Shuxian Ye

A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization

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A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization

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Series Preface

Since China's reform and opening began in 1978, the country has come a long way on the path of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Over 30 years of reform, efforts and sustained spectacular economic growth have turned China into the world's second largest economy, and wrought many profound changes in the Chinese society. These historically significant developments have been garnering increasing attention from scholars, governments, and the general public alike around the world since the 1990s, when the newest wave of China studies began to gather steam. Some of the hottest topics have included the so-called "China miracle", "Chinese phenomenon", "Chinese experience", "Chinese path", and the "Chinese model". Homegrown researchers have soon followed suit. Already hugely productive, this vibrant field is putting out a large number of books each year, with Social Sciences Academic Press alone having published hundreds of titles on a wide range of subjects.

Because most of these books have been written and published in Chinese, however, readership has been limited outside China—even among many who study China—for whom English is still the lingua franca. This language barrier has been an impediment to efforts by academia, business communities, and policy-makers in other countries to form a thorough understanding of contemporary China, of what is distinct about China's past and present may mean not only for her future but also for the future of the world. The need to remove such an impediment is both real and urgent, and the *Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path* is my answer to the call.

This series features some of the most notable achievements from the last 20 years by scholars in China in a variety of research topics related to reform and opening. They include both theoretical explorations and empirical studies, and cover economy, society, politics, law, culture, and ecology, the six areas in which reform and opening policies have had the deepest impact and farthest-reaching consequences for the country. Authors for the series have also tried to articulate their visions of the "Chinese Dream" and how the country can realize it in these fields and beyond.

All of the editors and authors for the *Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path* are both longtime students of reform and opening and

recognized authorities in their respective academic fields. Their credentials and expertise lend credibility to these books, each of which having been subject to a rigorous peer review process for inclusion in the series. As part of the Reform and Development Program under the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television of the People's Republic of China, the series is published by Springer, a Germany-based academic publisher of international repute, and distributed overseas. I am confident that it will help fill a lacuna in studies of China in the era of reform and opening.

Shanghai, China   Shouguang Xie

Translators' Note

The translation of Prof. Shuxian Ye's book *A Mythological Approach to the Origin of Chinese Civilization* has been a monumental, though thoroughly rewarding, task. Readers will immediately be struck by the innovation and rigour underpinning Prof. Ye's approach to Chinese identity and prehistory, particularly in his use of the four types of evidence, a methodology that forms the backbone of his analysis. The author's profound academic knowledge is on full display in this work as he seamlessly interweaves the fields of literature, anthropology, archaeology and mythology. It has been both an honour and a challenge for our team to translate this book.

It is our hope that this English translation succeeds in effectively communicating the rationale behind the quadruple-evidence method, and that it carries across the author's keen enthusiasm for the undeniably intriguing field that is the origins of Chinese culture. Non-Chinese readers will come across a number of terms that have their meanings rooted in Chinese history and culture. In such cases we have provided a combination of literal translations, pinyin transliterations and the simplified Chinese characters. Terminological explanations are predominantly given in-text rather than through footnotes, so as not to interrupt the flow of reading. Other scholars' translations of certain Chinese classical texts are used and cited throughout where we deemed them to be an accurate translation of the original text.

No translation of a text is ever exactly the same, in its intonations or meaning, as the original text itself. However, we have gone to great lengths and efforts to try and replicate the author's intended tone and meaning as accurately as is possible.

A tremendous thank you to Prof. Ye, who played an active role in our translation effort and regularly offered detailed suggestions in how we approach translating certain terms and passages. For instance, his proposition that we use the English terms "big tradition" and "small tradition" so as to distinguish them from Redfield's concepts of "great tradition" and "little tradition" proved invaluable.

Warm thanks also go to Xiong Tingting, Gong Xuexian, Cheng Yuting, Zhang Xujun, Gan Quan, Wan Yu, Xu Songjian, Zhang Lixia and Guo Ke for their support and assistance in producing this translation. Our appreciation also goes to Stephen

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The lack of an appropriate mythological perspective in exploring the origins of Chinese civilization remains a significant obstacle when attempting to build a link between archaeological materials and the way they are interpreted in the humanities. In this respect, comparative mythology may be seen as an effective means of re-establishing the essence of the Chinese tradition, and of viewing numerous topics, such as literature, history, philosophy, religion and politics, from an interdisciplinary perspective. Mythology, as is well known, both shapes and is shaped by the cultural contexts in which it develops, playing a fundamental role in evolution of any given culture's cosmology, value system and traditions.

(1)   Comparative Mythology and the Study of the Origins of Civilization

Comparative mythology emerged as an academic field of study in the late nineteenth century, and grew to thrive in the twentieth century. It is an interdisciplinary field, heavily incorporating comparative religion and linguistics, and commonly drawing on various other subjects. Since the introduction of the concept of 'myth' in 1902, it has led to a fever for Chinese mythology in literature and the research of mythological periods in historiography. Representatives of the former include Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967), Mao Dun (1896–1981) and Xie Liuyi (1898–1945). The latter includes scholars of the Doubting Antiquity School such as Gu Jiegang (1893–1980), Yang Kuan (1914–2005) and the later scholars of the historical textual criticism school, led by Xu Xusheng (1888–1976) and Ding Shan (1901–1952), who were at the forefront of the confluence of archaeology and palaeography. These two aspects of mythological research were limited by the conditions of their time. One focused on carefully reconstructing myths by gleaning ancient Chinese texts, attempting to trace them back to their origin in literature and create a parallel to the history of Western literature (cf. Lu 1998). The other sought to relegate the sage-king genealogies that have been handed down for millennia to the status of myth or legend.

