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Author(s): Gilles Boileau

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Wu and shaman¹

GILLES BOILEAU

Tamkang University, Taiwan

The relationship between shamanism and archaic Chinese religion has been the subject of debate for some time. The origin of the controversy is to be found in an article written by Chen Mengjia in 1936.² Chen contended that the Shang king was acting in accordance with his religious duties as a *wu* (巫), because the scope of the religious activities of the *wu* in later texts was approximately the same as part of the king's in oracular inscriptions. Chen Mengjia proposed that *wushu* (巫術), the art (or practice) of *wu* 巫 was the basis of Shang religion. Chen wrote that at the dawn of civilization, when society changed from matrilineal to patrilineal, men were in charge of government whilst women were in charge of religion. During Shang times, the king usurped the religious domain, thus taking charge of religion as well, acting as the *wu*-in-chief.³ Chen's view reflects that of Morgan, and is somewhat antiquated being based more on an a priori approach than on history.⁴

Chen Mengjia's conclusions were based on analysis of the functions of the *wu* as described in Zhou era texts.⁵ Chen Mengjia first proceeded by giving the scope of *wu* activities as seen in later sources: invocation; divination; healing; oneiromancy; rain and dances.⁶ He added that in oracular inscriptions, the Shang king could be seen to practise all these activities.⁷

Two observations can be made: (1) the Shang king indeed practised divination, invocation and so on. Still, in the oracular inscriptions, the term *wu* already existed independently of the character *wang* 王 (king), and no inscription allows a direct equivalence of *wu* and *wang*. Regardless of their specifics, *wang* and *wu* were considered separate entities. According to Chen Mengjia, the king is supposed to have been a *wu* (more precisely, the head *wu*) because he did what the *wu*, in later texts, is said to have done. Therefore, he applied directly to the Shang king information coming from later Zhou sources, sources concerning the *wu* in Zhou times, not the Zhou king or the Shang king; (2) Using these two terms synonymously without direct textual evidence is problematic. Chen Mengjia implied that either the functions of the *wu* were akin to those of the king, or that part of either the nature or the functions of the king were akin to those of the *wu*. The underlying problem, in this case, is to determine finally the difference between *wu* and king, knowing that these differences were probably greater than the common points: parts of the Shang

¹ I am indebted to Professors J. Fleming and T. Price from Tamkang University, Taiwan, and Professor D. Rath, for assistance in correcting the English of this text. This article could never have been written without the help of Roberte Hamayon, director of studies in EPHE (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris), specialist on shamanism. I would like especially to thank P. Li Diankui. I have also to thank Father J. Lefevre, Professors A. Pisarev, M. and V. Kryukov and T. Trimarchi for their invaluable suggestions. I take sole responsibility for the shortcomings of this article.

² Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, 'Shangdai de Shenhua yu Wushu' 商代的神話與巫術, *Yanijing Xuebao* 燕京學報 1936/20, 486–576.

³ *ibid.*, 533.

⁴ For an account of Morgan's theories, see Robert Deliége, *Anthropologie de la parenté* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1996), 48–53.

⁵ Chen, 'Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu', 539, uses the terms 'wushu xingwei' 巫術行爲.

⁶ *ibid.*, 534.

⁷ *ibid.*, 534, 39. On the point of healing, David Keightley has shown that a great many oracular inscriptions concerned with disease are in fact related to the identification of the source of physical discomfort, coming mainly from irritated ancestors, and that there is not a trace of a shamanistic-like cure; the diseases are taken care of through sacrifices (see 'Shamanism, death, and the ancestors', *Asiatische Studien*, LII/3, 1998, 782).

king's activities had (apparently) the same range as those of the *wu* in later texts, therefore the king was a *wu*. It is still very obvious that the same activities were performed by people other than *wu* or the king; for example divination was taken care of by the diviners, even if they acted on the king's behalf.⁸ The functions performed by cultural figures do not enable us to understand such figures because these activities (or similar ones) can in some cases also be performed by others. What is relevant is to understand the role of a person within his society, what distinguishes him from other social actors in the same society, and the form of the society itself.

In the case of the relationship between *wu* and *wang*, Chen Mengjia did not pay sufficient attention to what the king was able to do as a king, that is to say, to the parts of the king's activities in which the *wu* was not involved, for example, political leadership as such, or warfare. The process of recognition must also be taken into account: it is probable that the *wu* was chosen or acknowledged as such according to different criteria to those adopted for the king. Chen's concept of the king as the head *wu* was influenced by Frazer's theories about the origin of political power: for Frazer the king was originally a powerful sorcerer.⁹

Chen Mengjia, even if he did not use the term 'shaman', has established the basic framework for later scholarship on Shang shamanism: since his article, the ruler of Shang dynasty has been understood in some works as a figure whose characteristics were akin to those of the *wu*. But Chen did not provide a translation for 'wu' in a Western language.

Hopkins and Schafer were the first proposing to translate *wu* by 'Shaman', but they gave no anthropological reference as to the definition of this term.¹⁰ Arthur Waley also translated 'wu' as 'shaman', referring directly to Siberian shamanism.¹¹ He was followed by numerous scholars who used comparatism to demonstrate that a form of religion present primarily in Siberia and still observed today is a reliable explanatory tool for Shang and Zhou civilization.¹² Recently, David Keightley expressed some doubts about the validity of the shamanistic model (Siberian or otherwise) as an explanatory model for archaic Chinese religion.¹³ The terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' are, as Lothar von Falkenhausen aptly remarked, so widely employed to describe a vast array of religious beliefs, behaviours and types of society that it is not easy to use them for sociological purposes and comparisons.¹⁴ Another, related, problem is the definition of the term 'shaman'. For example, Ake Hultkrantz defines shamanism as 'a mediator between man and the powers'.¹⁵ According to this

⁸ Keightley, 'Shamanism, death, and the ancestors', 803–4, sees divination as related to the process of legitimization of royal power. One could say that divination was important for the king but it is probable that it was not the primary source of his power but rather a way to consolidate it.

⁹ On this point, see J. P. Roux, *Le roi, mythes et symboles*. (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 26–8.

¹⁰ L. C. Hopkins, 'The shaman or Chinese wu', *JRAS*, 1945, 3–16 and Edward Schafer, 'Ritual exposure in ancient China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1951, 1–2, 130–84. Hopkins evokes the 'Wizard of the proto-historic Orient' whereas, sometimes, Schafer (for example, p. 134) compares the *wu* with the medieval witch.

¹¹ Arthur Waley, *The Nine Songs: a study of shamanism in ancient China*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), 9.

¹² For the history of the *wu*-shaman scholarship, see Kwang-chih Chang, *Art, myth, and ritual: the path to political authority in ancient China*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 45.

¹³ Keightley, 'Shamanism, death, and the ancestors', 829–31.

¹⁴ 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums in early China: the *wu* officials in the Zhouli', *Early China*, 20, 1995, 279. For an example of this kind of understanding of a phenomenon, supposed to continue the same paleolithic tradition, see J. Halifax, *Shaman, the wounded healer*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982).

¹⁵ 'A definition of shamanism', *Temenos* 11, 1973, 29, 34, quoted in E. Childs-Johnson, 'The ghost head mask and metamorphic Shang imagery', *Early China* 20, 1995, 84.

definition, the problem would not be discerning who is shaman, but who is not. In the light of this kind of definition, it is obvious that what is needed is a thorough description of the phenomenon rather than a simple definition. Arthur Waley provided a (rather short) description of the activities of the Siberian shaman: ‘[the *wu*] ... were magic healers and in later times at any rate one of their methods of doctoring was to go, as Siberian shamans do, to the underworld and find out how the Power of Death can be propitiated. Indeed the functions of Chinese *wu* were so like those of Siberian and Tungus Shamans that it is convenient ... to use shaman as a translation of *wu*.’¹⁶ Since Waley, Siberian shamanism has been taken as the primary reference to understand the *wu*. For Waley, the functions of a shaman were essentially in the field of magical medicine.

The scholarship following Chen Mengjia’s article revolves around two issues: Firstly, was the Chinese *wu* akin to the Siberian shaman? Secondly, was the king, while exercising his political duties, retaining some characteristics of the *wu*? This article will deal only with the first question, beginning with a sociological description of Siberian shamanism.

1. *Siberian shamanism*

To say that part of archaic Chinese civilization can be better understood with concepts originating in other civilizations is to do comparatism. Comparatism can be applied in two ways: firstly, it can be used within a coherent entity (for geographical, historical or linguistic reasons) to understand the characteristics of other parts of the same entity; secondly, the comparison’s aim is to detect similarities but also, and more importantly, differences between two systems, to examine the precise characteristics of a given system, what distinguishes this system from related ones, that is to say, to understand more precisely the uniqueness of a given system.¹⁷

What are the characteristics of the Siberian shamans? According to Waley, they were essentially healers, but the situation appears in fact to be far more complex. A recent study by Roberte Hamayon shows that there is a multiplicity of forms of shamanism belonging roughly to two principal models, themselves linked to two forms of social organization: hunting societies and societies practising animal husbandry. The two models described here do not correspond to societies existing in two chronologically different stages: these different societies co-exist in the same area at present. It is important to note that in all Siberian societies, shamanism is an activity that can be exercised by everybody; still, some situations require the expertise of a shaman, who is supposed to be more competent than ‘ordinary’ (or non-shaman) people.¹⁸

Societies dependent exclusively on hunting for their survival are loosely organized, patrilineal, exogamic, and divided into moieties (dualistic organization). The two halves of the society co-operate in hunting, as hunters and bush-beaters.¹⁹ All relationships between humans, and between humans and

¹⁶ In *The Nine Songs*, 9.

¹⁷ See D. Éribon and C. Lévi-strauss, *De près et de loin*, (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1988), 158–59, 179–80. One of the notions used by Lévi-strauss on the problem of comparatism is that of differential gap (*écarts différentiels*), expressing the need to concentrate studies in this field not so much on similarities as on differences. Of course, it is the preliminary generalization that makes comparatism possible. Still, comparatism is best employed between civilizations with comparable levels of technology and social structures.

¹⁸ *La chasse à l’âme, esquisse d’une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*, (Nanterre: Société d’anthropologie, 1990), 429.

¹⁹ I shall show below that such a co-operation is the model for the relationship between the shaman and his spirit helpers.

nature, are conceived as horizontal, as an alliance, with a circulation of vital force between human society and the forest (that is to say the realm of game animals).²⁰ The game are supposed to be provided by the Spirit of the Forest, who is conceived as a horned animal, a large cervid (deer or reindeer, the main source of food). This Spirit has daughters, and the shaman, who will then act as a go-between, securing game for the community, must seduce (one could say trick) these daughters. The position of the shaman is akin to that of the son-in-law, and his personal value is related to his ability to catch game and seduce the daughter of the Spirit of the Forest.²¹ The activities of the shamans are described in terms which evoke play, sexuality and fecundity.²² The shaman is in the position of the wife-taker, which is why he is structurally a male.²³

The shamanistic séance is a symbolic journey during which the shaman 'becomes' a horned animal (a deer or a reindeer) in order to seduce his animal wife, the daughter of the Spirit of the Forest. It is an act of seduction, and the behaviour of the shaman imitates that of a deer trying to seduce a mate and struggling with rivals. He does not dance. He hops and fights as male deer do; he also simulates mating. All these manifestations are not choreographed, they are highly personal and represent the stamina and *savoir-faire* of the shaman; the shaman is fully in control of the séance with the help of an assistant who is directed by the shaman himself.²⁴ To help him, the shaman must enlist animal, auxiliary spirits.²⁵

In Siberian societies which practise husbandry, the concepts attached to and the status of the shaman are very different.²⁶ The main religious activity is ancestral sacrifice. During these sacrifices, the shaman has a marginal role (one that can be filled by old men as well). Sometimes he is in charge of the ritual cleansing.

