assist the shamans of the world.

Xi Wangmu's Aiding Spirits

The shaman has aiding spirits that are needed when he or she is to journey to the spirit realms. These spirits usually take on animal shape. I believe Xi wangmu's entourage of animals are aiding spirits. None of her helping animals are more dangerous than herself (tiger/leopard). So it is logical to see her animals as aiding spirits that she has control over. The Queen mother of the West is depicted with both the sun and the moon, symbols of yin and yang. The animals that follow her are also of different types. Like the toad and the rabbit that are lunar residents, while the crow is associated with the sun. Indicating that she controls both sides, and thus the whole cosmos.

The Three Birds

As stated in Book Twelve of the Shanhaijing three birds bring Xi wangmu food. Why are there three birds? One could of course argue in light of Eliades theory of the mythical importance of the number three as a result of the divide of the cosmos into three realms. The three levels are made up of sky, earth and underworld which are connected through a central axis. As the Queen Mother of the West has several shamanistic traits it would not be illogical

that the three birds each represents a cosmic zone. Bird symbolism is strong within shamanism as a representation of the magical flight of the shaman.

The Three Legged Crow

The sun has a long tradition in China of being associated with a black bird, most likely a crow or a raven. I will in this text refer to it as a crow. Hawkes suggest that this association of the sun and the crow arrived as a mythological explanation of sunspots (Hawkes, 1959, p.49). Nelson states that the sun can be considered as a shamanistic symbol in China (Nelson, 2008, p.127). The *Shiji* tell us of the three legged bird that bring Xi wangmu food. As mentioned earlier in tombs from the Han Dynasty there has been found depictions of a crow with three legs. Allan argues that the three legged sun bird is a symbol of the calendric units of a month. Ten days in a three week circular movement of a month (Allan, 1981, p.293-298). Loewe on the other side believes that the three legs of the black bird could be a result of the flock of three birds that Xi wangmu also has been present with (Loewe, 2005, p.119). I believe that the three legs of the crow symbolize the three cosmic zones, just as I believe the three birds symbolize each their cosmic zone. I therefore see it as irrelevant whether the flock of birds or the three legged bird appeared first as they to my view serve the same function. The crow is a symbol of the forces of yang (Loewe, 2005, p.119).

The Fox with Nine Tails

One of her aiding spirits is a fox with nine tails. According to Krappe to come across a fox in China is seen to forebode bad luck. He stated that this was clear already from the early Zhou Dynasty. In the *Shijing* we find a poem that contains the metaphor “..nothing red was to be seen except the fox, and nothing black except the crow” to indicate the destruction of the state (Krappe, 1944, p.132). What is interesting here is that we meet two of the animals associated with Xi wangmu and both are here connected to death and devastation. They also symbolize the moon and the sun, the fox is a nocturnal animal and the crow is linked with the sun.

Krappe stated that a man that would fall into a string of bad luck would be said to be haunted by the fox (Hu-li-ma). The fox takes offence when hearing his name or seeing the character expressing his name, and therefore is often designated by synonyms. An example of

this would be “long-tail”. To kill a fox would be the ultimate omen of ill luck. James on the other side claims the fox is a good omen, and refers to just such a description in the *Bo Hu Tong* from the first century AD. “The fox denotes the benevolence of Xiwangmu because the fox itself is auspicious” (James, 1995, p.22). The fox is associated with the element of fire and is thought to be able to produce fire by striking its tail to the ground (Krappe, 1944, p.136). The fire association stems from the red fur, and Krappe points out that animals of red color have cross-culturally been connected with fire (Krappe, 1944, p.146). Johnson states that fire is a symbol of the generator of life and transformation. Further more that women were seen as the controllers of fire, due to their cooking by the hearth (Johnson, 1994, p.21). The fox is also seen as having the ability to transform into other creatures, most often into human form (Krappe, 1944, p.136). Further more he states that in certain areas in China the fox have been seen as an erotic symbol. As when the fox takes human shape it is not always but most often in female form (Krappe, 1944, p.138). This is not uncommon in other cultures either. Is the fox an auspicious sign? Though the fox is a beautiful creature, I find this somewhat problematic. Growing up on the countryside I certainly do not see the fox as an auspicious sign. The fox is an animal that can in very creative ways surpass many an obstacle to achieve its goal. Which often is to consume a chicken.