The association of the mythology with the written word has remained dominant, nearly unchanged, for almost a century, and the myth itself has come to be associated

with fiction and fantasy as a result. Mythology has come to play a very narrow role in broader Chinese academia. In terms of history and archaeology, Chinese scholars have generally attached little importance to myths, and what little systematic teaching of mythology there is can be found in folk literature courses. Myths have proven more popular outside of academia, and have served as an inspiration to numerous writers and artists.

Humanities are generally considered to not be "science", and the reason for this lies in the non-quantitative, and thus non-verifiable, analyses that they make. Despite this, scholars of the humanities that pertain to China have, over the past century, shown a bias towards empirical data. Mythology is thus placed in a very impractical position as a research object that is notoriously difficult to study in any empirical sense. Proposals to explore the origins of Chinese civilization from an interdisciplinary perspective, effectively combining comparative mythology with archaeological findings, have been met with deep scepticism from the academic community.

The question arises whether the seemingly reasonable system of categorizing subjects into humanities and social sciences, inherited from Western academia, should be subject to introspection, criticism and reconstruction. This question has become more urgent with the rise of non-disciplinary cultural research in the late-twentieth century, and one is obliged to re-examine the approaches, scholarship and research tools of the discipline when one engages in exploring the origins of civilization. Karen Armstrong alerted modern people who ignore or disparage myths.

> It is, therefore, a mistake to regard myth as an inferior mode of thought, which can be cast aside when human beings have attained the age of reason. Mythology is not an early attempt at history and does not claim that its tales are objective fact. Like a novel, an opera or a ballet, myth is make-believe; it is a game that transfigures our fragmented, tragic world, and helps us to glimpse new possibilities by asking 'what if?'—a question which has also provoked some of our most important discoveries in philosophy, science and technology (Armstrong 2005, 8).

The emergence of postmodern mythological study has, it seems, benefited from several important academic fields. For example, masters of psychoanalysis, such as Freud, Jung and Newman, urged their contemporaries to explore the soul, citing the discarding of myths as being the main cause of the loss of soul. Another example is anthropologists' research into the relevance of myths and rituals in non-literary societies. The myths and epics behind rituals are not only the "history" of the oral memory of specific ethnic groups, but are the very basis of their cultural identity. Philosophers such as Cassirer and Levi-Strauss argue that one may discover the true source of human thinking and the "cultural code" in myths. The horizons of mythological research extend far beyond the mythological concept of the literary subject and can promote wider academic innovation in the humanities.

The changes to the concept of history brought about by post-modern mythological study are equally breathtaking. Some theorists have even urged that the long-accepted word "history" be replaced by a new term such as "mythistory" (Cornford 1907; Kelley 1998). The substitution of terms offers a truer description of the field, and helps rectify two thousand years of error caused by the separation and opposition of "history" and "myth". As the American historian Peter Heehs maintained:

To summarize the different approaches to myth and history that we have considered, positivist historiography declares that myth has nothing to do with history; academic mythology replies that history has nothing to do with myth. Certain contemporary historians study myth as an object or category of historiography. Others go so far as to view history as a sort of myth. In the evolutionary view (represented by McNeill) and even more so in the extreme view advocated by White, the conventional distinction between factual and fictive events is blurred (Heehs 1994, 5).

From the writings of the representatives of new historicism, McNeill and Hayden White, and the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, it can be seen that the opposition between "factual" and "fictive" may be questioned and even overturned. Taking the oral mythology of the Maori culture in the Hawaiian Islands and New Zealand as an example, Sahlins illustrates that the myths the aborigines recount reflect their history, although Westerners mistakenly assume they have no history. On the contrary, the history of the Pacific islands recorded by Western colonists was in the eyes of the aborigines a fictional myth. He called the non-literate Hawaiian aboriginal society the "Islands of History", identifying "history" with "myth–practice" or "culture" (Sahlins 1987). Sahlins creative ideas offer a new way of thinking to historical anthropological researchers aiming to find history beyond written records.

At the end of the twentieth century, after completing the largest liberal arts project since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the "Xia Shang Zhou Chronology", the country launched a follow-up project, "Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization", at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To tackle the problems and questions at the heart of this project, a team was formed that brought together experts from multiple disciplines, with archaeologists forming the core. The other disciplines represented include history, astronomy, geography, paleoethnobotany, palaeontology, scientific history, and chemical composition analysis. Almost every conceivable field, but not comparative mythology. This evident deficiency not only reflects the impact of the narrow literary interpretation of the myth on Chinese academia over the past century, but also our relative ignorance of overseas research achievements in comparative mythology. The need to reflect critically on the literature-based myth that modern Chinese scholars have long been accustomed to and to re-establish a broader view rooted in cross-disciplinary perspectives has prompted one to apply comparative mythology to explore the origins of civilization and the study of ancient history in this study.