The principal role during the sacrifices is played by old men of the clans, and the sacrificial altar is the residence of ancestors.²⁷ The introduction of husbandry induces a new attitude towards nature (that is to say the principal source of riches) and goes from a horizontal model to a vertical one: the master of the riches is not the non-human Spirit of the Forest but the human ancestors of the clans. These ancestors must be revered and prayed to. Animals are not game any more, human survival and social status do not depend on hunting but are secured through animal husbandry. The well-being of the herd depends on the grace and blessing of the ancestors. Thus, the intervention of the shaman is not as central as that of the possessor of the cattle (and his ancestors).

In cattle-raising societies, the shaman's principal task is the private cure (performed for the benefit not of the community but of individuals, the cure being remunerated). In line with the general tendency of humanizing the connection between society and nature, the helpers of the shaman are his own ancestors (even if they retain some animal characteristics or traits).²⁸

²⁰ Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 403ff. This circulation uses small figurines, called 'Ongon', which are fed regularly with the meat of hunted animals.

²¹ *ibid.*, 300–12, 428–33, 448–9, 452–3, 593.

²² *ibid.*, 491–506.

²³ *ibid.*, 444, 446, 451. Shamanesses exist but their talents are used mainly for cure and divination. In that case, they are shamanesses not because they are women (it would be more accurate to say in spite of it) but because they belong to the human species as opposed to being animals. The development of shamanism exerted by women is linked to the appearance of more dignified careers for men, particularly as Lamaist monks.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 451.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 299–311.

²⁶ Of course, in some societies, the situation is more complex, with the co-existence of hunting and some primitive forms of husbandry. See Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 321.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 624, 637–43.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 170, 585, 674, 679–82, 699–700.

In summary, Siberian shamanism can be characterized in its purest form (within societies dependent on animal game hunting) as a system of exchange between two partners (human society, and nature as the provider of the food) of equal status. The metaphor of marriage is at the core of the system, where the shaman seduces the daughter of the Spirit of the Forest. He plays a central role too in the communitarian rituals of fecundity.

Where Siberian societies adopt animal husbandry, their social structure is more complex, the religion revolves around the ancestral cult and the shaman becomes a marginal figure, relegated to carrying out private cures.

In order to understand whether Chinese *wu* possessed characteristics akin to those of the Siberian shaman, Shang and Zhou texts will now be examined.

2. *Wu* in Shang oracular inscriptions

The etymology of *wu* is unclear. Tu Baikui has suggested that this character was composed of two pieces of jade and originally designated a tool of divination.²⁹ Wang Hui, basing his interpretation on the *Shuowen Jiezi*, which says that the character 'wu' sounds like the character 'gong' (工), infers that 'wu' designated a kind of officer.³⁰ In oracular inscriptions (twenty or so are known at present), the character *wu* has several meanings:³¹

a) it designates a spirit, *wu* of the north or *wu* of the east, to which sacrifices are offered;³²

b) it is a sacrifice:

(合 34138, epoch IV): 辛酉卜寧風巫九犬

(the day) xinyou, cracks, appeasing the wind (by) offering in the sacrifice *wu* nine dogs.

There are several inscriptions of this type which indicate that the *wu* sacrifice might have been linked to the control of wind, probably in relation to meteorology.³³

c) it is sometimes considered to be an equivalent for *shi* 筮, a form of divination using achilea.³⁴

d) *wu* sometimes seems to refer to a living human being:

(合 5651, epoch I): 丙申卜巫禦, 不禦

(the day) bingshen cracks, the *wu* (offers the) sacrifice of appeasement; (the *wu* does not offer the) sacrifice of appeasement

(合 5658 正, epoch I): 甲子卜貞妥氏巫, 貞妥不其氏巫

(the day) jiazi, 貞 proclaims the oracle, Tuo (will) bring the *wu*; oracle, Tuo will not bring the *wu*.

²⁹ Tu Baikui 塗白奎, 'Shi wu' 釋巫, *Huaxia Kaogu* 華夏考古 1997/1, 90.

³⁰ Wang Hui 王暉, *Shangzhou wenhua bijiao yanjiu* 商周文化比較研究. (Beijing: Renwen, 2000), 115–6.

³¹ See David Keightley's analysis in 'Shamanism, death, and the ancestors', 765–6.

³² Yu Xingwu 于省吾, *Jiaguwenzi Gulin* 甲骨文字詁林, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), T4, 2909. See also Tu Baikui, 'Shi wu', 89. Tu Baikui says that these spirits were the spirits of divinized *wu*, after their death, giving Han sources as evidence.

³³ Another inscription. (合 21078, epoch I): 巫帝, 一犬一豕 could be interpreted as: 'offering a *wu* sacrifice to the High God, one dog, one pig', but the absence in general in oracular inscriptions of sacrifices offered directly to the Shangdi would force a reconsideration of this interpretation. Maybe it was a case of two sacrifices, *wu* and *di*, with no recipient mentioned. Other inscriptions should help to solve the question. In some inscriptions, the meaning of *wu* is ambiguous, as in 英 1957, epoch II: 貞弗崇王惠巫 divination, there is no harm to the king, (but) there is (harm) to the *wu*. This inscription is difficult to interpret; another interpretation would be: 'X (ancestor?) does not harm the king, it is the *wu* (who harms the king)'. In that case, the character 'wu' would perhaps be a kind of spirit.

³⁴ 'Shi wu', 91. Tu Baikui interprets 'wu' as the equivalent of 'shi' as a method of divination using jade sticks.

(合 5654, epoch I): 貞周氏巫, 二告

oracle, Zhou brings the *wu*, second proclamation.

Tu Baikui suggests ('Shi wu', 89) that *wu* could have been offered as a tribute to the Shang.

(合 5647 正, epoch I): 壬辰卜互貞出誓 巫呼取氏

(the day) renchen cracks, Gen proclaims the oracle, (there is) a mandate about *wu*, call to capture and bring on (*wu*).³⁵

In addition, Song Zhenhao has found an inscription which seems to indicate that the *wu* was sometimes in charge of divination. In this inscription (合 5648, epoch I), the expression 貞巫曰 (divination, the *wu* proclaims ...) is present in the context of a sacrifice of appeasement offered to a royal spouse (婦).³⁶

Are all the characters 'wu' related or is it that its phonetic value or morphology have been borrowed for certain terms?³⁷ It seems that when *wu* means divination using achilea, the character 巫 would then be the prototype of the character nowadays pronounced *shi* (筮). It could also be the case that *wu* designating a spirit or a type of sacrifice is phonetically borrowed. When *wu* designates a living being, it is not clear whether it is a personal name or the name of a tribe, *wu* being also the name of a place or territory. Jean Lefevre interprets the character *wu* as the name of a deity and a territory. For *wu* as the name of a territory, see, for example, 合 32234 (epoch IV) 乙丑卜 𠄎 伐辛未于巫 'the day yichou, cracks, making an offering of blood and decapitated victims the day xinwei at Wu'.³⁸ Hence, it is difficult to say whether the character can be taken as an equivalent of *wu*, as used in received texts. The living *wu*'s characteristics can be described conservatively as follows:

- 1) whether the *wu* is a man or a woman is not known;
- 2) it could be either the name for a function or the name of a people (or an individual) coming from a definite territory or nation;
- 3) the *wu* seems to have been in charge of some divinations, (in one instance, divination is linked to a sacrifice of appeasement);
- 4) the *wu* is seen as offering a sacrifice of appeasement but the inscription and the fact that this kind of sacrifice was offered by other persons (the king included) suggests that the *wu* was not the person of choice to conduct all the sacrifices of appeasement;
- 5) there is only one inscription where a direct link between the king and the *wu* appears. Nevertheless, the nature of the link is not known, because the status of the *wu* does not appear clearly;
- 6) he follows (being brought, presumably, to Shang territory or court) the orders of other people; he is perhaps offered to the Shang as a tribute.

³⁵ The inscription 合 35607 (IV epoch) contains the expression '[we] will offer *wu* [people?] in the sacrifice 其用巫', and thus seems to indicate that *wu* were also sacrificial victims.

³⁶ Song Zhenhao 宋鎮豪, 'Shangdai de Wuchen Jiaohe he Yiliao Suxin' 商代的巫臣交合和醫療俗信, *Huaxia Kaogu* 華夏考古 1995/1, 77–85.

³⁷ Victor Mair, based on phonetic evidence, suggests that the term 'wu' originally designated a non-Chinese magician, an Iranian 'magus', invited by the Shang kings to their court for his magical talents. Whatever the phonetic resemblance between the reconstructed pronunciation of *wu* and the term 'magus', oracular inscriptions offer no clue as to the ethnic identity of the *wu*. Besides, these *wu* do not seem to have had any particular importance in Shang court. See 'Old Sinitic *Myag, Old Persian Maguš, and English "Magician"' in *Early China* 1990/15, 27–47.

³⁸ Jean Lefevre, 'Grands et petits territoires', in Jacques Gernet and Marc Kalinowski (ed.), *En suivant la voie royale: mélanges en hommage à Léon Vandermeersch*. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient: Études Thématiques 7, 1997), 46–7. Sarah Allan analyses the character 'wu' in oracular inscriptions as being derived from the character 'fang' and suggests that *wu* would mean in some inscriptions 'the four directions'. See *Gui zhi Mi* 昭公 (trans. Wang Tao 汪濤, Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin, 1992), 85.

Tu Baikui argues that the *wu* were in charge of some ritual dances, for example in the 合 36507 (epoch V) where the expression 巫九 appears. Tu, referring to later texts, affirms that these characters designated a group of nine *wu* responsible for a ritual dance before sacrifices.³⁹ This expression is frequently found in oracular inscriptions relating to cyclical sacrifices, but for Chang Yuzhi, the meaning is unclear.⁴⁰

The number of oracular inscriptions concerning the *wu* is quite limited. One question remains: what is the relationship between the many meanings of this character? Are the spirits, the sacrifice and the living person(s) related to a single phenomenon? The *jiaguwen* offer no clear answer. It could be that the kind of spirit named *wu* was in fact the spirit of the place *Wu*.

If we consider only the inscriptions related to the living *wu*, his (her?) status does not seem to have been too elevated. He (she) had to follow orders and does not appear to have had a great deal of autonomy. His (her) attributes do not seem to match the king's: he (she) does not appear to have had political functions and his (her) involvement in sacrifice seems limited. The ambiguity inherent in the meaning of the character (name of a territory designating also the people living in this territory, the spirit in charge of the territory or also the name of a function) renders difficult a comparison with either Siberian shamanism or with later Chinese texts.