The number nine seems to be of significance in ancient China. The number appears in Chu Ci several times, such as the Nine Declarations, the Nine Arguments, The Nine Regrets, the Nine Songs, the Nine Lament and the Nine Longings. What is interesting here is that the Nine Songs are actually eleven song. In this example we encounter the Nine Lands.

In sweeping circles my lord is descending:
‘Let me follow you over the K’ung-sang Mountain’
See the teeming peoples of the Nine Lands!
‘What is the span of man’s life to me?’
(Chu ci, The Great Master of Fate, 5-8) (Hawkes, 1959, p.40).

Nine is a number that is frequent in myth worldwide. Eliade suggested the reason for this was the importance of the number three, for the three cosmic zones, and that three times three makes nine (Eliade, 1974, p.274). I find this to be a ludicrous explanation, as multiplication had a rather late arrival in the world of math. Even after such an arrival it seems quite farfetched. I assume the importance of nine has to do with the nine months of the pregnancy. However in this case it would be most logical that the nine tails are symbols of the nine lands. So this fox being a aiding spirit of Xi wangmu is a reference to her total control of the nine lands.

The Toad

The toad is associated with the moon. Different text describes the creature in the moon as a toad or a frog. I will use the terms interchangeably as I see no great difference. As mentioned earlier the funerary pendant that was unearthed in a grave from the early Han Dynasty tomb (no.1, Mawangdui, Hunan Province) there is a moon in the corner of the depiction that contains a toad (Allan, 1981, p.297). In a segment of the Heavenly Questions in the Chu Ci we find the following question

“What is the peculiar virtue of the moon, the Brightness of the Night, which causes it to grow once more after its death? What does it advantage it to keep a frog in its belly?” (Chu Ci, Tian Wen, 17-18) (Hawkes, 1959, p.47).

Loewe states that the toad was an ancient symbol of the process of birth, death and rebirth (Loewe, 2005, p.120). Eliade claimed that early on man made a symbolic system of temporal notations which were based on the moon's phases. Eliade stated that the lunar cycle occupied man thousand of years before agriculture came into being. This he felt explained the repeated presence of the moon in archaic mythologies. Further more the moon has been given symbolic connections to fertility, death, rebirth, the waters, vegetation, the serpent and woman (Eliade, 1979, p.23). The question then becomes was the toad a symbol of the circle of life before it was placed in the moon, or did it come later? The toad is a symbol of the moon and as such the power of yin (Loewe, 2005, p.66).

“Though the sun and the moon are surrounded by halos, the real danger to them comes from within.” (Han Fei Zi, p.86/Watson, 1967). This metaphor is used in a segment in the Han Fei Zi that deals with the ruler's need for caution towards everyone surrounding him. You never know who will stab you in the back, so you should keep a watchful eye especially on those who are seemingly loyal to you. Watson believed that this was a reference to the myth of the toad in the moon and the crow in the sun (Watson, 1967, p.86). Later stories tell of Chang O metamorphosed on the moon and became a toad (Birrell, 1993, p.189). James also suggests that there could be a connection between the tale of Chang O and the depictions of the toad in the moon (James, 1995, p.20). Whether or not the toad that keeps company with Xi wangmu is a representation of Chang O is hard to determine. I do not find it likely as Chang O after all stole the elixir of life that the Queen Mother of the West had intended for someone else. In

addition Xi wangmu's toad is depicted as enmeshed in trance and Chang O has never been portrait in ecstatic trance.

The Hare

The rabbit or hare appears in mythology all over the world. The Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre for instance is connected to the hare (Boyle, 1973, p.323). Hawkes stated that some Chinese traditions tell of a rabbit inside the moon. In Han art one finds depictions of the rabbit inside the moon, like the Fei yi found in Mawangdui Tomb no.3. There is also myths found in India that associate the moon with the rabbit (Boyle, 1973, p.320). The rabbit in Xi wangmu's entourage creates the elixir of immortality by the use of its pestle and mortar (Hawkes, 1959, p.47). Loewe also states that the rabbit is associated with the moon and the power of yin (Loewe, 2005, p.66). Why the rabbit became associated with the elixir of life I do not know, but if I was to venture a guess I would think it had something to do with the speed rabbits procreate.

