

time of Yao, the ten suns came out together, withering the crops of grain and killing the grasses, so that the people had nothing to eat. . .” Various monsters also appeared, but Yao sent Yi to punish them and “shoot the ten suns”. Because of Yao’s success, he became the first ruler.

The time of Yao in which the ten suns appeared was followed by the time of Shun in which the waters were fanned by the evil Gong Gong 共工 until they “reached the Hollow Mulberry” (*kong sang* 空桑) but Shun appointed Yu to dig the river channels and open up passages so that the water could run into the sea. In this passage, then, the time of Yao was the era in which perfect harmony was lost to the world and heaven and earth separated (because of a ritual breach implied by the disobedience of the ten suns?). The appearance of the ten suns in the sky also contrasts with the following era in which water flooded the earth: a time of fire, then a time of water. The story of Yi shooting the ten suns has a further mythical dimension for an Yi is associated with the west and the moon in other myths. He was given the elixir of immortality by Xi Wang Mu 西王母, the Queen Mother of the West, but it was stolen by his wife Chang E (that is Chang Yi, see p. 33) who fled with it to the moon.⁶⁶ Yi in shooting the suns may have represented the forces of the west and the moon in battle with those of the east and the sun.⁶⁷

This myth is usually interpreted to mean that Yi shot down nine of the ten suns, destroying them so that afterwards there was only one sun left which came out every day. Wang Yi so interprets the *Tian wen* question quoted above: “The nine birds inside [the suns] all died, dropping their feathers and wings, so that one sun from among them was left.”⁶⁸ This interpretation accepts the tradition of ten suns rising from the Mulberry Tree, but assigns it to an era in the mythological past. Thus, where the belief in ten suns was heterodox in Zhou times, the myth of Archer Yi could still be accepted.

The coexistence of the two beliefs is evident in three related passages, two from the *Zhuangzi* (fifth century B.C.) and one from the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (third century B.C.), all of which refer to the light of the sun or suns as a metaphor for virtue and refer to the time of Yao. These passages appear to have a common source, but the *Zhuangzi*, at least in its present form, rejects the ten sun tradition. In the *Lüshi chunqiu* (22/9b), Yao, who wishes to cede the throne to Xu You, explains, “If the ten suns rise, and the beacon fires are not [let to] expire, is this not too troublesome!” But in the equivalent passage in the *Zhuangzi*, Yao says to Xu You 許由, “If the sun and moon rise. . . .”⁶⁹ This can be correlated to another passage in the *Zhuangzi* which the commentators relate to the *Huainanzi* passage discussed above (8/5a). Here, Shun in reply to a question from Yao about whether to force the submission of certain tribes says, “Formerly,

the ten suns came out together and the ten thousand things were all illuminated. . . .”⁷⁰

However, the myth of Archer Yi was not always interpreted to mean that the nine were destroyed. They may merely have been frightened into better behaviour. Wang Chong who discusses this myth in the *Lunheng* 論衡 says that Yi shot the ten suns and “therefore they were not seen together again on the same day”.⁷¹ Other texts also refer to the ten suns coming out together in later times. For example, according to the *Huainanzi* (15/6b), the ten suns appeared as an ill omen at the end of the Shang dynasty. Similarly, in the authentic *Bamboo Annals*, the ten suns appeared together as an ill omen near the end of the Xia dynasty.⁷²

Because of the ambiguity about whether the suns were destroyed when Archer Yi shot them, this myth allowed some people to continue to believe in ten suns which rose from the branches of the Mulberry Tree while others accepted that there was only one sun. Since the myth of Archer Yi assumes the motifs of the Mulberry Tree tradition, it could only have arisen after that tradition, although the two traditions coexisted in late Zhou and Han texts. The prevalence of the Mulberry Tree tradition in the *Chuci* and to a lesser extent in the *Huainanzi*, as well as the portrayal of the nine suns on the Mulberry Tree in the Mawangdui painting, indicate an association in Zhou and Han times with Southern China, but as discussed above, Shang influence had extended into what became the semi-independent state of Chu in Zhou times.

I have suggested that the Mulberry Tree tradition derived from a Shang tradition which lost its integrity when the Shang were conquered by the Zhou and a belief in a single sun replaced that in ten suns as the orthodox belief. The Mulberry Tree tradition as I have described it is a late Zhou and Han tradition of Southern China and has no particular association with the Shang. However, the same motifs—with the exception of ten as the number of the suns—are intimately associated with the Shang in another tradition about the origin of the Shang people and their dynasty which is recorded in the broad range of Zhou texts. As I will discuss later, the Shang origin myth is a transformation deriving from the same source as the myth of Xihe giving birth to the ten suns. The Shang are also associated with the motifs of the Mulberry Tree tradition in: the name of their altar, the story of the great drought at the beginning of the dynasty, the myth of the birth of Yi Yin, and the name of the founder of the dynasty.