3. *Wu in received texts*

The nature of these texts is not homogenous; some are rituals, others are historical texts with a strong Confucian bias, some are Taoist, some, like the *Lüshi chunqiu*, are eclectic. It is quite clear that the data presented do not emanate from the *wu* themselves but are so to speak different points of view on the *wu*. All these texts are by no means equivalent to first-hand, anthropological studies and should therefore be compared with data pertaining to the Siberian shaman (for whom such first-hand studies exist) with great care. Therefore, what can be seen in the received texts is not what *wu* 'really' were, but how they were considered.

A number of these texts have been frequently used to try to fathom the status of the *wu* in early ages. The *Guoyu*, for example, presents them in a rather favourable way:

古者民神不雜。民之精爽不攜貳者，而又能齊肅衰正，其智能上下比義，其聖能光遠宣朗，其明能光照之，其聰能聽徹之，如是則明神降之，在男曰覡，在女曰巫。是使制神之處位次主，而為之牲器時服，而後使先聖之後之有光烈，而能知山川之號，高祖之主，宗廟之事，昭穆之世，齊敬之勤，禮節之宜，威儀之則，容貌之崇，忠信之質，禋絜之服，而敬恭明神者，以為之祝。使名姓之後，能知四時之生，犧牲之物，玉帛之類，采服之儀，彝器之量，次主之度，屏攝之位，壇場之所，上下之神，氏姓之出，而心率舊典者為之宗。於是乎有天地神民類物之官，是謂五官，各司其序，不相亂也。民是以能有忠信，神是以能有明德，民神異業，敬不瀆，故神降嘉生，民以物享，禍災不至，求用不匱。

³⁹ Tu Baikui, 'Shi Wu', 89.

⁴⁰ Chang Yuzhi 常玉芝, *Shangdai zhouji zhidu* 商代周祭制度 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue, 1987), 10.

Anciently, humans and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were so perspicacious, single-minded, and reverential that their understanding enabled them to make meaningful collation of what lies above and below, and their insight to illumine what is distant and profound. Therefore the spirits would descend into them. The possessors of such powers were, if men, called *xi* 覡 (shaman), and, if women, *wu* 巫 (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.⁴¹

According to David Keightley, this passage could not be used to provide evidence about the distant past of Chinese civilization: he interprets it as being concerned with the way in which early Chinese states maintained their control of religious order, if necessary against every kind of ecstatic or anarchic religious manifestation.⁴² The complete passage insists on bringing order and differentiation into religious matters, in line with the late Zhou ideology of sacrifice and religion. The discourse in the *Guoyu* presents the *wu* as the head of a hierarchy of officers and appears to be an elaboration on the relation between religion and society, relevant within the framework of the ritual thinking of this period, particularly the ideology of sacrifice. The examples given in Table 1 may suffice to show there are striking similarities in the concepts used between the text of the *Guoyu* and several received texts from the end of the Zhou period, ritual or not.

These correspondences confirm Keightley's conclusion: the text of the *Guoyu* is relevant in the context of the ritual discussions of the Warring States period. Another text presenting a *wu* as an officer is the chapter 'jun Shi' 君奭 of the *Shujing*. Here, Zhou Gongdan himself takes six ministers of the Shang dynasty as an example of good servants of the kings. Among them there are

⁴¹ *Guoyu* 國語, chapter Chuyuxia 楚語下, *Sibu Beiyao* (ed.) 18.1A–B. For a part of this passage (from 'Anciently' to '... and if women, *wu*') I have used the translation from Derk Bode, 'Myths of ancient China', in S. N. Kramer (ed.) *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 390–91 quoted in Chang, *Art, myth and ritual*, 44–5. The bracketed terms, shamans and shamanesses are Bode's interpretations of *xi* and *wu*.

⁴² 'Shamanism, death, and the ancestors', 821–4.

Table 1.

<i>Guoyu</i> , Chuyuxia	Other received texts
(the invocators were in charge of) the difference between senior and junior (in the ritual), the enforcement of respect 昭穆之世，齊敬之勤	it (the sacrifice) manifests the moral principle binding father and son; it manifests the hierarchy of the noble and ignoble 見父子之倫焉。見貴賤之等焉。 ⁴³
the people and spirits had their own realm, there was respect and no untoward familiarity 民神異業，敬不瀆	the ritual is the order of Heaven and Earth ... There is order; therefore all beings are differentiated 禮者天地之序焉 ... 序則群物皆別。 ⁴⁴
Anciently, men and spirits did not intermingle 古者民神不雜	respecting ancestors and spirits, and keeping them at a distance 敬鬼神而遠之。 ⁴⁵

two individuals, Wu Xian (巫賢) and his son, Wu Xian (巫咸) who are in charge of the king's household.⁴⁶ In some texts, Wu Xian senior is described as being in charge of the divination using achilea.⁴⁷ He was apparently made a high god in the kingdom of Qin 秦 during the Warring States period.⁴⁸ The Tang subcommentary interprets the character *wu* of Wu Xian father and son as being a cognomen, the name of the clan from which the two Xian came. It is possible that in fact the text referred to two Shang ministers, father and son, coming from the same eponymous territory *wu*. Perhaps, later, the name (*wu* 巫) of these two ministers has been confused with the character *wu* (巫) as employed in other received texts.

According to K. C. Chang, a text describing male and female *wu*, perfumed, clothed in gorgeous costumes singing and dancing for the deities during rituals, appears in the *Chuci* 楚詞, in the chapter 'Jiuge' 九歌, passage 'Yunzhongjun' 雲中君. In fact, an examination of the text itself reveals that the character '*wu*' does not appear at all, and this holds true for the whole Nine Songs.⁴⁹ The only connection between the Nine Songs and *wu* is the preface written during the Song dynasty by Zhuzi 朱子, which says that the Nine Songs were written by Qu Yuan as a description of the dances of *wu* and *xi* 覯 (male *wu*) performed during sacrifices. Admittedly, *wu* and *xi* dance, but they do so to pray for rain, and there is no mention of these dances being associated with regular sacrifices to gods. All the aforementioned texts place the *wu* within a hierarchy of officers, a fact that does not correspond well to the situation of the Siberian shaman, who is never in such a hierarchy.

Other texts, scattered in a number of sources dating from Spring and Autumn to Warring States and Western Han period, present the *wu* in a less favourable manner and suggest an understanding of the details of their activities in the Zhou era, either in a ritual or historical context.

⁴³ *Liji*, 'Jitong' 祭統, 49, 376–7.

⁴⁴ *Liji*, 'Yueji' 樂記, 37, 302.

⁴⁵ *Lunyu* 論語, (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 6.23.

⁴⁶ *Shujing* 伊, (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 18.11.

⁴⁷ See Wang, *Shangzhou wenhua bijiao yanjiu*, 117.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁹ *Chuci jizhu* 楚詞集註 [*Sikuquanshu* ed.] 2, 3–6, text translated by David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 35, quoted in Chang, *Art, myth and ritual*, 47.

The classical text for the typology of the functions of the *wu* is the *Zhouli*. The *Zhouli* does not mention the character *xi* (覡) but only male *wu* (男巫) and female *wu* (女巫). The range of *wu* activities in this source is as follows:⁵⁰ Male *wu*: (a) in charge of sacrifices to the deities of mountains and rivers; (b) in the winter, they make offerings (or shoot arrows) in the great temple hall. According to Zheng Xuan, the winter ceremony during which the *wu* make offerings (or shoot arrows) in the great temple hall is an exorcism;⁵¹ (c) in the spring, they are in charge of protecting the country from disease; (d) when the king offers condolences, they, together with invocators (祝), precede him.

Female *wu*: (a) in charge of ablutions and anointing during exorcism; (b) dance for drought; (c) when the queen offers condolence, they, together with invocators precede her; (d) in great calamities of the state, they pray, sing and wail.

According to the various commentaries, the male *wu* seems also to be in charge, with physicians, of healing, using the special techniques of the *wu* (which are different to those used by physicians (醫)).⁵²

In the *Zhouli*, the number of *wu* is not fixed, varying presumably according to the circumstances; this suggests that *wu* could be observed outside the court and that their rank was given according to their performance, which further suggests that *wu* could be hired or dismissed on the basis of their performance. Their activities appear to take place under the direction of two officers, who do not seem to be *wu* themselves: the *siwu* (司巫) and the *shiwu* (師巫).⁵³

The only activities in which the *wu* take part alone are healing according to their own special techniques and the dance for drought: accompanying the king during visits of condolence is performed by the *wu* and the invocators (ceremony attested also in the *Liji*);⁵⁴ sacrifices to the deities of mountains and rivers seem to be, like other sacrifices, under the control of two major officials: the *dazongbo* (大宗伯) and the *xiaozongbo* (小宗伯).⁵⁵ It is therefore probable that the male *wu* was merely an underling during these sacrifices.

One important point emerges from the texts of the *Zhouli*: the tasks of the *wu*, male and female alike, seem to have had a close connection with inauspicious events—diseases, death, droughts or floods.⁵⁶ The elements presented in the *Zhouli* are not very detailed. An examination of further texts is necessary to understand more completely the *wu*'s activities. The *wu* appear in a number of circumstances as detailed below.

Wu as healer

In the *Zhouli*, there is no detail pertaining to the healing techniques used by the *wu* (different from the techniques of the *yi* physicians with whom they collaborated) during healing rituals. The *Yizhoushu* 逸周書, chapter 'Daju' 大聚, seems to indicate that the *wu* could also heal through the use of herbs or medicinal substances:

⁵⁰ The following outline is loosely based on the one presented in von Falkenhausen, 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 290–92.

⁵¹ Zheng Xuan refers to an exorcism performed by the official *fangxiangshi* (方相氏) in the *Zhouli*; see von Falkenhausen, 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 291, n. 44.

⁵² *ibid.*, 291–2, n. 46.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 286.

⁵⁴ *Liji* 禮記 'Tangongxia' 檀弓下 (*Shisanjing Zhushu*, 十三經注疏. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 9.74.

⁵⁵ *Zhouli* 周禮, (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 18.120 and 19.128.

⁵⁶ von Falkenhausen, 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 293.

鄉立巫醫具百藥以備疾災

The county will establish a *wu*-physician, (who will) gather the Hundred Medications, in order to prepare for diseases and calamities.⁵⁷

Still, this passage could be corrupted, meaning in fact that a *wu* and a physician, who then would be solely in charge of medications, are established in the county, as a passage from the Lunyu 論語 might suggest:

子曰.南人有言曰.人而無恆.不可以作巫醫.

The Master said, 'the people of the South have a saying—"A man without constancy cannot be either a *wu* or a doctor."⁵⁸

The translation is based partially on the sub-commentary by Xing Bing 邢昺, who stated that physicians were in charge of medication and *wu* received spirits to repel evil (接神除邪).