Xian and Other Companions

Xi wangmu is on some occasions depicted with skinny men with wings who have long robes and long hair. James calls them "fortunate men who have escaped death completely and dwell with Xiwangmu" (James, 1995, p.20). The wings of these men give associations to the magical flight of the shaman and also their long robes remind me of the costume used by the Nepalese shamans which are long-sleeved white robes. However the shamans in Nepal also wear headgear, necklaces, brass bells, and so on (Sidky, 2008, p.87-88). In a tomb from 86 AD she is depicted with a bird-headed man and an ox-headed man, in addition to xian, two beasts with many heads and the hare. James suggests that these are ordinary men with animal masks that symbolize the total domination Xi wangmu holds over men and animals (James, 1995, p.25). In another tomb from ca. 100 AD she is depicted with a man with the head of a rooster, in addition a hunting scene is depicted (James, 1995, p.26). In a tomb from 151 AD she is depicted with a large man-headed bird, in addition to another bird, a toad, two hares and attendants with wings (James, 1995, p.27). In Book twelve of the Shanhaijing it is stated that she resides on "the mountain of the serpent shamans" (Cahill, 1993, p.19). Birrell dates this part to the year 6 BC (Birrell, 1999, p.xv). From this text we learn that she is surrounded by

shamans, and shamans do on some occasions use masks as a part of their costume. So both the masked men and the xian might be a representation of shamans. She is also sometimes depicted with servants with no special features.

Music

Music is used by the shaman to call up the spirits. Xi wangmu is as far as I can tell not associated with any musical instruments. However as mentioned earlier she is “a fine whistler”. The voice in itself can be defined as a musical instrument.

Divination

There are no elements connected with Xi wangmu that would suggest that she made use of divination.

Texts Referring to Nugua

In the **Huainanzi** (c.150 BC) she is mentioned several times. In two segments Nugua is described to have rescued the world after the male god, Gonggong, broke a mountain which was one of the pillars attaching heaven and earth. As Ching puts it “if it took a male figure to bring catastrophe to the universe, it took a female deity to restore order and completion.” (Ching, 1993, p.26). However a different account of the myth does not give any indication as to why the four compass points were falling. Nonetheless her rescue plan is the same. Nugua cuts the legs of the celestial tortoise and replaced the poles. She furthermore mended the skies by melting five stones of five different colors. Then Nugua rescued the province of Ji (Chi) by slaying the Black Dragon which had caused a great flood (Ching, 1993, p.26) (Irwin, 1990, p.55) (Christie, 1983, p.88). I will only give one account of the myth.

In remote antiquity, the four poles collapsed. The Nine Regions split up. Heaven could not cover all things uniformly, and earth could not carry everything at once. Fire raged fiercely and could not be extinguished. Water rose in vast floods without abating. Fierce beasts devoured the people of Chuan. Violent birds seized the old and weak in their talons. Then Nü Kua smelted five-color stones to mend the blue sky. She severed the feet of a giant sea turtle to support the four poles and killed a black dragon to save the region of Chi. And she piled up the ashes from burned reeds to dam the surging waters. The blue sky was mended. The four poles were set right. The surging waters dried up. The region of Chi was under control. Fierce beasts died and the people of Chuan lived (Huainanzi, Lan ming, SPPY 6.7b) (Birrell, 1993, p.71).

When one considers her achievement, it knows only the bounds of Ninth Heaven above and the limits of Yellow Cloud below. She is acclaimed by later generations, and her brilliant glory sweetly suffuses the whole world. She rides in a thunder-carriage driving shaft-steeds of winged dragons and an outer pair of green hornless dragons. She bears the emblem of the Fortune of Life and Death. Her seat is the Visionary Chart. Her steeds' halter is of yellow cloud; in the front is a white calf-dragon, in the rear a rushing snake. Floating, drifting, free and easy, she guides ghostly spirits as she ascends to Ninth Heaven. She has audience with God inside the holy gates. Silently, solemnly, she comes to rest below the High Ancestor. Then, without displaying her achievements, without spreading her fame, she holds the secret of the Way of the True Person and follows the eternal nature of Heaven and earth (Huainanzi, Lan ming, SPPY 8a) (Birrell, 1993, p.71).