In what follows, the tension that has arisen between a rampant globalism and a widespread renewed consciousness of local culture will be presented as a realistic driving force for academic development in the humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century. In the post-colonial era every nation, big or small, has been faced with the task of looking inwards and to reconfirm and consolidate its own cultural traditions and identity. The search for cultural roots and the academic exploration of the origins of civilization are, and will remain, topical and difficult issues to tackle. Addressing these challenges, and building on advances made to interdisciplinary approaches, this author and his colleagues at the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Committee of Mythology of the Chinese Folk Literature and Art Association (commonly referred to as "the

Chinese Mythology Society") have proposed looking the problem through a new lens: "Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization from the Perspective of Comparative Mythology". The advantages of their suggestion are twofold: such research will support and strengthen what are arguably the most important academic projects in China, and in doing so will foster a framework for, and systematic training of, the serious study of mythology in China. This study explores the integration of cross-cultural interdisciplinary knowledge into the humanities in China and the direction of academic innovation within the field. It further probes the significance and utility of the "quadruple-evidence method" in the study of literature and history.

Extant research by Chinese academics that applies mythology in exploring the origins of civilization is, relatively to the work done by academics in other countries, lagging behind. The problem, it seems, lies in the fragmentation of knowledge about the humanities between literature, history and philosophy, and the fact that so many advances in the field are now becoming outdated. In the 1920s, Wang Guowei first proposed the "double-evidence method". Then, in the 1930s and 1940s, Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958) and Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) conducted case studies utilising anthropological methods and comparative mythology. Because of their capacity as writers or literary historians, scholars in historical and archaeological fields did not pay enough attention to their research paradigm, and largely ignored their research findings. Some conservatives even regarded such exploration as unorthodox. When the era of doubting antiquity came to an end in the 1990s, calls for a re-evaluation of the research of Zheng Zhenduo and Wen Yiduo's research were steadily growing. This author summarizes their approach as the "triple-evidence method" and will seek to apply the research paradigm of cultural anthropology, in particular the anthropological means of analysing mythology, to further develop and expand the scope of the triple-evidence method in order to provide a modern interpretation of ancient Chinese classics.

In modern Chinese historiography a more systemic study of the legendary and mythological times in ancient history was represented by Xu Xusheng's *The Legendary Times in Early Chinese History* (1943) and Ding Shan's *An Examination of Chinese Ancient Religion and Myth* (finished in 1950). Because of the frequent wars in the 1940s and the limited archaeological discoveries in China, the research sources were mainly inherited literature. The concept of myth was still limited to the literature-based myth of western modernity. Xu Xusheng entitled his book "Legendary times" rather than "Mythological times" because he thought that the terms "are two things that are very close but different from each other and must not be confused" (1985, 21). Myths are fictions, whereas legends imply historical events. The imagination of the ancient Greeks was highly developed and their legends include many strange elements. However, the ancestors of the Chinese people preferred to be practical, so there are not many elements of myths in Chinese legends. This is the main reason why Xu Xusheng chose "legends" instead of "myths" in studying ancient Chinese history. Because the "Doubting Antiquity School" relegated all ancient history in the minds of the ancients to myths and legends, it viewed "recorded history" as equivalent to "pseudo history" (Gu 1982, 59). As an historian and archaeologist, Xu Xusheng made an example of deliberately avoiding "myth".

His great works, like Gu Jiegang's "pseudo-history" theory, left a clear "restricted area" for later generations. Its far-reaching side effects have yet to be reconsidered. The historian Zhao Guangxian, meanwhile, wrote an article in 1947 to evaluate Xu Shu's research methods, hoping that the study of ancient history in China could follow the example of Egypt, Babylon, Persia and Greece by "taking off the cloak of legends and myths to embark on a scientific continent" (Zhao 1987, 20). The word "myth" in his works seems to be the opposite of "science".

The inheritance of the concept of opposing science with myth from Hu Shih and Gu Jiegang to Xu Xusheng and Zhao Guangxian is roughly illustrated by the basic neglect of mythology in historical and archaeological studies in New China. Ding Shan's historical textual criticism generally follows the Doubting Antiquity School's idea of discerning the part of religion and myth from the so-called historical records: that is, to distinguish the fictive from the factual (1988). Ding Shan's goal is to turn a considerable part of ancient history into a literary myth. Although the title of his book does not evade mythology, it does not trust it, just like Xu Xusheng. It regards myth as the opposite of history and reality, that is, in Gu Jiegang's words, "pseudo-history".