It is tempting to interpret the receiving of the gods by the *wu* as an allusion to possession or trance. The notion of trance depends heavily on the subjective interpretation of the scholar and thus cannot form the basis of scientific studies (particularly in the case of historic civilizations, where there is no access whatsoever to living witnesses). It is not necessary to fall into a trance in order to have spirits perform tasks at one's will. Receiving spirits could also be achieved by ritual, symbolic means, without the performer being supposedly under the control of a spirit.⁵⁹ Logically, it would not be possible for somebody to order a spirit to do something if the spirit was supposed already to have invaded his mind. Therefore, if somebody were to fall in a trance, he would have to be under the control of 'somebody' else. Indeed, the texts of the *Zhouli* mention that the *wu* was hierarchically under the control of the *siwu* and the *shiwu*; still, the *Lunyu* and their commentaries do not seem to imply that the *wu*, when performing healing, was under the direct control of somebody else. Lothar von Falkenhausen, quoting Mircea Eliade, alludes to ethnographic descriptions of shaman's journeys in order to suggest that trance could indeed have been the *wu*'s preferred way of healing.⁶⁰ Several remarks can be made on this point. First, the notion of trance is very difficult to define; it certainly implies bodily aspects such as shaking, extraordinary feats of physical agility or resistance to pain, muttering in a strange way that can be observed for example during ceremonies during which a person is supposed to be invaded by a spirit, like the *jitong* 祭童 in modern Taiwan. Second, a possessed person is always under the control of a 'master'. We have seen above that the Siberian shaman does not fall into this category because he is fully in control of the *séance*; therefore even if the *wu* were a kind of possessed person during healing, it would be difficult to say that his performance were akin to that of a Siberian shaman. Third, and more fundamentally, trance itself can only be interpreted within the representational frame of a given society because the trance is a

⁵⁷ *Yi Zhoushu* (Sibu Beiyao ed. 四部備要 (Taibei: Zhonghua, 1964), 4.8A.

⁵⁸ Chapter 'Zilu', 子路 (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 13.52. The translation is borrowed from James Legge, *Confucian Analects* (Taibei: SMC, 1994), 272. Legge has translated 'wu' by 'wizard'. The Wei and Song commentaries suggest that the text should be translated as: 'if somebody has no persistence, he cannot be cured by *wu* or physicians'.

⁵⁹ Lévi-Strauss' analysis (in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale I.* (Paris: Plon, 1996), 214–26. A healing ritual in the Amazon involving the invocation of spirits reveals no trace of trance and therefore shows that there is not necessarily a connection between this kind of ritual and trance. Lévi-Strauss calls the person in charge of the ritual a 'shaman' (without giving the term any precise definition).

⁶⁰ 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 296.

means to an end, and analysis must therefore concentrate on this end.⁶¹ In the case of the performance of the *wu*, two remarks must be made: (1) the end result is the expulsion of evil; (2) the performance is to be effected through a ritual, and it is through this ritual that the end can be understood. It is not the trance that explains the ritual but it is the ritual that explains the trance, because if the ritual says that a certain result must be attained with the help of somebody who falls into a trance, a trance will occur. This automatism certainly reminds one of a role play, and some studies have already noted a link between mediumism and theatre.⁶² Was the *wu* making the spirits descend through a trance during healing rituals? There is no certainty in the texts. And the question to ask is why would the ritual require or use a trance. The level of detail presented in the texts does not allow a clear answer to this question.

Concerning healing, a comparison of the *wu* and the Siberian shaman shows a big difference: in Siberia, the shaman is also in charge of cures and healing, but he does this by identifying the spirit responsible for the disease and negotiates the proper way to appease him (or her), for example by offering a sacrifice or food on a regular basis.⁶³ In archaic China, this role is performed through sacrifice: exorcism by the *wu* does not seem to result in a sacrifice but is aimed purely and simply at expelling the evil spirit.

Wu and funerals

Neither the *Zhouli* nor other texts show the *wu* to have any connection with ancestral sacrifices, a fact that can be explained thus: sacrifices to ancestors were supposed to be auspicious, unlike the sacrifices offered to the deceased immediately after death, during which the *wu* performed exorcism as a passage from the *siwu* (司巫) of the *Zhouli* shows:

凡喪事.掌巫降之禮.

During the funerals, (the *siwu*) is in charge of the ritual by which the *wu* make descent (spirits, performs exorcism).⁶⁴

Our tentative translation is based on the commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), who says that this ritual was an exorcism performed by the *wu* during the clothing of the defunct. In his commentary, he uses the term *yang* 禳, meaning ‘strong (evil) spirit’ 強鬼 and by extension ‘expelling evil spirits and diseases’, alluding to a passage in the chapter ‘Jiaotesheng’ of the *Liji*, on which he himself has commented.⁶⁵ The *wu* would therefore be a person in charge of averting evil not only during major non-auspicious events but also during funerals. This task seems to be performed by the *wu* through the use of deities 神. Zheng Xuan does not give any further detail concerning either the nature or the precise use of these deities. The function of the *wu* during funerals seems to be analogous to their role in the Great Annual Exorcism *nuo* 儺 in the great temple hall in winter by shooting arrows.⁶⁶ Therefore,

⁶¹ See Roberte Hamayon, ‘Pour en finir avec la “trance” et l’ “extase” dans l’étude du chamanisme’, *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes* 26, 1995, 155–90, ‘“Ecstasy” or the West-dreamt Shaman’ in Helmut Wautischer (ed.) *Tribal epistemology*, (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 175–96.

⁶² See Brigitte Berthier, *La dame du bord de l’eau* (Nanterre: Société d’Ethnologie, 1988), 171, 279.

⁶³ Hamayon, *La chasse à l’âme*, 679–81.

⁶⁴ (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 26.178.

⁶⁵ *Liji* ‘Jiaotesheng’ 郊特牲, (*Shisanjing Zhushu* ed.), 25.220. The passage of the *Liji* reads: 鄉人禳 ‘men of the village expel bad spirits’.

⁶⁶ According to Zheng Xuan’s commentary, quoted in von Falkenhausen, ‘Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums’, 295.

during regular ancestral sacrifices, there was no need to invite the *wu* to perform. A text in the *Liji*, chapter ‘Jiyi’ 祭義 describes the great sacrifice to Heaven in the suburb:

郊之祭也。喪者不敢哭。兇服者不敢入國門。

During the sacrifice in the suburb (*Jiao*), the bereaved do not dare to cry. Those who wear mourning clothes do not dare to enter the principal gate of the capital.⁶⁷

This text shows that, indeed, funerals and regular sacrifices could not be mixed: inviting a person otherwise specially dealing with inauspicious events (that is the *wu*) would not have been considered wise because the *wu* was dealing primarily with misfortune.

The *Yili*, 儀禮 chapter ‘Sangli’ 喪禮, describes in detail the function of the *wu* during the arrival of the feudal lord during condolences.⁶⁸

君至。主人出迎于門外。見馬首不哭。還入門右北面。及眾主人袒。巫止于廟門外。祝代之。

The Prince arrives. The Master of Ceremonies [the principal mourner] meets him outside the outer door. When he sees the heads of the horses he does not wail, but turns, and entering by the right of the gate of the court in which the obsequies are being conducted, he faces north. When he comes to where they are standing who are assisting him in managing the obsequies, he bares his arms. The sorcerer [the *wu*] stays outside the door of the court, and the Prince’s liturgist [the *zhu* invocator] takes his place.⁶⁹

It is interesting to note that the feudal lord is allowed no contact with bereavement: the principal mourner stops crying; it is for exactly the same reason that the lord (like the king) is preceded by people whose task is to ward off evil. The Tang sub-commentary referring to another passage of the *Liji* 禮記 chapter ‘Sang daji’ 喪大記, which describes exactly the same sequence, says that the *wu* stops at the funeral chamber in order not to upset the principal mourner.⁷⁰ It seems therefore that even people directly in contact with death (during the funeral of a relative) would prefer to avoid the presence of the *wu*. It is not because the lord wants to respect the bereavement of the mourner that the *wu* is not allowed to enter; rather, his task (to ward off evil) is taken care of inside the funeral chamber anyway, but by the invocators. The fact that the *wu* could not enter the funeral chamber even during funerals is interesting: it suggests that the *wu* was considered too dangerous to be permitted entry. The *Zuozhuan*, year 29 of the duke Xiang (襄公), tells that the duke wanted to honour the defunct duke Kang (康公) of the kingdom of Chu but was forced to bring grave-clothes with his own hands, a (female) *wu* having been requested first to execute a sprinkling with a peach branch and some reeds, to protect the duke Xiang. Nevertheless, the duke was deeply troubled: this suggests that the presence of a *wu* could also have upset the prince, even when she was supposed to protect him.⁷¹ Overall, the text of the *Yili* seems to imply that the *wu* was not welcome in human dwellings.

⁶⁷ *Shisanjing Zhushu*, ed., 47.366.

⁶⁸ A ceremony which is described in the *Zhouli* for the king himself, but in less detail.

⁶⁹ *Shisanjing Zhushu*, ed., 37. 198–9. The translation is taken from J. Steele, *The I-Li or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* vol. 2 (Taipei: Chengwen reed., 1966), 66. The bracketed term ‘sorcerer’ is Steele’s rendition of *wu*.

⁷⁰ *Shisanjing Zhushu*, ed., 45. 352.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 39, 302–3.

Wu and natural catastrophies

In the *Zhouli*, the *nanwu* had a part in sacrifices offered to natural deities, mountains and rivers, which seems strange if one considers that most of the other tasks of the *wu* consist of repelling evil. In fact, a passage in the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳, first year of the Duke Zhao 昭公, shows that the deities of mountains and rivers were involved in the control of meteorological phenomena and diseases:

山川之神.則水旱癘疫之災.於是乎祭之.

The spirits of the hills and streams are sacrificed to in times of flood, drought, and pestilence.⁷²

The domains of intervention of these spirits are exactly the same as for the *wu*, male and female: diseases, and natural, meteorological catastrophes.⁷³ The chapter 'Jifa' 祭法 of the *Liji* gives the following detail:

雩宗.祭水旱.

Sacrifices for (stopping) flood and drought are offered on the mound of lamentations.⁷⁴

The *nuwu* wails during catastrophes, the character employed being *zai* (equivalent of 災), designating natural catastrophes like droughts. The *nanwu* himself probably participated in dances intended to bring on rain, that is to say to correct the consequences of a natural, meteorological catastrophe. The task of the *nanwu* would therefore have been, by calling on the names and titles of the spirits of the hills and streams, to placate them, in this case, to prevent catastrophes rather than being sacrificed to the origin of the meteorological misfortunes. This suggests that a particular relationship existed between *wu* and mountains and rivers. In the *Zhouli*, dancing was one of the specific acts of the female *wu* and the only way mentioned of countering a drought during the Spring and Autumn period. There was also a ritual which consisted of burning or exposing to the sun a cripple or a *wu* in order to obtain rain. An example is given in the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, twenty-first year of the Duke Xi 僖公:

夏.大旱.公欲焚巫尪.臧文仲曰.非旱備也.脩城郭.貶食省用.務穡勸分.此其務也.巫尪何爲.天欲殺之.則如勿生.若能爲旱.焚之滋甚.