In this segment we are told that her magnificent splendor pervades the whole world and that she is highly praised by later generations. She did after all rescue the world from chaos. By the “emblem of the Fortune of Life and Death” I believe she holds the future of humanity and all living things in her hands. She sits in no less than the “Visionary Chart”, so her influence must be great. While ascending to the Ninth Heaven she helps steer ghostly spirits on their way. She could possibly be a divine wu. She has Daoistic tendencies as she is described as someone who “holds the secret of the Way” and in not flaunting her greatness. She meets with

God, which probably is Tian the anthropomorphic power of heaven. As mentioned earlier the deity Tian during the Zhou Dynasty was considered to be the ancestral spirit of the royal family (Ching, 1993, p.17). So Tian is most likely the “High Ancestor” that she rests below. Her carriage is labeled “thunder-carriage”, giving associations to rain, lightning and of course thunder. So she must be a controller of the weather. Irwin calls her a wind goddess and I feel with good cause (Irwin, 1990, p.55). The carriage is drawn by dragons. The winged dragons are of different varieties, some green dragons with and without horns and one white adolescent dragon. Behind the carriage follows a snake.

The following passage is also found in Huainanzi: “Nü Kua made seventy transformations”. The commentator Xu Shen (c.100 AD) understood this as an indication of her creative power, in other words her ability to change and renew the cosmos (Birrell, 1993, p.33). But Birrell suggests that it could also be a description of her own sacred metamorphoses (Birrell, 1993, p.164). As we know the snake sheds its skin and as such can be seen as going through metamorphoses. Then again Birrell states that Nugua created the world through her divine metamorphoses (Birrell, 1999, p.223). However Birrell does not explain on what she basis this statement on and I have not found any myths within the timeframe I am working on that directly corresponds to this. So I believe she is referring to Nugua’s “seventy transformations” and by renewing herself she is recreating cosmos.

In **Chu ci** she mentioned in Tian wen or ‘The heavenly questions’.

Who built the ten-storied tower of jade? In the beginning, when the first signs appeared, who foresaw its coming? How was Nü Wa’s body fashioned? By what means was she raised up, when she mounted on high and became High Lord? (Chu ci, Tien wen, 95-98) (Hawkes, 1959, p.51)

As mentioned earlier Cook and Blakeley are of the opinion that Nugua was one of the three divine ancestors that were mentioned in a Chu tomb from the fourth century BC (Cook and Blakeley, 1999, p.3). As such she would have been regarded as an early tribal leader of the Chu people. This fits well with the description we find of Nugua in Lie Nu Zhuan, though then as the early tribal leader of the people in the region generally. So perhaps when the question “By what means was she raised up, when she mounted on high and became High Lord?” is asked it is a reference to her transformation from a semi-divine tribal leader to divine high ancestress. It is also natural to ponder how she came to be half snake. I believe the first part of the segment concerning the “ten-storied tower of jade” is an allusion to another

myth which is not connected with Nugua. I chose not to exclude it due to it being presented as a unit. The cryptic passage “In the beginning, when the first signs appeared, who foresaw its coming?” is hard to classify as it could be part of the first myth mentioned. However it might be an allusion to Nugua because of her role, as presented elsewhere, as a great cosmic goddess. If so then the question could be about who could have foreseen her creation or the creation of the cosmos. If we go by the Daoistic belief that everything comes from nothingness and will return to it, then who could possibly have foreseen its coming.

In **Lie Nu Zhuan** (Biographies of exemplary woman) (79-8 BC) Nugua is presented as the first queen consort and later on as the first reigning queen. Her husband, Fu Xi, is in this text considered to be one of the Three Sovereigns. When he became a tribal chief, he supposedly introduced hunting, fishing and animal domestication to the peoples of the land. In addition he established the institution of marriage. Interestingly his consort Nugua is described as a female with a human head and a serpent’s body. So she is clearly a semi-divine being. On many occasions she functioned as an advisor to Fu Xi, and upon his death Nugua took his place as tribal Chief (Linduff, 2003, p.61). Her skills as a political leader were described as wise and courageous. She did for instance put down the uprising against her that was led by Gonggong. Further more she was presented as the inventor of some musical instruments. Linduff however states that even though she is presented as a good leader of her people, her political skills is not attributed to her as an independent person but rather an expansion of her husband’s affiliation to her (Linduff, 2003, p.62).