(2) Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization: Possible Contributions of Comparative Mythology

In the past 30 years, Chinese historiography and archaeology have witnessed a growth in interdisciplinary approaches. However, most people are still reluctant to step onto the restricted area delimited by Xu Xusheng and others. Only a few historians or archaeologists with wide-ranging interests have entered the mythological field and achieved a degree of success. Recent studies include the book *Mythology Archaeology* written by Lu Sixian (1995), an archaeologist specializing in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Lu focused on cultural relics and explored the possible connection between the myths of Fuxi and Nüwa[1] and images found on excavated artifacts. The book was, in essence, written in isolation from the international community of scholars that practice comparative mythology (using references only from Chinese scholars), which unfortunately limits the theoretical background on which it draws and its methodological framework. The works *Selected Essays on Comparative Archaeology* (1997a) and *Walking Out of the 'Doubting of Antiquity' Era* (1997b) by Li Xueqin, the chief expert on the Xia–Shang–Zhou Chronology Project, are both closely tied to the theme of exploring the origins of civilization. They show profound knowledge of both literature and artifact archaeology, demonstrating a broad understanding of each which is almost unparalleled in China.

They are, however, set back by their failure to include an adequate consideration of comparative mythological approaches to the materials. Had Li been aware of important trends and breakthroughs in mythological approaches to interpreting archaeology, he no doubt would have come to analyse certain artifacts differently, not least prehistoric jades and their role in myths and the mythological motifs of the Erlitou

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[1] Fuxi (伏羲) and Nüwa (女娲) are a pair of important deities found in Chinese mythology. They are credited with the creation of humanity.

culture. In the case of the latter, for instance, Li's interpretation of the *taotie* mythological creature is tenuous and relies too heavily on outdated assumptions. It fails to reveal the cultural origins of the bronze ornament with inlaid turquoise features, a task that this author will tackle from a mythological perspective in Chap. 13.

Over the past 15 years literary anthropologists, building on Wang Guowei's double-evidence method, have proposed using a triple-evidence method and more recently a quadruple-evidence method. These developments represent the academic background of, and inspiration for, this exploration into the origins of Chinese civilization using a mythological approach.

The study of the origins of civilization focuses on the evolution that occurred between the Neolithic age and the formation of the Early State, in which mythological thinking and worldviews gradually gave way to the authority of rationality and science. Given the importance of mythology in this era, a comprehensive study of the myths and legends, and mythological narratives, thinking, representations and ceremonies can shed new light on archaeological materials, and help one to better understand the culture, beliefs and lives of the people that inhabited China in this period. In the past, mythological studies have been predominantly rooted in literature, and thus academics have shied away from studying the era before written records. Recent studies, however, have innovated to extend their research into the preliterate period, making full use of material objects (statues of gods, totem icons, pottery figures, jade images, etc.) and references to ethnographic evidence in order to make nuanced interpretations about ancient societies, achieving remarkable progress.

In the past couple of decades outside of China, comparative mythology has developed rapidly as a field, and other projects tackling the theme of the "origins of civilization" have seen outstanding progress. Influential works include *Archaeology of Mythology* (1986), *Mythology of Jomon Figurines* (1986) and *Japanese Beliefs in the Goddesses* (1995), all written by the Japanese mythologist Atsuhiko Yoshida; a series of books by the American archaeologist and mythologist Marija Gimbutas such as *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: 6500–3500 BC* (1982), *The Civilization of the Goddesses* (1991) and *The Living Goddesses* (2001); *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (2004) by the German scholar of Greek mythology Walter Burkert; *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* (2000) by the British scholar Cynthia Eller; *Sumerian Mythology* (1961) by Samuel Noah Kramer, an expert on Sumer; *Greek Mythology and Mesopotamia* (1994) by the British comparative mythologist Charles Penglase; and *Prehistoric Religion: Mythology, Symbolism* (2003) by the American scholar Ariel Golan. Golan's book examines the relationship between religion, myth and ritual in prehistoric society. It is believed that in the preliterate age, images often contained significant religious content. With the passage of time, the religious dimensions of these images are forgotten and they come to be interpreted as merely decorative patterns. These international achievements in the field of comparative mythology are of great significance for scholars studying the origins of Chinese civilization. In view of this, the national project planned to set up a database of translations of those books (17 books initially planned, 21 completed at present

and, conditions permitting, 30–50 in the future), providing a timely academic reference for the study of the origins of civilization and the construction of a mythological history of China.

Although comparative mythology outside of China has made considerable progress, as a result of considerable linguistic and cultural gaps almost no mythologists have directly studied the origins of Chinese civilization. Apart from the late Harvard anthropologist Chang Kwang-chih's research on the Bronze Age of China (1982) and Wu Hong of the University of Chicago using archaeological images to study the formation of myths in the Han Dynasty, there have been few related achievements in recent years. This indicates the need for an in-depth discussion among Chinese researchers.

In constructing a theoretical framework for a (comparative) mythological approach to the origins of Chinese civilization, scholars might consider the following three aspects.

Firstly, how one might apply comparative mythology in studying the origins of civilization. Since related research in China has, relatively speaking, neglected the perspective of comparative mythologists, it is necessary to systematically sort through the relevant international academic achievements from the twentieth century onwards and clarify how comparative mythology can provide a new perspective for the research.

Looking at the unique contribution of mythology to the study of the origins of civilization in the twentieth century, one may focus attention on three important schools. (1) Comparative mythology focusing on cultural origins, represented by Georges Dumézil (1898–1986) (Ye 1988). In particular, their achievements in Indo-European comparative mythology are most prominent. (2) Mythological interpretation of archaeology and iconology, represented by Marija Gimbutas and Atsuhiko Yoshida; (3) Research on the origins of Western civilization and mythological biology, represented by Walter Burkert and Martin Nilsson. The academic qualities and unique contributions of the above three schools offer insight into the ways in which mythology, history, archaeology, linguistics and art history interact with one another to yield new interpretations, and thus can assist one in developing a methodological approach for the study of the origins of Chinese civilization.