During summer, there was a drought. The duke (Xi) wanted to burn a *wu* and a cripple at the stake. Zang Wenzhong said: this is no preparation for the drought. Repair the city walls, limit your food, be economic in your consumption, be parsimonious and advise (people) to share (the food), this is what must be done. What use would be *wu* and cripple? If Heaven wanted to have them killed, why were they born at all? If they (the cripple and the *wu*) could produce drought, burning them would augment very much (the disaster).⁷⁵

Du Yu's commentary states that *wu* in the passage designates a woman,

⁷² *ibid.*, 41.322. The translation is taken from James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen* (Taipei: SMC, 1994), 580.

⁷³ The connection between mountains, rivers and rain seems to be as old as the Shang dynasty. On this question, see Wang Tao 汪濤, 'Guanyu yindai yuji de jige wenti' 關於殷代雨祭的幾個問題, in *Zhongguo Guoji Hanxue Yantaohui Lunwenji*, 中國國際漢學研討會論文集, (Beijing: Zhongguo Kexue), 1996, 334, 336-7, 339.

⁷⁴ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed., 46.360.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 14.109.

whereas the crippled person is a man, thus my translation. In his commentary on the ‘Siwu’ passage of the *Zhouli*, Zheng Xuan quotes this text and says that the duke of Lu wanted to burn the *wu* because the dance to end drought did not have the desired effect (did not provoke rain).⁷⁶ This interpretation is not supported by the text of the *Zuozhuan* itself, which does not mention dance. The discrepancies between the *Zuozhuan* and the *Zhouli* can be explained in two ways: first, the redactors of the *Zhouli* deliberately ignored the burning of the *wu* and replaced this ritual of burning by a dance; second, there were at that time two kind of rituals, dance and burning, the choice of the proper ritual being made according to the circumstances, presumably (as suggested by Zheng Xuan) according to the success of the dance, or the lack thereof.

The passage of the *Zuozhuan* is very similar to one found in the chapter ‘Tangongxia’ 檀弓下 of the *Liji*, relating events which took place during the Warring States period:

歲旱.穆公召縣子而問然.曰.天久而不雨.吾欲暴尪而奚若.曰.天久而不雨.而暴人之疾子.虐.毋乃不可與.然則吾欲暴巫而奚若.曰.天久而不雨.而望之愚婦人.於以求之.毋乃已疏乎.

There was a drought during the year. Duke Mu called on Xianzi and asked him about the reason for this. He said: ‘Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time. I want to expose to the sun a cripple and what about that?’ (Xianzi) said: ‘Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time but to expose to the sun the crippled son of somebody, that would be cruel. No, this cannot be allowed.’ (the duke said): ‘Well, then I want to expose to the sun a *wu* and what about that?’ (Xianzi) answered: ‘Heaven has not (given us) rain in a long time but to put one’s hope on an ignorant woman and offer her to pray (for rain), no, this is too far (from reason).’⁷⁷

In these two texts, two different persons are associated, a cripple and a *wu*. The *wu* is supposed to be female and the cripple male.

It is worth mentioning that as in the *Zhouli*, the *wu* in the two texts are sent or used on the orders of the state or the ruler; the degree of initiative of the *wu* seems somewhat low. In these two examples of ‘real’ ritual use of the *wu*, there is another point in common with the *Zhouli*: *wu* are to cope with inauspicious events (here drought), but in the *Zuozhuan* and the *Liji* alike, unlike the *Zhouli*, the female *wu* do not dance; instead they are put to death as a sacrificial offering, even though the recipient of the sacrifice is not given.

The last sentence of the quoted text of the *Zuozhuan*, ‘If they (the cripple and the *wu*) could produce drought, burning them would augment very much (the disaster)’, is interesting: overall, the counsellor seems to look at the drought in two ways; he first adopts a utilitarian point of view, insisting on sound management of the resources and, after that, he uses a moral tone, bringing to mind a Confucian stance (that it would be against Heaven’s will to kill the *wu* and the cripple). But he finally adds something else, and I suspect that it is to take into account the mentality of his ruler: the ruler wants first to destroy the supposed ‘supernatural’ source of the drought and is therefore to be warned that if the cripple and the *wu* were really powerful enough to cause a drought, killing them would be ill-advised. This seems to confirm the overall negativity associated with the *wu*. The text of the *Zuozhuan* seems to imply that the *wu* was considered—at least by the ruler—to be dangerous, no matter whether alive or dead. It is not only a passive association of the *wu*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 26.178.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 10.89.

with misfortune during the course of her duties, but also an indication that this kind of person could be actively dangerous.

It would be interesting to know the reason why the cripple and the *wu* were 'qualified' to act as victims in a ceremony to stop drought. That would provide another element for defining the characteristics of the *wu* and her association with inauspicious events. Indeed, cripples and *wu* must have been seen to be in some respects alike because they were mutually interchangeable in the same ritual. According to Zheng Xuan's commentary on the *Liji* text, the cripple is somebody who has a twisted spine; Heaven pities him and, fearing that rain would go into his nose, would not allow rain to fall. Destroying him would therefore remove the source of the drought. Edward Schafer presents many texts from the Han and post-Han eras that show the constant association between birth defects and drought.⁷⁸ The text of the *Liji* itself says that the *wu* is an ignorant woman but does not provide any further clues to understanding the reason behind her use as a victim, that is to say why she could have replaced a cripple in this ritual.

In fact, the ritual of burning cripples and female individuals at the stake is probably as old as the Shang dynasty. Chen Mengjia mentioned this ritual and, more recently, Qiu Xigui wrote an interesting article on the question. He determined that, in Shang oracular inscriptions, there was a character written either 𠄎 or 𠄏 and 𠄐 that could be used alone, functioning as a verb, and signifying 'burning a cripple at the stake', burning of an individual with a distorted spine.⁷⁹ This character would thus function as a sacrifice, a specialized term, mentioning in one sign the mode of sacrifice and the victim. When the character was accompanied by a complement (signifying 'burning an x kind of person'), this complement was a character designating a female individual, presumably a slave (𠄑) or a female coming either from a place or a tribe (like 𠄒).⁸⁰ There is no element in the oracular inscriptions examined by Qiu Xigui relating to the physical or mental characteristics of the female sacrificed. He concluded that the persons associated with 𠄐, that is to say a handicapped person and a female, were the ancestors of Zhou era *wu* and cripples, explaining why they were presented together in the texts dealing with the violent ritual of bringing an end to drought. The linkage effected by Qiu Xigui rests on an analogy between the two rituals, with the same kind of victims, performed for the same purpose. It remains to be understood if, during Shang times, the females and the cripples shared any common characteristics and why, in the oracular inscriptions, the character *wu* is not associated with 𠄐, that is to say why the *wu* of Shang times were not sacrificed to obtain rain. It is perhaps because the character 'wu' was applied, in later times, to a kind of person who was not designated by this term during the Shang period.

Neither oracular inscriptions nor the two received texts quoted above allow us to understand more precisely to what deity they were offered.

The most interesting point in the aforementioned passages is that the *wu* (and specifically the female *wu*) is destroyed when Nature does not abide by the regularity of the rites, when a natural catastrophe (linked to water) which can be explained as an irregularity, takes place. She is not only linked with negativity and death in the course of her 'regular' duties, she also seems to embody nature at its worst.

⁷⁸ 'Ritual exposure in ancient China', 165-6.

⁷⁹ Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, 'Shuo Buci de Fenwu yu Zuo Tulong' 說卜辭的焚巫與作土龍, *Jiaguwen yu Yinshang Shi* 甲骨文與殷商史, 1983.1, 22-5.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 28-30.

Wu and oneiromancy

Several received texts present the *wu* as divining dreams. Such a text, from the *Zuozhuan* (tenth year of the duke Cheng 成公), is particularly interesting:

晉候夢大厲，被髮及地，搏膺而踊，曰，殺余孫不義，余得請于帝矣。壞大門及寢門而入，公懼，入于室，又壞戶，公覺，召桑田巫，巫言如夢。公曰，何如。曰，不食新矣。公疫病，求醫于秦，秦伯使醫緩爲之，未至，公夢疫爲二豎子，曰彼良醫也，懼傷我，焉逃之。其一曰，居肓之上，膏之下，若我何。醫至，曰，疾不可爲也，在肓之上，膏之下，攻之不可，達之不及，藥不至焉，不可爲也。公曰，良醫也。厚爲之禮，而歸之。六月，丙午，晉候欲麥，使甸人獻麥，饋人爲之。召桑田巫，示而殺之。將食，張，如廁，陷而卒。小臣有晨夢負公以登天，及日中，負晉候出諸廁，遂以爲殉。

The lord of Jin saw in a dream a great demon with disheveled hair reaching to the ground, which beat its breast, and leaped up, saying: 'You have slain my descendants unrighteously, and I have presented my request to the High God in consequence.'⁸¹ It then broke the great gate [of the palace], advanced to the gate of the State chamber, and entered. The duke was afraid and went into a side-chamber, the door of which it also broke. The duke then awoke, and called the *wu* of Sangtian, who told him everything which he had dreamt. 'What will be the issue?' asked the duke. 'You will not taste the new wheat,' she (he?) replied. After this, the duke became very ill, and asked the services of a physician from Qin, the earl of which sent the physician Huan to do what he could for him. Before he came, the duke dreamt that his disease turned into two boys, who said, 'That is a skilful physician; it is to be feared he will hurt us; how shall we get out of his way?' Then one of them said: 'If we take our place above the heart and below the throat, what can he do to us?' When the physician arrived, he said, 'Nothing can be done for this disease. Its seat is above the heart and below the throat. If I assail it [with medicine], it will be of no use; if I attempt to puncture it, it cannot be reached. Nothing can be done for it.' The duke said, 'He is a skilful physician', gave him large gifts, and send him back to Qin. In the sixth month, on the day bingwu, the marquis wished to taste the new wheat, and made the superintendent of his fields present some. While the baker was getting it ready, [the marquis] called the *wu* of Sangtian, showed her (him?) the wheat and put her (him?) to death. As the marquis was about to taste the wheat, he felt it necessary to go to the privy, into which he fell, and so died. One of the servants that waited on him had dreamt in the morning that he carried the marquis on his back up to heaven. The same at mid-day carried him on his back out from the privy, and was afterwards buried alive with him.⁸²

The most obvious point here concerns the function of the *wu*: the *wu* interprets the dream (according to Du Yu's commentary) saying that 'a ghost is furious' 巫云鬼怒, but is not ordered to perform an exorcism. Moreover, when the marquis falls ill, the *wu* is not required to perform a healing ritual. This is strange because other texts mention such healing rituals being performed by the *wu*, in the guise of an exorcism, in conjunction with the *yi* physician, who uses medicine. In the text, there are several other elements that must be taken

⁸¹ This would refer to the slaying of the officers Zhao Tong 趙同 and Zhao Kuo 趙括 by the marquis of Jin, related in the eighth year of the duke Cheng, (*Zuozhuan*, *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed. 26.202). The monster would then be the founder of the Zhao clan.