THE SHANG ORIGIN MYTH

In the Mulberry Tree tradition, the suns were birds which were bathed by their mother Xihe in the pool of water in the Valley of the Sun at the foot of the Mulberry Tree. Xihe was married to Di Jun who was also married to

Chang Yi, the mother of the moons and to E Huang, the mother of the Three-bodied Tribe, who in turn gave birth to Yi Jun. In their origin myth, the Shang were born of a black bird which, I will argue, can be identified with the sun-bird.

The earliest references to the origin of the Shang are in the *Shang song* 商頌 section of the *Shijing*. The *Xuan niao* 玄鳥 (*Mao* 毛 303) states:

“Heaven commanded that black bird (*xuan niao* 玄鳥).
It descended and gave birth to Shang.
The land of Yin in which they dwelt was vast.
Therefore Di 帝 ordered martial Tang. . .”

The *Chang fa* 長發 (*Mao* 304) also states:

Wise and brilliant was Shang
And long-lived its fortune.
The flooding water spread forth,
And Yu brought order to the lands below.
Both small and large states were delineated.
And the border was long.
When the lady of You Rong 有戎 was nubile,
Di appointed (*li* 立) his son and gave birth
to the Shang.

The *Shang song* are the hymns of the Shang rulers as they were passed down among their descendants who were enfeoffed in the state of Song 宋 during the Zhou dynasty. The reference to Tian 天 ‘Heaven’ in the first line of *Xuan niao* may indicate Zhou influence. Later in the verse, however, and in the *Chang fa*, the high god is referred to as ‘Di’ Lord (that is the Lord on high) which accords with Shang usage. We may assume that these verses have suffered some changes before being recorded. Nevertheless, they are as close to authentic Shang tradition as is possible within the extant Zhou texts.

In terms of our discussion in the following chapter of the Xia myth, it is significant that Yu appears here in a hymn to the Shang ancestors. There are no Xia hymns within the *Shijing*, as we would have expected if they were a dynasty with living descendants. The only reference to Yu is this one, in which he appears after the beginning reference to Shang, as though he were a part of their own tradition. Yao and Shun also go unmentioned, but this is to be expected if, as I will argue, Yao was a transformation of the High Lord, Di and Shun of Di Ku 帝嚳.

Questions about this myth also occur in the *Tian wen* section of the

Chuci which, as discussed above, contains questions relating to the Fu Sang tradition: ‘When Jian Di 簡狄 was in the tower, how did Ku favor her? When the black bird brought its gift, how did the woman become blessed?’ (*Chuci* 3/22a) Here, the Lady of You Rong is named as Jian Di and Di Ku rather than the black bird is the progenitor.

For the answers to these questions, we must turn to a later text, the *Shiji*:

Xie 契 of Yin’s mother was called Jian Di. A woman of the You Rong clan, she was the second concubine of Di Ku. Three persons (including Jian Di) were going to bathe. They saw a black bird drop an egg. Jian Di took it and swallowed it. Thus, she became pregnant and gave birth to Xie.⁷³

The tower is missing from this version, but the Shang ancestor was born of the egg which Jian Di swallowed. Clearly, there is a relationship between this myth and that of Di Jun. Di Jun was the father of the *jun*-ravens, the black birds in the sun, and of the ‘Three-bodied Tribe’ who bore Yi Jun, that is, Shang Jun 商均, that is, the Shang.⁷⁵ Di Ku bore the Shang by means of a black bird. Di Jun and Di Ku have been identified, as discussed above. Thus, the bird which gave birth to the Shang was the same as the bird in the sun. (The *Shiji* passage also mentions the motifs of bathing and the number three. These may be weakened transformations of earlier myth motifs.)

A raven is black and *wu* 烏 also means dark or black. The earliest forms of the Shang origin myth only identify the bird as a *xuan niao*, but in the *Lüshi chunqiu* the bird is identified as a swallow (*yan* 燕) and this identification is often followed by later texts. According to the *Lüshi chunqiu* (6/6b), Di ordered a swallow to go and look at two beautiful women of the You Rong clan for whom a nine-storied tower had been built where they ate and drank to the accompaniment of drums. Attracted to the bird, the two women competed to catch it and put it in a jade box. When the younger one (Jian Di) opened it, it flew out leaving behind two eggs. The reference to two eggs is unusual—could the second have been swallowed by Di Ku’s other wife Chang Yi and given birth to the moons?—but the colorful detail in the passage suggests a relatively late version of the story, even though the *Lüshi chunqiu* was compiled earlier than the *Shiji*. The two women eating and drinking in a tower to the accompaniment of drums is also reminiscent of the motif of the bad wives of Zhou Xin 紂辛, the last Shang king.⁷⁶

The black bird which gave birth to the Shang thus seems originally to have been undifferentiated with regard to species, but in color matches