Secondly, a reflection on Chinese mythology and previous research on the origins of Chinese civilization is long overdue. A systematic mapping of the heritage of Chinese mythology, as has been theorized since the twentieth century, and of research findings pertaining to the origins of civilization is to be conducted. Older studies must be re-evaluated in light of new archaeological findings and developments in our understanding of the interaction between literary mythology and ancient history. Further fieldwork and literary text research must also be conducted in order to accumulate enough cultural knowledge to make considered ethnographic analyses of archaeological objects and images. It is also crucial for scholars to learn about the evolution of the double- and triple-evidence methods, and how they incorporate anthropology, folklore, archaeology and mythology in exploring the emergence of Chinese civilization.

Thirdly, scholars must fully consider the quadruple-evidence method, which embraces comparative mythology as a core part of its methodology. Based on both international and Chinese comparative mythological research, and combining various multi-disciplinary perspectives, this method allows for the study of unique local myths and religious rituals in the prehistoric period, such as the sanctification of jade and metals. It also allows for a mythological and anthropological interpretation of archaeological objects found at key sites. As will be demonstrated, analysing the emergence of Chinese civilization through the lens of the quadruple-evidence method reveals that prehistoric myths and beliefs played an important role in shaping early civilization, and that they greatly influenced early Confucian/Daoist thought (for instance, the sage and sage-king myths are known to have been greatly valued by early proponents of both thought systems). In addition, this method can be used to systematically analyse the origins and evolution of many of China's distinct mythical creatures (dragons, phoenixes, turtles, etc.). This author will use this method to show how the phoenix deity came to replace the earlier owl deity, and likewise how the dragon replaced the bear. Such analyses provide new clues in the search for the origins and development of Chinese thought, literature and art.

Of the above three aspects, the first two are effectively a summation of existing academia, which can be regarded as theoretical preparation for new research, while the last calls for an improvement in methodology and the application of evidence. The "quadruple-evidence method" emerged from the interdisciplinary research experience of the literary anthropology school, an innovative group of scholars within China's humanities. More specifically, the quadruple-evidence method refers to the full and conscious use of the following four types of data in research in order to fully reap the rewards of multidisciplinary knowledge integration: (1) inherited literature; (2) excavated literature; (3) ethnography and oral culture; and (4) excavated objects and images (Ye 2006a).

The quadruple-evidence method is an attempt to explore and perfect a research approach based in multi-dimensional interpretation that sits outside the debates on "doubting the ancient" and "interpreting the ancient" that dominate modern studies of the ancient in China. Specifically, it combines four types of historical evidence—inherited literature, excavated texts (including those on bamboo and silk), the findings of ethnographic field studies, and newly discovered archaeological materials—in order that previously "silent" prehistoric relics can play a narrative function and thus allow for new interpretations of the cultures of the prehistoric age. As existing research demonstrates, these four types of data do not always play a consistently prominent and straightforward role. To be most effective, they must be applied in an interactive way, strengthening and verifying one another. This might, for example, include interpreting archaeological findings in the context of ethnographic findings, re-assessing textual myths in consideration of archaeological materials, or shedding light on Chinese myths by drawing on the mythological traditions of other ethnic or cultural groups. It is hoped that through attempts to apply this method, innovative teams of academics might be established that will foster refined methods suitable for globalizing knowledge.

(3)   The possible breakthrough of comparative mythology into the paradigm of Chinese studies.

Exploring the origins of civilization through comparative mythology would represent a breakthrough in the field of Chinese studies in three key ways.

Firstly, it would represent a breakthrough in the research paradigm of Chinese studies, encouraging a "second excavation" of archaeological culture and objects by viewing them from a new perspective. One will be able to better understand the myths and beliefs represented by unearthed "sacred objects", to map the evolution of objects (e.g., from pottery drums and pottery bells to bronze drums) from the prehistoric period into the age of early civilized states, and to find the unique dynamic functions of dominant myths and rituals. Efforts should be made to highlight the cultural interpretation of the comparative perspective of globalization in research. For example, combining religious and ritual instruments excavated from the tombs of *wu* (巫, shaman or sorcerer) and priests of the Taosi and Erlitou cultures with the mythological narratives presented on excavated bamboo and silk manuscripts would be conducive to discussing the credibility of Xia Dynasty myths, legends and rituals contained in the inherited literature.

The integration of new mythological knowledge and methods into the research paradigm of Chinese studies would encourage a higher degree of interdisciplinarity across literature, history, philosophy, archaeology and art history, with the result of promoting overdue innovation within the humanities.