⁸² *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed. 36.204. I have used the translation of James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew*, 374.

into account: the disease that afflicts the lord is understood to be a revenge of a spirit, the founder of the clan Zhao and two of his descendants having been killed by the lord; this would explain why the disease appears in the second dream as two boys, standing presumably for the two officials killed. The demon that assaulted the lord in the first dream looks and behaves exactly as requested during the ritual of mourning; the relevant text can be found in the *Yili* 儀禮, chapter concerning the ritual of mourning for the officer (士喪禮):

主人西面馮尸踴無筭... 主人髻髮袒.

The Master of Ceremonies [the principal mourner, son of the defunct] faces west and embraces the corpse. He then stamps in sign of grief without restraint ... The Master of Ceremonies then withdraws his hairpin and ties his hair in a knot [with straw]. Thereafter, he bares his shoulders.⁸³

The demon who attacks the lord is dishevelled as the principal mourner was before he tied his hair up, beat his chest (manifestation of sorrow in many civilizations, China included), and leaped, a behaviour specifically required during mourning. The texts above show that the *wu* is linked to the removal of diseases through exorcism, the repelling of evil spirits, (this would apply to the 'great demon') especially during funerals. But here, the *wu* does not perform an exorcism nor is he (she?) requested to do so. Still, the cause of the malady seems to fall exclusively into the domain of the *wu*. Indeed, the physician is obliged to admit that he cannot use his own techniques to heal the patient.

After the *wu* is shown the new wheat, of which he (she?) has said that the lord would not be able to taste it (the lord would die before) he (she?) is killed. This calls for an explanation. The relations between the *wu*, their functions and what they have to do can be represented as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

	Inauspicious events	Diseases	Funerals
<i>Wu</i>	Performs exorcisms/ prays/is destroyed	Expels evil spirits	Expels evil spirits
King/kingdom/ patient	Kingdom is protected	Patient is healed	King is protected/family of the defunct is protected

The demise of the *wu* could of course be interpreted as a punishment: the *wu* has predicted that the lord would not taste the new wheat, but the new wheat is ready to be consumed; that is to say the lord is still alive. Therefore, the *wu* is wrong and must be punished. Table 2 suggests yet another explanation: the lord is the victim of an evil spirit. The task of the *wu* should be to remove this spirit in order for the lord to be cured, but this is not the case. The *wu* should have protected the lord as he does during funerals.

There is, indeed, a funeral context because the demon who attacks the lord is mourning his two descendants slain by the lord, descendants who are 'transformed' into a double disease. This is an interesting case of inversion because, in the ritual of mourning, it is the son (the descendant) who mourns,

⁸³ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed. 36.192. The translation is taken from Steele, *The I-Li*, vol. 2, 57.

beats his chest, and leaps. Yet in this case, it is the elder (the founder of the clan) who mourns for his descendants. The *wu* is not requested to repel this spirit, and the lord finally dies. This also looks like an inversion because the *wu* usually repels evil during exorcisms or healing rituals or dies to remedy a natural catastrophe, that is to say to give life to heal the country. Here, the lord is dying from an incurable disease while the *wu* stays alive (until he [she?] is put to death). In the two texts where *wu* are burned or exposed to the sun, the association with the cripple suggests that the *wu* could also be considered the source of the inauspicious event (drought, the metaphorical equivalent to a disease, but for the whole country). According to this reasoning, the *wu* would then have been put to death in order to destroy the source of the disease. The circumstances of the death of the lord of Jin are interesting: the marquis seems to have thought that the *wu* was somehow responsible for the attack of the demon and ordered him (or her?) to be executed, in order to remove the source of the evil. This interpretation seems to be contradicted by the fact that the execution of the *wu* was not ordered immediately after the interpretation of the dream.

To understand as completely as possible the many issues involved in that problem, one has to remember that the death of the lord is not directly linked to his malady and takes place after the *wu*'s execution. Other texts must be considered. Zhuangzi 莊子, in the chapter 'Yingdiwang' 應帝王 mentions a *wu* of the state of Zheng 鄭 who was able to scrutinize people's fate:

鄭有神巫曰季咸,知人之生死存亡禍福壽夭,期以歲月旬日若神.鄭人見之.皆棄而走.

In Zheng, there was a mysterious *wu* named Jixian. He knew all about the deaths and births of men, their preservation and ruin, their misery and happiness, and whether their lives would be long or short, foretelling the year, the decade and the day like a spirit. When the people of Zheng saw him, they all ran out of his way.⁸⁴

The commentary of the *Zhuzi jicheng* adds that nobody wants to know the exact date of his demise! According to this text, the *wu* was definitely not a good person to have around. Another text from the *Zuozhuan* (eighteenth year of the duke Xiang 襄公) shows the *wu* divining a dream in which the spirit of a dead person is looking for revenge:

秋.晉伐我北鄙.中行獻子將伐齊.夢與厲公訟.弗勝.公以戈擊之.首隊於前.跪而戴之.奉之以走.見榑陽之巫皋.他日見諸道與之言同.巫曰今茲主必死.若有事於東方則可以逞.獻子許諾.

In autumn, the marquis of Jin invaded our northern border. Zhongxing Xianzi prepared to invade Qi. He dreamt that he was maintaining a suit with duke Li, in which the case was going against him, when the duke struck him with a *ge*, and his head fell down before him.⁸⁵ He took his head up, put it on his shoulders, and ran off, when he saw the *wu* Gao of Gengyang. A day or two after, it happened that he did see this Gao on the road, and told him his dream, and the *wu*, who had had the same dream, said to him: 'Your death is to happen about this time; but if you have

⁸⁴ *Zhuzi jicheng* ed. 諸子集成, ed. Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 (Taipei: Shijie, 1955), 7.134. For the translation, see J. Legge, *Taotching and the writings of Chuang-Tzu* (Taipei: Wenxing, 1960), 310-11.

⁸⁵ Du Yu's commentary presents Zhongxing Xiangzi as the murderer of the duke Li.

business in the east, you will there be successful [first]. Xianzi accepted this interpretation.⁸⁶

The *wu* named Gao does not only interpret a dream, he is present in a dream that he had himself. He predicts the death of the officer Zhongxing, death that could be understood as a revenge of the spirit of the duke Li of Jin, assassinated with the complicity of Zhongxing himself. There is therefore a direct link between the dream and the interpretation of the *wu*: it is a classical case of revenge by the spirit of a murdered man. In fact, the *wu* says two things: '(1) you will die but (2) you will succeed at first'. The last part of this passage seems strange. Legge's translation is: 'Xianzi accepted the interpretation' thus translating *xu* 許 and *nuo* 諾 as 'accepted [this interpretation]'; more probably, the first character refers to what the *wu* has said first, the second expresses Zhongxin's agreement with what the *wu* has finally said: that the officer would be successful in his campaign against Qi. There is a point worth questioning in this text: why wasn't the *wu* asked by Zhongxin to expel the spirit of the duke? Perhaps because the spirit went through him to curse the officer. Could it be that the *wu* was involved (his involvement is extremely strong in this affair) in a kind of deal, or is it simply that the *wu* was aware of two different matters concerning the officer, only one connected to the dream?

Interpreting a dream can be considered a kind of divination. Divination is not so much about foretelling the future as it is about trying to influence it.⁸⁷ When the people of Zheng (according to Zhuangzi) meet a *wu* who can predict their death, they run away from him because he could literally provoke their death by predicting it. Knowing that, why did Zhongxin not kill the *wu*? If there was a deal, could it have been: death for Zhongxin (provoked by the vengeful spirit of the killed duke) but on the other hand military success; the other term of the exchange would logically be: sparing the *wu*'s life for the promise of victory. The text itself does not provide any clue allowing a complete understanding of this detected anomaly. Once again, the sentence from the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, twenty-first year of the Duke Xi studied above must be remembered: 'If they (the cripple and the *wu*) could produce drought, burning them would augment very much (the disaster)'. This sentence, the text of Zhuangzi and that in the *Zuozhuan* (eighteenth year of the duke Xiang) allow one to understand that the lord of Jin awaited the moment when he was about to taste the new wheat, that is to say to dispel the *wu*'s curse, before having the *wu* killed. If the lord had the *wu* killed before being sure that the curse was ineffective, he might have feared the consequences. This story shows that the *wu* were indeed considered dangerous.⁸⁸ They seem to have been considered as a vehicle through which the vengeful dead act, even if (for example during funerals as seen above) they also have the duty of keeping them at bay.

The wu and the mulberry tree

In one of the texts studied above (*Zuozhuan*, tenth year of the duke Cheng) the *wu*'s personal name is not given, but it is said that it is the *wu* of

⁸⁶ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed. 33.263. I have used the translation of James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew*, 478, but for the character *wu*, rendered by Legge as 'witch', and the transcriptions for which I used pinyin.

⁸⁷ See Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 599 and Sarah Allen, *The shape of the turtle: myth, art and cosmos in Early China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 113, 117, 121.

⁸⁸ Indeed, the lord dies an ugly death. There might be some symbolic connection between the circumstances of his demise and the attack of the demon, but further study would be necessary to establish this.

Sangtian 桑田, the *wu* of the mulberry tree field.⁸⁹ Mulberry leaves are used to feed silkworms and, apparently, there is no bad meaning associated with them. Still, the chapter of the ritual of mourning for the officers in the *Yili* associates mulberry trees and death:

髻 笄用桑

The pin with which the topknot [of the corpse] is made up is of mulberry wood.⁹⁰

Zheng Xuan's commentary says that the material of the pin used during funerals is the wood of the mulberry tree 桑 because of the homophony with 'funeral' 喪. The fact that the *wu* is known as the *wu* from the mulberry tree field may be a coincidence, but it could also mean that this *wu* was residing in a place where only mulberry trees, a tree connected with funerals, were planted. The term 'tian' 田 could mean 'wilderness', because in oracular inscriptions and received texts alike, the meaning was 'hunting' and probably, by extension, a hunting territory.⁹¹ In the *Shanhai Jing* 山海經, *wu* are often depicted as mountain dwellers, that is to say, inhabitants of territories outside the boundaries of civilization.⁹² In the annual Great Exorcism (*nuo*), the *wu* accompany the evil spirits outside, away from human habitations.⁹³

The *wu* usually inhabits wilderness, specifically a place planted with mulberry trees, a place where the normal conduct of civilized people ceases. This last element suggests why the *wu* could have been associated with a cripple in the sacrifice for drought: the *wu* dwells in places situated physically and metaphorically outside of civilization; the cripple is himself outside the 'normal' physical norms. Mozi 墨子 mentions:

深谿博林。幽閒毋人之所。

... the deep valleys, the broad forests, the dark and distant places where no one lives ...⁹⁴

This would also explain why (in the text of the *Liji* describing the arrival of a feudal lord to offer his condolences) the *wu* was not authorized to enter the funeral chamber, an inauspicious place to be sure but nevertheless a place within the boundaries of civilization. A most famous story related to all these elements is told in the chapter 'Shun Min' 順民 of the *Lüshi chunqiu* telling how Cheng Tang 成湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty, offered himself in sacrifice to stop a five year drought.⁹⁵ He proceeded to this symbolic sacrifice (he cut and burned his hair and his fingernails) in a place called 'Sanglin 桑林, the forest of mulberry trees'. The term 'lin' suggests that it was a place outside the boundaries of civilization. According to Granet, this place was under the influence of a spirit who had control over rain, drought and diseases, that is to say the elements the *wu* deals with during the rituals he/she performs or during which the female *wu* is sacrificed.⁹⁶ The *Zuozhuan* (year sixteen of the

⁸⁹ Or maybe, due to the fact that the character 'tian' 田 could mean 'hunting', should 桑田巫 be rendered 'the *wu* of the mulberry tree wilderness'.