She is also mentioned in the **Shanhaijing**. Birrell dates this section to the first century AD (Birrell, 1999, p.xv). Birrell chooses to translate Nu Kua (Nugua) with Girl Kua.

There are deities here, ten gods in all. Their name is the Guts of Girl Kua. The guts of the goddess Girl Kua turned into gods and they live in the Wilderness of Fullwide. These ten gods took a crosswise route and settled in that place (Shanhaijing, Book sixteen, Great Wilderness: the West) (Birrell, 1999, p.173).

Unfortunately there are no known myths about these ten gods that came from the bowels of Nugua. Birrell suggests that she exists both as an individual but also within these ten gods that she gave life to (Birrell, 1993, p.164). This of course would be very hard to verify since we have no more information about them. However as their collective name is “the Guts of Girl Kua” it would not be illogical that some essence of her remains within them. Birrell also propose that the number ten imitates the myth of the ten suns (Birrell, 1999, p.223).

In the **Fengsutongyi** (c.185 AD) Nüwa is mentioned in something as seldom as a Chinese anthropogony. Nüwa created humans. Well, not quite, she created men. The myth tells of a time before humans existed, and one day Nüwa decides to create men by putting yellow earth together. This went on for some time, but then the creatress tired of the work. She decided to take a short cut and with a builder's cord heaped up mud to make men. Thus it continues that this is the reason why there is social difference. The upper classes, meaning rich and noble men, were made of the yellow earth with great care. The poor men of lower classes were on the other hand just hurriedly thrown together by the help of a cord. Thus they were called cord-made men. Interestingly the myth makes no mention of females. Men were created, how women came about seems still to be unexplained. Perhaps the creation of women was deemed unimportant by the Han literati. Irwin as mentioned earlier suggests that the anthropogony as told in Fengsutongyi is a result of wide-spread folk popularity that the Han elite made fit better with their understanding of the world (Irwin, 1990, p.54). If I was to venture a guess, the myth originally was an anthropogony of all human kind. Nüwa the celestial creator first used the yellow earth to make Chinese, then got frustrated and quickly threw together mud to make the others. The others being the people living on the fringe of the known world, those that did not share their culture. On the other hand if Birrell is correct in her assumption that the depictions of a twisted cord in Shang and pre-Shang cultures is a builder's cord and further more an allusion to Nüwa, then why would you celebrate the sloppy making of the foreigner or for that sake the common man? Perhaps she first created immortal divine beings and then humanity. After all as we have just seen in the Shanhaijing ten gods came from her bowels. This indicates that she can create divine beings. So depictions of the cord might be a celebration of the general creation of man which due to somewhat easier production became mortal.

This myth is sometimes presented with Pan Gu who supposedly formed the universe and then Nüwa appears and makes men. I have omitted this because according to Birrell is Nüwa at least more than six centuries older than Pan Gu in classical mythology (Birrell, 1993, p.33).

Ecstatic Trance

Nugua displays no signs of ecstatic trance as far as I can tell. And again I am uncertain how viable it is to measure the shamanistic trait of ecstatic trance against a spirit goddess.

However the ecstatic trance is a vehicle the shaman makes use of to travel in the realm of the spirits. When arrived in this realm the spirit of the shaman can ascend or descend. The Huainanzi tells us that Nugua “guides ghostly spirits as she ascends to..”, so perhaps she is a divine wu that helps the earthly shamans on their magical flight. She is herself ascending which possibly makes her a wu, and when she helps others do the same she becomes a divine wu. She does this however without ecstatic trance.

Axis Mundi

Geographical locations that are associated to Nugua are among others Zhonghuang Shan, which translates into “Great Mountain of the centre”. On this mountain it is told that she seduced Yu, the flood controller. This is however a myth that arrives at a later date than that of my interest. Another mountain with an actual known location has a rock formation that has created a cave named the “Palace of Nugua” in Jiangxi (Irwin, 1990, p.56). The Huainanzi tells the story of the cosmic disaster that Nugua prevented when “the four poles collapsed”. Birrell states that the poles are earthly supports of the sky. She adds that in some versions of the myth the poles are replaced by mountains (Birrell, 1993, p.69). Still they do not seem to function as axis mundi, and if they did it would be for other beings to use them as access points. She is however a centre goddess and the axis mundi is supposed to be in the central point of the world.