Secondly, it will lead to the exploration of a new series of important academic questions. On the one hand, integrating a mythological perspective into research will lead to new and unique interpretations of issues that have eluded explanation since ancient times, such as Gun (鲧) transforming into a bear, and the Jade Gate. On the other hand, it will raise questions about aspects of ancient history that were formerly accepted without query, and at the same time gives one clues towards their solutions. For example, the question of why Yu, when creating five directional flags, only used the central bear flag as his state flag. Another example of this is how one is to interpret newly discovered jade ritual traditions among the Hongshan, Liangzhu and Qijia cultures, and whether they are confirmation of a "Jade Age" unique to Chinese civilization between the Neolithic Age and the Bronze Age. If this is the case, which the evidence suggests it was, 6000–8000 years of jade sanctification provides a telling backdrop to later literature, from King Mu of Zhou's westward search for jade in the Kunlun Mountains to Jia Baoyu being born with a piece of jade in his mouth in Cao Xueqin's Qing Dynasty novel *The Story of the Stone* (also known as *A Dream of the Red Mansion, Hong Lou Meng,* 红楼梦). In adopting a mythological approach to the study of the origins of civilization, one thus might reveal much about the characteristics of later Chinese culture and literature.

Thirdly, it would lead towards a large-scale integration of mythological data into mainstream academia, would lay the foundations for future developments in mythological reconstruction in China, and, in bringing scholars into contact with a variety of new research and literature, would provide a rich source of theoretical references and

case studies for the cross-disciplinary development of literature, history and philosophy. Currently, the national plan is to translate and publish a series of monographs on mythology, focusing on mythological approaches to archaeology and iconography, such as the six volumes of *Theories of Myth* (1996) edited by the English mythologist Robert Segal. It is hoped that as a result the predominant conception of mythology in Chinese academia, purely based on inherited literature, can be updated to reflect current academic trends. In this regard, the book *A Brief History of Greek Mythology Research in the 20th Century* (2011), a doctoral dissertation by Wang Qian that this author supervised, has already made an attempt to review English-language academic writings on the topic. At present, the plan is to continue the project of translations and to expand the scale of research (to include German, French and Japanese writings among others) with the aim of introducing 50 works within 10 years, so that the fruit of modern comparative mythology may be presented to the Chinese academic community in a more comprehensive and palatable way.

To summarize, it is hoped that the introduction of comparative mythology as an interdisciplinary resource into the study of the origins of civilization will provide an opportunity to innovate in terms of both theory and method. In writing this study, this author sincerely hopes to change people's perceptions on the value of mythology as a historical tool, to remove prejudices and in the process shed light on some of the more difficult and opaque parts of ancient history. Perhaps most excitingly of all, this study will re-evaluate the narrative genealogy of the sage-kings from Emperors Yan and Huang to Wen and Wu, thereby providing a new theoretical basis for understanding Chinese cultural identity.

Part I
Theory and Methodology

Chapter 2
An Interdisciplinary Paradigm of Mythology

2.1 The Significance of Mythology Beyond the Written Word

The study of mythology developed considerably in the twentieth century and mythological perspectives have been gradually applied to cultural studies across various fields including literature, historiography, philosophy, religion, law, politics and psychology. Studies on the origins of civilization and intellectual histories have seen great success in applying these new interpretations and methods. Like linguistics before it, mythology emerged as a frontier of innovation in the humanities and allowed great strides to be made in methodology. It has now successfully broken through the limitations of being a "standalone discipline" and is increasingly used to great effect in interdisciplinary studies.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, studies of mythology rooted in literature were introduced from the West via Japan and soon took root and flourished within the field of Chinese literature. Back then, a huge number of researchers focused on folk literature. Since the 1980s, the mythological community in China has had many various discussions about the nature and role of the mythological view in a broad sense. However, mythological studies in China failed to go beyond the boundary of literature and folk literature. Myths and legends closely linked to more ancient times could therefore not be understood properly. Consequently, mythology did not initially play an active role in research into the origins of Chinese civilization.

Realizing this academic bias, the school of Chinese literary anthropology proposed in the late twentieth century a mythological view that goes beyond literature alone. In light of pioneering international research in this field, this chapter will discuss the necessity of, and possibilities presented by, the study of mythology that goes beyond writing. Emphasis will be placed on the expansion of and inspiration for mythological studies brought by increased attention to "image narratives" and "physical material objects", drawing on an interdisciplinary perspective. More weight will be given to a new, non-literary approach to understanding "myth" that focuses more

on traces of the original ideological and cultural contexts in which they were formed. In doing so, one can expand the scope of mythological study into the preliterate age and build a cognitive bridge between the big tradition[1] of the preliterate age and the small tradition of the literate age. Hence, a new paradigm of mythology will be proposed that seeks to reinterpret cultural symbols and ideological codes by means of reinterpreting the small tradition in light of new understandings of the big tradition.

The following sections of this chapter will discuss how mythology can help historians and anthropologists break the restrictive shackles of writing, with a focus on the origin and application of four interdisciplinary paradigms.