⁹⁰ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed. 35.186. The translation is taken from Steele, *The I-Li*, vol. 2, 49.

⁹¹ As in French, the term 'chasse' means the act of hunting and a hunting territory.

⁹² Chang, *Art, myth and ritual*, 48.

⁹³ Von Falkenhausen, 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 291.

⁹⁴ Mozi 墨子, chapter Minggui xia 明鬼下, *Zhuji jicheng* ed. 8.145. The translation is taken from Burton Watson, *Basic writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu and Han Fei Tzu* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), 99.

⁹⁵ *Zhuji jicheng* ed., 9.86.

⁹⁶ Marcel Granet, *La civilisation chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988), 199-200. See also Schafer, 'Ritual exposure in ancient China', 162-9 on the 'demon of drought' 旱鬼.

duke Zhao 昭公) tells the story of three officials of the state of Zheng who, during a drought, were sent to perform a sacrifice in the mountain of the mulberry trees 桑山. They cut the trees and, as a result, the rain did not fall.⁹⁷ This text confirms that the mulberry trees were linked to rain in this historical period. Tang, by way of his self-sacrifice, was remedying the officers' moral misconduct that resulted in the drought. Sarah Allen relates this story, and that of the Ten Suns, to Shang totemism. The Ten Suns, usually perched on the mulberry tree Fu (扶桑) would be the origin of the tiangan 天干, used in the names of royal ancestors.⁹⁸ It is easy to see that this particular mulberry tree was also linked to disaster. A great drought followed the departure of the Ten Suns from this tree. It is because the Ten Suns departed all at once (when they should have left the tree one at a time) that catastrophe ensued. The behaviour of the Suns was chaotic and disorderly.

Other texts connect mulberry trees with inauspicious events. For example, the *Lüshi chunqiu* says: 鄭衛之聲, 桑間之音, 此亂國之所好, 衰德之所說. 'The folk music of Zheng and Wei, the music from inside the mulberry trees, this is what the disorderly states like, what appeals to those of weak virtue'.⁹⁹ The commentary specifies that the folk music of the two states mentioned was considered inappropriate and the music from inside the mulberry trees alludes to the suicide of a court musician of the last king of the Shang among mulberry trees during the fall of Shang; later, during the Spring and Autumn period, a musician of Jin wrote an air that sounded like the sound of the wind through the trees. This music would be evocative of death and destruction.

There is also a connection between the mulberry trees and sexual disorder, as in a passage of the *Shijing* 詩經, style of the Wei state 魏風, ode Shimu zhijian (inside ten acres) 十畝之間, which mentions disorderly conduct occurring between young men and women among the mulberry trees: 桑者閑閑 'rollicking among the mulberry trees'.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, mulberry trees are not just associated with death and natural catastrophes linked to water (or the lack thereof); places planted with them seem also to have been the scene of orgies or, according to the commentary, a place where men and women intermingled without order (男女無別往來), something that was frowned upon by the ruling élite. Wang Hui links the rain dances performed by the *wu* to sexuality: the *wu* were females who danced naked to entice gods above and so to speak by this symbolic copulation, to have them bring down rain.¹⁰¹ Granet and Schafer remarked that nudity is linked to magical powers in archaic China. Moreover, Granet noticed that nudity ran contrary to the ethics of the nobles, who were prescribed to show the least possible amount of skin in the course of their official duties.¹⁰² Concerning the connection between human copulation and rain, the chapter Xici 繫辭 of the *Yijing* 易經 presents a cosmological link between human copulation and the production of life, to which rain (water) is essential:

天地網緼, 萬物化醇, 男女構精, 萬物化生。

⁹⁷ Shisanjing Zhushu ed., 47.378.

⁹⁸ See 'Sons of the suns: myth and totemism in early China', *BSOAS*, XLIV/2, 1981, 290–326 and 'Drought, human sacrifice and the Mandate of Heaven in a lost text from the *Shang shu*', *BSOAS*, XLVII/3, 1984, 523–39.

⁹⁹ *Zhuzi jicheng* ed. 6.59.

¹⁰⁰ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed., 5-3.90.

¹⁰¹ *Shangzhou Wenhua Bijiao Yanjiu*, 121–22. He interprets the definition of the character *wu* in the *Shuowen* 女能事無形以舞降神者也 as: [*wu* are] women who can serve naked and entice the gods by dancing. This interpretation seems to be at odds with the syntax of the text. Lothar von Falkenhausen's translation (in 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 288) is: they are women who can perform service to the shapeless and make the Spirits come down by dancing.

¹⁰² Schafer, 'Ritual exposure in ancient China', 149–52; Granet, *La civilisation chinoise*, 313.

Heaven and Earth unite, the myriad of beings are transformed and activated. Male and female blend their essences, the myriad of beings are transformed and produced.¹⁰³

This confirms what Zhuangzi says in the chapter Tianyun 天運:

雲者爲雨乎。雨者爲雲者。孰隆 [降] 施是孰居無事淫樂而歡是。

(Then) how the clouds become rain! And how the rain again forms the clouds! Who diffuses them so abundantly? Who is it that, without trouble or exertion on his part, produces this elemental enjoyment, and seems to stimulate it?¹⁰⁴

The *Zhuangzi* text is the origin of the classical expression 雲雨之樂 ‘pleasure of the clouds and the rain’ which designates sexual intercourse.

The *Mozi* 墨子 in the chapter Minggui 明鬼下 confirms that places where public copulation were performed indeed existed at least in some parts of China:

昔者燕簡公。殺其臣莊子儀而不辜。莊子儀曰。吾君殺我而不辜。死人毋知亦已。死人
有知不出三年。必使吾君知之。期年。燕將馳祖。燕之有馳族。當齊之社稷。宋之有桑
林。楚之有雲夢也。此男女之所屬而觀也。

In ancient times, Duke Jian of Yan put to death his minister Zhuang Ziyi, though he had committed no crime. Zhuang Ziyi said, ‘My lord, you are going to put me to death, though I have committed no crime. If the dead have no consciousness, that will be the end of the matter. But if the dead have consciousness, then before three years are over, I will make you know it!’ A year later the ruler of Yan was about to set off for Zu. [The activities taking place in] Yan’s lake Zu are the same as in the altar of the spirits of Qi, the forest of mulberry trees in Song, and [the lake of] Yunmeng in Chu: [it is a place where people] see [the spectacle of] men and women gathering [copulating].¹⁰⁵

The *Chunqiu* (year 23 of the duke Zhuang 莊公) mentions the altar of the spirits of Qi:

夏。公如齊觀社。

In summer, the duke went to Qi to see [the service at] the altar of the spirits of the land.¹⁰⁶

The commentary of the *Zuozhuan* adds: ‘[the conduct of the duke] was improper’ (非禮). The subcommentaries interpret this judgement as a reminder that a duke is only to leave his country in exceptional circumstances. Wang Hui interprets it as a condemnation of the immorality associated with the public copulation taking place at the altar of the spirits of Qi.¹⁰⁷ Apart from this altar, the text on the *Mozi* mentions three other places, all associated with water, either directly, like the two lakes Zu and Yunmeng, or indirectly, like the forest of mulberry trees—all associated with public copulation. The name Yunmeng, ‘dream of clouds’ is itself very evocative! According to Wang Hui, it was traditional in China to ask prostitutes to pray for rain.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed., 8.76. The translation I use comes from Richard Rutt (who dates this chapter from the Warring States period, with a Han redaction) in *The Book of Changes* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), 426.

¹⁰⁴ *Zhuzi jicheng* ed. Translation borrowed from Legge’s *Taoteking and the writings of Chuang-tzu*, 393.

¹⁰⁵ *Zhuzi jicheng* ed. 8.142. The translation is taken (for the sentence beginning with 昔者 ... to 燕將馳祖) from Watson, *Basic writings*, 97. Watson’s translation of the rest of the passage is not accurate.

¹⁰⁶ *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed., 10.76. For translation, see Legge, *The Ch’un Ts’ew*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Wang, *Shangzhou Wenhua Bijiao Yanjiu*, 104–5.

¹⁰⁸ Wang, *Shangzhou Wenhua Bijiao Yanjiu*, 124.

A passage of the chapter Benwei 本味 of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 relating the birth of Yiyin 伊尹 seems to sum up the different aspects of the relationship between the *wu*, rain (water) and morality:

有佚氏女子采桑。得嬰兒于空桑之中。獻之其君。其君令人養之。察其所以然。曰。其母居伊水之上。孕。夢有神告之曰。曰出水而東走。毋顧。明日視白出水。告其鄰。東走十里，而顧。其邑盡爲水。身因化爲空桑。故命之曰伊尹。

There was a daughter of the clan Xian who went to collect mulberry tree [leaves]. She obtained a baby [concealed] in a hollow mulberry tree. She gave the baby to the lord. The lord ordered his cook to raise the baby and asked him to make an enquiry as to this affair. [The cook] said: [The baby's] mother lived near the river Yi. She got pregnant. In a dream, the spirit [of the river] told her that: 'when water will pour over [your] mortar, run toward the East. Do not look back.' The next day, she saw water pouring over the recipient. She told her neighbor and ran toward the East. She ran for ten leagues. She looked back. The town was flooded. Her body was transformed into a hollow mulberry tree. Because [of this, the lord] named [the baby] Yi Yin.¹⁰⁹

The general structure of this story suggests a comparison with the story of the wife of Lot in the Bible.¹¹⁰ In Genesis, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by a god because of the moral corruption of these two towns; Lot's wife was transformed into a statue of salt because she looked back, thus disobeying the god's direct orders. In the Chinese text, the woman is also punished for an act of disobedience to the orders of a god. It must be noted that in the Bible, Lot's wife is not responsible for the destruction of the two towns, which would have happened anyway, whereas in the *Lüshi chunqiu* the situation is less clear. In fact it could be that the god warned the woman about the destruction of the town by a flood and that she was punished for not having respected this order. In the text, the flood takes place after the woman looked back as it was the consequence of the visual contact thus established. Several elements indicate that the main difference between the Bible story and that in the *Lüshi chunqiu* is that in the Bible the destruction of the towns was not the consequence of the disobedience of the woman. These elements are: (a) the mother of the saint minister Yiyin lived near water; (b) her dream was linked to pouring water, an image of flood; (c) she was supposed, on seeing the sign, to run towards the East (that is to say, to leave an inhabited place immediately) without looking back—but she failed to do so and thus provoked a disaster: a flood; (d) by punishment, she was transformed into a hollow mulberry tree, among other mulberry trees, a tree that (as we have seen) grows in the wilderness. While the mother of Yiyin was in the wilderness, she looked back to the town and thus established a direct contact, a closeness between wilderness and the boundaries of civilization (the town). The text does not say that the mother of Yiyin was a *wu* but the details of this story are certainly coherent with what we already know about the *wu*: her link with nature and natural catastrophes, droughts, or in this case floods—floods and drought being two opposite aspects, equally feared but equally linked to water. A flood can be interpreted as a breach of the boundary between nature and culture—water usually 'kept' outside, in rivers, brutally invading the domain of men.