Nugua: Main Spirit and Costume

Nugua’s appearance is that of half snake and half human. Though some state, like Irwin, that she is half snake or dragon, and thus leaving the question open (Irwin, 1990, p.55). However I have found little to support Nugua being half dragon. Ching (1993) and Nelson (2008) only use the term half snake. As mentioned previously the snake has the directional emblem of the north. However Major has stated that originally the snake was connected to the centre and

during the Shang period the snake was a sign of celestial divinity and centrality (Major, 1999, p.129). Nugua is associated with neither the east nor the north, but generally is linked to the centre. If she originally had been half dragon then most certainly her directional emblem would have been the east. This is only logical since the direction east was coupled with the dragon already 4000 BC. I therefore assume that Nugua's main spirit is that of the snake. She is however undoubtedly associated with dragons as we saw in Huainanzi.

Krappe stated that tales of snake women have been told from China to France (Krappe, 1944, p.141). Snakes are often deemed dangerous and demonic, and indeed as Major points out that studies within the field of evolutionary psychology have shown that humans have a strong instinctual aversion against snakes (Major, 1999, p.131). Wang and Whitfield stresses that all higher primates show a physiological reaction of fear when encountering a snake (Wang and Whitfield, 1999, p.74). So why does the snake motif occur so often? Major argues that since we have such an innate distain for snakes, that anyone who seems to have the ability to control snakes is someone with great powers. He states that snake handling was a common if not a universal attribute of north Asian shamanism. The shaman was supposedly immune to the poison of the snakes while possessed by aiding spirits (Major, 1999, p.131). Altaic shamans for instance had snakes or ornaments that symbolized snakes on their costume (Eliade, 1974, p.152).

The Country of Shaman Whole lies north of the country of Girl Deuce. In his right hand Shaman Whole holds a green snake. In his left hand he holds a scarlet snake. His land lies near Mount Climbscreen. The land of Shaman Whole is the place from which crowds of shamans make their ascension and descend from the mountain (Shanhaijing, Book Seven, the West) (Birrell, 1999, p.116).

As we can see from the segment above from the Shanhaijing snake handling seems not to have been unusual. Also from a segment concerning Xi Wangmu we read "As for the mountain of the serpent shamans..". As mentioned earlier So states that in Chu culture shaman-like human figures with decorative headdresses and long robes often are depicted in contact with snakes and other serpentine creatures (So, 1999, p.45). There is undoubtedly a connection between snakes and shamans in China. The snake is an underground creature and Krappe claimed that this have lead to the belief that the souls of the deceased enter into snakes (Krappe, 1944, p.145). Major states that the snakes shedding of the skin can be seen as an auto-rebirth (Major, 1999, p.130). Wang and Whitfield also point out that the snake can revive after hibernation (Wang and Whitfield, 1999, p.74). The fact that snakes swallow their

prey whole might lead to the assumption that a transformation takes place. One thing turns into something else. Which might explain “Nü Kua made seventy transformations”.

Healing Powers

The human shaman’s mission is to heal the individual. Nugua heals on a grander scale. As a deity she heals the cosmos. Nugua has the capability to rescue humanity, as she saves from floods, unstoppable fire, a vicious black dragon and dangerous beasts, and the complete destruction of the entire world. The worldly shaman calls upon the spirits to help with the healing. Nugua does this task quite on her own. She is a deity and therefore a spirit in her own right.

Nugua and Aiding Spirits

The shaman is seen to be in contact with other spirits, some of which are aiding spirits that the shaman controls. In Nugua’s case as told in Huainanzi she has a variety of dragons and a snake. The dragon is associated with the direction east and water. It can with equal ease reside in water or the sky. Usually it is designated the color green, but Major uses the term ‘bluegreen’ (Major, 1999, p.125). In China the dragon seems to symbolize a frightening creature that could bring about destruction, yet at the same time was a giver of life and rain. The dragon has been associated with rain, clouds, storms, rivers and marshes, imperial power and fertility (Ching, 1993, p.15-16). According to Carlson is the dragon benevolent when it brings rain for the crops, but the dragon can easily turn malevolent if the forces of nature are out of balance (Carlson, 2006, p.137). Loewe states that from the Han dynasty the green dragon became connected with the ‘element’ of wood, while the snake and turtle were associated with the ‘element’ of water (Loewe, 2005, p.41).