2.2 Mythology and Archaeology

As a branch of cultural anthropology, archaeology represents a relatively new field of knowledge that has brought about great changes to traditional scholarship in the twentieth century. It has exerted a great influence on the original humanities: literature, history, philosophy, linguistics, art history and religion, all of which have had to borrow research methods and adopt focuses that highlight the interpretation and analysis of cultural relics. Mythological studies can also draw on archaeology, since myths came into being during prehistoric times and continued to be created into the early stages of civilization. In adopting an approach that draws on mythological and archaeological evidence, researchers will be able to overcome previous limitations in understanding and integrate the big tradition of the preliterate age with the small tradition represented in writing. The school of psychoanalysis led by Freud and Jung has connected mythical heritage with fantasy and the unconscious, and adopted a number of paradigms of archaeology in order to study the human mind. The importance of archaeological materials can be seen clearly in pioneering works such as *Aion* by Jung. It could even be said that archaeology and mythology constitute the two cornerstones of psychoanalysis.

For example, *Aion* (1970) is a work, written by Jung in his later years, that studies the symbology of the "self-archetype". It was named after the Mithraic god Aion of ancient Rome, just as Fraser's *Golden Bough* was named after the religious myths of ancient Rome. The title page of *Aion* displays an image of the titular god on a Roman relic from around 2nd or third century AD. It is a majestic yet slightly unnerving image, creating an atmosphere of mystery. In his book, Jung attempted to illuminate the mechanism of human psychological integration through exploring symbolic manifestations of the concept of self. Centering on the image and story of Christ, Jung tried to trace Jesus' death and resurrection back to the mythological understandings of fish. His book also covers Gnosticism and alchemy. To make clear the connection between the image of the resurrection of Christ and the mythological symbol of the fish, Chap. 6 cites abundant archaeological evidence, much of which

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[1] Big tradition and small tradition are a pair of new concepts different from Redfield's great tradition and little tradition (see details in Chap. 3).

consists of non-textual artefacts. The symbol of the fishes "has a long and colourful prehistory, from the Babylonian fish-god Oannes and his priests who clothed themselves in fish-skins, to the sacred fish-meals in the cult of the Phoenician goddess Derceto-Atargatis" (Jung 1970, 72–73). In this way, psychotherapists have opened a door to new evidence and considerations for professional literary critics. Following the example of such great psychotherapists, academics of literature focusing on the analysis of myths cast their eyes on archaeological evidence and cultural relics. From prehistoric Chinese culture to the jade and bronze fish unearthed from tombs built in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the mythological significance of legends and creatures that cross the boundary between life and death and their relation to the imaginary world hereafter, the Kingdom of Huangquan (黄泉, Yellow Springs), are all worthy of in-depth discussion. In the Shang Dynasty (c.1600–1100 BC) and Zhou Dynasty (c.1100–256 BC), the jade fish was a funerary ceremonial decoration for those of high rank, used most commonly both inside and outside of the coffin. Although jade fish, stone fish, copper fish and tin fish are all recorded in many archaeological reports of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1100–771 BC), few analyses of their mythological meaning have been conducted.

Inspired by psychoanalysis, Joseph Campbell, a mythologist, extended the boundaries of literary research and looked to archaeology and prehistory. In the 1950s, he coined the key phrase "The Archaeology of Myth", using it as the title of the fourth part of *Primitive Mythology*, the first volume of *The Masks of God*. There are two chapters in the fourth part. Chap. 9 "Mythological Thresholds of the Paleolithic" and Chap. 10 "Mythological Thresholds of the Neolithic". Both cover with unequalled depth and vision a time span of hundreds of thousands of years, a chronological range on which most professional literary critics remain unqualified or unwilling to comment. Campbell felt proud when talking of the old age of myths circulating around the world. In Chap. 10, he told of how the serpent is the initial mythological theme of farming cultures, thus illustrating the tale of degeneration of human ancestors caused by Eve in the Garden of Eden when she is tempted by the serpent, as recounted in the Old Testament. The archetype of the serpent in myth has a history of at least 9500 years and "first appeared somewhere along the arc of the primary tropical diffusion from Africa, through Arabia and the Near East, to India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Melanesia" (Campbell 1960, 385–386). The concept of archaeological cultural types offers a space–time coordinate system with which to reorient and relocate purely literary mythological studies. Its significance is thus self-evident, and its side effects may lead to the dismantling and reconstruction of literature-based mythology.

Marija Gimbutas, an American archaeologist, has gone further on this transdisciplinary course. She studied goddess cults in the Paleolithic Age and put forward the theory of "The Civilization of the Goddess", who later, in various forms, became an influential figure in ecology and feminism. In her book *The Living Goddesses* (2001), Gimbutas sought to integrate the myths of various ethnic groups that circulated in early European civilizations, combining prehistoric mythological images. She attempted to see them as different manifestations of the same big cultural tradition, established before and surviving after the establishment of patriarchy. She also

endeavoured to find the blind spots of knowledge caused by the mechanical demarcation between "civilized" and "prehistoric" times and to restore the cultural link between mythological coding (the original societal and cultural elements that led to the formation of myths) and mythological narratives as they existed later. Under the influence of Campbell's archaeological perspective toward mythology and Gimbutas' theory of the Goddess Civilization, Karen Armstrong, a comparative religions scholar in the United Kingdom, presented a history of human mythology as developing over an uninterrupted period of tens of thousands of years, tracing from the cave paintings in the late Paleolithic Age to the works of modernist artists such as Eliot's poetry and Picasso's paintings. Armstrong pointed out that the shortcoming of modern civilization lies in its suppression of its ancient mythological legacy in the name of reason and science:

> Our modern alienation from myth is unprecedented. In the pre-modern world, mythology was indispensable. It not only helped people to make sense of their lives but also revealed regions of the human mind that would otherwise have remained inaccessible. It was an early form of psychology. The stories of gods or heroes descending into the underworld, threading through labyrinths and fighting with monsters, brought to light the mysterious workings of the psyche, showing people how to cope with their own interior crises. When Freud and Jung began to chart the modern quest for the soul, they instinctively turned to classical mythology to explain their insights and gave the old myths a new interpretation. (Armstrong 2005, 10-11)

Armstrong named the great psychoanalysts in order to raise the prospect of a mythological revival in contemporary knowledge. The supporting role that archaeology has played in the new interpretation of mythology is unprecedented, and Armstrong took full advantage of the new knowledge and evidence provided by archaeology to outline the different stages of prehistorical spiritual revolution from the hunter myths (20,000–8000 BC) to the farmer myths (8000–4000 BC). She rebuilt a prehistory of myth on the basis of archaeology (Armstrong 2005). Metaphorically speaking, the prehistory of myth is equivalent to a cipher book that provides the keys for one to understand the original coding behind myths in written literature. Thus, one can decode the small tradition by reinterpreting the big tradition.

> The people of the Paleolithic period had regarded hunting as a sacred act and now farming also became sacramental. When they tilled the fields or gathered the harvest, the farmers had to be in a state of ritual purity. As they watched the seeds descending into the depths of the earth, and realised that they broke open in the darkness to bring forth a marvellously different form of life, planters recognised a hidden force at work. The crop was an epiphany, a revelation of divine energy, and when farmers cultivated the land and brought forth food for their community, they felt that they had entered a sacred realm and participated in this miraculous abundance. The earth seemed to sustain all creatures—plants, animals and humans—as in a living womb. (Ibid., 41-42)

For people today, Mother Earth is a commonly used metaphor. But for Neolithic farmers, it was a steadfast belief and mythological worldview. From reproductive worship in the hunting era to the worship of Mother Earth in the farming era, the goddess's footprints can be seen everywhere. Archaeologists can describe with detail the initial trajectory of agricultural production on earth based on relatively abundant excavations.

Mithen (2006) in his book *After the Ice: A Global Human History 20,000–5000 BC* confirmed that this phenomenon, known to have occurred in the settlement on the Jordan Valley, was also seen elsewhere in the Middle East. About five hundred kilometres northeast of Jericho is the site of Mureybet, whose Neolithic stratum is rich in cultural relics. There is evidence of complex architecture, indicating that people of the late Natufian culture probably rebuilt their settlements at this location. They were semi-subterranean. In the centre there were posts supporting roof timbers mounted on the surrounding walls. Grinding stones were set into the floor of grain storage areas. This was obviously the site of an agricultural settlement. Female figurines were discovered. "Jacques Cauvin proposed that a cult of the 'mother goddess' had existed throughout the Neolithic world. According to Cauvin, this deity has been joined by another: the bull. Skulls and horns of wild cattle were found below floors and within its walls. As the plants and animals remains from the site were from wild species, he held that the new Neolithic worship of such deities caused the development of farming" (Mithen 2006, 63–64). Ideological change came before economic change in the period from 10,000 BC to 9,000 BC. In other words, in the Near East during the Neolithic period, religious and social ideologies came into being before agriculture. Although they did not necessarily directly promote the development of agriculture, they gradually evolved into ideologies and cults that incorporated the characteristics of farming and exerted influence on the form of social organization followed in these societies.

Many Neolithic sites were scattered throughout this vast area from the east coast of the Mediterranean to the Iranian plateau in the west, from the southern part of Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf to the Anatolian plateau in the north. This was the origin of agriculture and the home of a great number of goddess worshippers. In the Near East, a growing number of female images were found in excavations. From this period onward, symbols of the goddess and worship of the female appeared in the economic context of farming and livestock husbandry. Influential Neolithic discoveries include the Jordan Valley, the Levant and the Anatolia regions (ibid., 95). Çatalhöyük in Anatolia is a famous Neolithic site where many buildings, artifacts and tombs were unearthed. In the late 1950s, James Mellaart, the British scholar who first discovered the site, believed that Çatalhöyük was an agriculture-dependent civilization, essentially living from cereals and herds. But some scholars held different opinions, arguing that there was insufficient evidence to validate such a conclusion. After all, the facilities found there for milling grain were much sparser than those in the Jordan Valley. However, the latest research shows that its economy, like many of the Near Eastern societies, was based on the domestication of wild animals and plants, such as goats, sheep, cereals and beans.

Jacques Cauvin's book *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture* (2000) explores the origin of mythology based on relatively recent archaeological findings. As a pioneer of prehistoric archaeology of the Middle East, Cauvin has over twenty years of field experience in Neolithic archaeology. He is familiar with the settlements and agrarian cultural relics and aspires to reveal the changes in mythological thinking and religious beliefs that took place along with the dawn of the Neolithic age. According to Cauvin, a seated female sculpture from 7000 BC, unearthed in