Nugua through the connection to dragons is a goddess that controls the weather. Since the dragon is associated with rain, clouds, and storms. Her carriage is also followed by a snake, possibly an indication of her ability to transform cosmos. So we are left with weather controller and cosmic regenerator. Nugua is indeed a great cosmic goddess. The fact that she is described with green and white dragons is interesting. The dragon is the emblem of the east and so is the color green. White however is the color of the west. The presence of the white dragon could be an indication of Nugua’s control of both the east and the west. By this time

the snake was associated with the north, even though Nugua remained as a goddess of the centre. As the centre she is the state of equilibrium. So why is there no representation of the south in this segment? I have made a list of things associated with the four directions.

North: serpent/turtle, called the dark warrior, water, cold, hibernation, passivity, winter

South: vermilion bird, potency, fire, heat, active, summer

West: white tiger, death, destructiveness, metal, autumn

East: green dragon, birth, regeneration, wood, spring (Christie, 1983, p.37) (Major, 1999, p.130).

As we can see here the one who fits the least well with the description of Nugua is in fact the south. Especially since the account we are looking at comes from a daoistic text. Daoism prefers the natural fluidity instead of forcefulness. The north due to its water (thunder-carriage) and passivity (Floating, drifting, free and easy..) and the snake that follows her cart. The east due to the green dragons she travels with and regeneration (seventy transformations). The west due to the color white of one of the dragons (let us not forget the passage in Chu ci that tells of the dragon with a torch that lights up the Kunlun mountain) and death (she bears the emblem of the Fortune of Life and Death). The south is closer to what she stops when saving the world from collapse. Before her rescue “violent birds seized the old and weak” and “fire raged fiercely” (Birrell, 1993, p.71). This might symbolize the potency and activeness of the south? On the other side you could argue that she is very active since she rescues humanity, but at the same time it is a necessary reaction to the destruction that is taking place, and as such can be seen as the natural flow of the Dao.

Nugua and Divination

Divination is a tool used to foretell the future and what appropriate action to take for a best possible outcome. In the Huainanzi she sits in the “visionary chart”. She clearly has great foresight. So when the earthly shaman makes contact via scapulimancy it might be Nugua that answers. But she does not herself show any sign of making use of scapulimancy. However as mentioned earlier the second part of her name ‘gua’ means ‘snail-like creature’. The sign contains the female signifier and if this is removed we are left with ‘to cut meat away from the bones’ (Birrell, 1999, p.223). This might indicate divination. To perform scapulimancy

you need to clean the bones first. So her name could be said to be linked to divination. But if she does the divination or is the recipient of it is hard to determine.

Music

Music is a means to help the spirit travel. According to Nelson Nigua was seen as the inventor of music (Nelson, 2008, p.114). As an inventor of music she lays the ground for the shaman as she gives the world an aid to access the other realms

Conclusion

In my opinion archaeological findings and myths, particularly those told in Daoistic works of literature, show that early Chinese religious culture was rooted in shamanism. The frequency of animal symbols and divination are a clear indication of this. I further more find that the importance of ancestor veneration is another sign of shamanism, as the soul of the ancestor is thought to continue in a different realm. This leads us to the understanding of different planes of cosmos. Further more the remains of drums unearthed in graves show that musical instruments had great importance. Since drums are particularly connected with shamanism, I find this to be additional evidence of the presence of shamanism in China.

Xi wangmu is clearly a result of a shamanistic culture. She always resides on a mountain in these early texts which can be seen as an axis mundi. Sometimes even described as a mountain other shamans travel to, like “the mountain of the serpent shamans”. So she seems to control the access point to the other realms. Her white dishevelled hair is a possible symbol of the ecstatic trance of the shaman, and her trancedancing frog leaves no doubt that she is connected to shamanistic rituals. She wears a crown that can be associated with the headgear worn by shamans, but it can also be an indication of her role as a queen. Her leopard’s tail, and tiger’s teeth shows that her main spirit is the tiger/leopard and this makes her a force to be recon with. Her looks resembles shamanistic costumes used in China and Central Asia. Her entourage of aiding spirits also places her within the shamanistic tradition. The three birds, the three legged crow, the fox with nine tails, the toad, and the elixir producing rabbit belong both to yin and yang symbolism and as such are signs of her total control of the cosmos. Her frequent contact with birds can be a symbol of the magical flight that the shaman undertakes. She is also portrayed with men with wings and men with animal masks. Which give associations again to the magical flight and the shaman’s costume. Her skillful whistling may be a sign of her role as charmer of animals. When placed on Mount Flamingfire with all the myriad creatures of the world she can be seen as dominating the animals. Her role as a healer is somewhat more blurred. There are indications that she originally was a goddess of plague and natural disasters, yet if she controlled plague and natural disasters, she would have the power to refrain from letting a people suffer such calamities. However by the Han dynasty she was portrait as a saver of humanity with the ability to bestow immortality.

Nugua seems to me to have older roots than that of Xi wangmu. Nugua appears as a more primal cosmic creator. She is half snake, a weather goddess, a creator of men, a savior of the floods and a savior of the world. Xi wangmu displays the role of the shaman very clearly, but this also makes me assume that her arrival is later than that of Nugua. They are both possibly divine wu, but Xi wangmu has a closer connection to the human world as it was thought possible to find her mountain. I would think that before the appearance of a deity that shows such clear resemblance to a shaman one would have deities that are more primal. Since Xi wangmu in my opinion is definitely a primordial shaman I would assume that to make a goddess a shaman one must have contemplated the role of the shaman to a great extent. But Nugua also have shamanistic tendencies, the snake being the most obvious one. Nugua is also a helper of ascension. From the material I have found there are no connections between Nugua and ecstatic trance. She seems not to require trance to reach the spirits. I find it more likely to be the other way around. The spirits she encounters are either shamans who made the transformation from one realm to another through trance or spirits of the dead whom she guides on their way. She is not generally placed on mountains, however Nugua is a center goddess which means she is in the axis mundi. Nugua is certainly a true healer, as she heals the cosmos when destruction is waiting. On some occasions she is followed by dragons and snakes that can be interpreted as aiding spirits. Nugua is further more seen as the inventor of music and as such can be regarded as the one who open the door for the spirit of the shaman who requires music to make the journey.

Both Xi wangmu and Nugua have strong shamanistic traits. Xi wangmu is a divine copy of an actual shaman, while Nugua is a deity whose attributes fits well with a shamanistic religion.

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The two Chinese goddesses Xi wangmu and Nugua might have roots as far back as the Shang dynasty (c.1600-1046 BC). They can with certainty, through texts and iconography be placed in the timeframe of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (771-256 BC).

Xi wangmu or Queen Mother of the West is described as a mountain goddess with the fangs of a tiger and the tail of a leopard. Her hair is white and unkempt, and she usually wears a crown made of jade. In iconography she is presented with an entourage consisting of a hare, a toad, a nine-tailed fox, three birds or a three legged bird. Sometimes she is also depicted with men with animal masks or heads, and robed longhaired men with wings. A mythological account from c.300 BC tells us she is goddess of plague and calamity, while during the Han dynasty (206 BC -220 AD) she was believed to have the power to bestow immortality upon man. Worshipers of Xi wangmu started the first recorded millenarian movement in China in the year 3 BC.

The physical attributes of the goddess Nugua is that of half snake and half human. She has been described as the first reigning queen and is sometimes said to be one of the Three Sovereigns. Nugua has been designated as the creator of men, family and music. She also rescues the world from a great cosmic disaster. Nugua is a weather controller and is frequently associated with dragons. In iconography from the Han dynasty she is often depicted holding a compass in her hands and as such is the goddess of the centre.

Both Xi wangmu and Nugua display shamanistic traits. They have the ability to heal and guide souls heavenwards. Their appearances give associations to shaman's costumes. Xi wangmu has so many similarities to an actual shaman that I assume she must have been viewed as a divine primordial shaman by her worshipers. While Nugua is a deity whose attributes fits well with a shamanistic religion.