One final element must also be considered: this story is set in a context of

¹⁰⁹ Zhuzi jicheng ed., 14.139.

¹¹⁰ See Genesis, 19: 1–26.

fecundity, the woman being pregnant, probably by the spirit of the river himself. This last point is important: this unnatural pregnancy is a kind of transgression, humanity (the woman) having sex with nature, in the way that *wu* have sex (at least symbolically) with the gods in order to obtain rain. The image used to describe the sign indicated by the spirit to the woman is also sexual in nature: the water that pours over the mortar. This mortar is an image of the womb, and probably also of the female sexual organs. It evokes an image of exuberant sexuality. Chaos that literally ‘floods’ everything and destroys human communality.¹¹¹

In the *Lüshi chunqiu* the act of looking back is very significant: in the texts mentioning places where public copulations took place, it is said that these copulations are a spectacle, to be looked at. Moreover, when the duke of Lu went to Qi for the service at the altar of the spirits, it is precisely because he saw it that his action was condemned as improper by the *Zuozhuan*. It is through sight that impurity is transmitted.

All the texts quoted above confirm that the *wu* were associated with water and rain, in charge of dances to obtain rain and linked with public copulation, which is also related to the production of rain. It is noteworthy that in the received texts these elements are systematically presented in a very unfavourable light, as they run contrary to the ritual and moral order. It seems that *wu* (and more specifically the female *wu*) were considered to belong more to the domain of nature, dwelling in mountains or in the vicinity of lakes or rivers. These deities were in command of natural disasters specifically linked to rain (droughts — that is to say the lack of water — or floods — that is to say too much water) as explained in the text of the first year of the duke Zhao in the *Zuozhuan* quoted above. The *wu* would therefore be associated with sexual disorder and death, particularly the death or destruction of a country, understood to be the result of moral corruption. Moreover, the rain dances, performed by the female *wu*, erotic as they were intended to be, were also considered a threat to order. It is probably femininity as a whole that was considered to be acceptable only within the framework of ritual.

Some texts present the *wu* directly in a political context. The first is found in the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書, chapter Fengbao 豐保:

外用四蠹五落...四蠹...四曰神巫蠱龍以惑之...五落...四曰厚其禱巫其謀乃獲

[The king, in dealing with] the enemies uses the four kinds of vermin, the five kinds of corruption ... The four kinds of vermin ... The fourth consists in [asking] gifted *wu* [and] by their power [obtain] favor [from the spirits] in order to confuse them [the enemies] ... The five kind of corruption ... The fifth consists in corrupting (enemies’) *wu*; thus the aim will be attained.¹¹²

Here, the political power can be seen to be harnessing the magical powers of either his or the enemies’ *wu*. In both cases, *wu* powers appear to be forces of confusion and disorder. It is understandable, then, that there are texts which

¹¹¹ In this context, the birth of Yiyin is significant: he is one who was the result of a sexual transgression but who (as a minister of Tang) reintroduced order.

¹¹² *Yi Zhoushu* (Sibu Beiyao ed.), 3.1B–2A. According to *Yi Zhoushu huixiao jizhu* 逸周書彙校集注 Huang Huaixin 黃懷信 *et al.* ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1995), vol. 1, 205, this chapter was written during the Warring States period. According to the commentaries, the fifth corruption would turn ones enemies’ *wu* into allies, that is to say having them pray not for the enemies but for oneself, diverting their power for one’s profit.

prescribe the destruction of *wu*, as this text from the chapter Shangxian 上賢 of the *Liutao* 六韜 shows:

七曰僞方異伎巫蠱左道不祥之言幻惑良民.王者必止之.

The seventh (harm) consists in using magical tricks, poison of the *wu* (sorcery), evil ways and curses in order to confuse the good people. The king must stop it.¹¹³

Even if the *wu* is constantly associated with misfortune, he/she is none the less supposed to remedy it, either with the help of spirits or through his/her own destruction. The two texts cited above add weight to the idea, already suggested in the *Zuozhuan*, that *wu* could in fact be the origin of misfortune, and had to be dealt with carefully. A famous story is related in the *Shiji* 史記 by Sima Qian, presenting the action of an official of the state of Wei 魏 during the Warring States period: when Ximen Bao 西門豹 took charge of the territorial administration of Ye (鄴 a place situated near Anyang in Hebei), he asked the people about their difficulties. The most significant of them was the marriage of the Count (the spirit) of the Yellow River 河伯娶婦: a family of *wu* (the chief of which being an old woman), helped by three elders as their accomplices, cheated the people of their money and forced them to give their most beautiful girls to be offered in sacrifice to the Count. These women were first abused sexually by the *wu* (and the elders). Ximen Bao took care of the situation by drowning the *wu*, some of her relatives and the elders.¹¹⁴ This episode seems to indicate that at least in some areas, being a *wu* was a family affair, perhaps passed on from female to female, one of the few elements related to the sociological aspects of the *wu*.

To understand the issues at stake when dealing with this particular aspect of the relationship between *wu* and political authorities, a comparison with the African domain is, I think, warranted. The anthropologist G. Balandier said: 'The strategy of the sacred, in reaching political goals, has two aspects, contradictory in appearance; it can be used by the existent social order and the establishment, or serve the ambition of those who want to conquer and legitimate authority'.¹¹⁵ This author states that (in Africa) the sorcerer was linked to chaos and forces of disorder against which the sovereign was forced to act, and that sometimes, sorcery could be used in the form of a witch hunt, as an instrument of conformity and protection of power.¹¹⁶ Even if a *wu* could have been in the pay of a ruler (in the *Zhouli*) or called on to perform exorcism during a healing ritual, his/her association with misfortune went beyond the array of 'official' functions: they could remedy evil, expel it while alive through ritual, or incarnate it, their physical destruction being the best solution to get rid of it.

In the last case, comparison with Africa suggests that accusations of sorcery could have been invaluable for removing political adversaries or (as the episode concerning Ximen Bao in the *Shiji* shows) to establish order even at a very

¹¹³ *Liutao* (Sibu Congkan ed. 四部叢刊 [Taipei: Shangwu]), 1.7. A third text comes from chapter Yixun 伊訓 of the *Shangshu* 尚書, which is a *guwen* chapter: 曰敢有恒舞于宮.酣歌于室.時爲巫風.

(Yiyin) said: (Those who) dare dancing constantly in palaces, drink and sing in chambers will be then called modeling [their actions] on *wu*, *Shisanjing Zhushu* ed., 8.11.

¹¹⁴ See *Shiji*, (Zhonghua Shuju ed.), 126. 3211–2. This episode shows that the *wu* and their activities cannot automatically be interpreted as a form of folk religion as opposed to feudal ritual because the *wu* here harmed the people of Ye.

¹¹⁵ In *Anthropologie politique* (Paris: PUF, 1984), 138.

¹¹⁶ Balandier, *Anthropologie politique*, 79, 127–8.

low administrative level. Future research might discover texts illustrating this possibility.

5. *Summary and comparison*

During Zhou times (and perhaps earlier), the 'wu' was a specialist (male or female) in dealing with negative events, often considered an evil sorcerer. He/she dwelled in the wilderness, in places where public copulation took place, having contact with the dead and impurity, enticing (in the case of the female wu) deities of above to come to earth. This coming, and the rain that resulted, was interpreted in terms of sexual intercourse. Considering the ambivalent aspect of water; needed but also feared, one can say that the wu was considered a kind of embodiment of the most negative aspects of Nature.

A comparison of the Chinese wu and the Siberian shaman is shown in Table 3.

When the main religious act, either in archaic China and in Siberia, is ancestral sacrifice, the participation of either the wu or the shaman seems dubious, but for different reasons: whereas the wu does not participate in these sacrifices due to his/her overall association with unfortunate events in model II, the shaman's role is not important because his function as described in model I becomes less relevant in a religious context dominated by ancestor cult and sacrifice.

Conclusion

Concerning the historical origin of the wu, we may ask: were they a remnant of an earlier stage of the development of archaic Chinese civilization? The present state of the documentation does not allow such a conclusion for two reasons: first, the most abundant data about the wu are to be found in Eastern Zhou texts; and, second, these texts have little in common with the data originating directly from the Shang civilization; possible ancestors of the Eastern Zhou wu are the cripples and the females burned in sacrifice to bring about rain. They are mentioned in the oracular inscriptions but there is no mention of the Shang character wu. Moreover, because of the scarcity of information, many of the activities of the Zhou wu cannot be traced back to the Shang period. Consequently, trying to correlate Zhou data with Neolithic cultures appears very difficult.

In the received texts of the Zhou era, even if the ritual order still could use the wu when times required, they were considered to belong more to nature (in its negative aspects) than to culture. A civilization determines itself by its limits. It seems that in late Zhou times, the boundaries of humanity excluded the wu, but at the same time one cannot say that the wu were not part of civilization: they were so to speak among the 'official' outcasts and were put in charge of dealing with chaos. Chaos and disorder are at the same time dangerous to civilization and unavoidable; civilizations must find a way to account for the unavoidable and the chaotic. I think that the wu were one of the tools the Zhou period used to deal with such matters. It must be noted though that the ritual order very often destroyed the wu when the disorder they represented became too threatening.

What emerges from the comparison of archaic Chinese wu and Siberian shaman is very interesting: in both cases, the principal performance is interpreted in terms strongly linked to sexuality. The female wu and the Siberian shamans are both seducers of the forces of nature responsible for the well-being of the group. The kinds of societies in which they function are

Table 3.

	<i>Wu</i>	Siberian shaman
Sex	Male/female	Structurally male
Social organization	Hierarchical, centralized	Model I: loose organization Model II: local, clanic (no state)
Relation to nature	↓: Hierarchy of ancestors and spirits, domination of nature	Model I: ↔ based on egalitarian partnership between man and nature Model II: ↓ hierarchy of spirits
Principal religious act of society as a whole	Sacrifice to ancestors (no <i>wu</i> participation);	Model I: shamanistic séance; no sacrifice; food offerings. Model II: sacrifice to ancestors (shaman play a marginal role)
Functions and interpretation (model) of the principal function	1) Exorcism, in rituals or cures 2) Dance for rain on behalf of the group, interpreted as an act of sexually enticing the spirits above, in order to obtain rain, often linked to sexual misconduct 3) witch.	Model I: junction between nature and society to secure access to game animals, function interpreted as an act of seduction of the daughter of the Spirit of the Forest; this act of seduction is linked to the ritual of fecundity led by the shaman Model II: private cures
Physical relation to human dwellings	Outside, dwells in the wilderness, stops at the door of funeral chambers	Models I and II: either séance inside a hut or among humans associated with the ritual ¹¹⁷
Auxiliary spirits	?	Model I: animals (generally small predators), or birds Model II: shaman ancestors
Access to function, performance and formation	Access to function unknown Performance ritualized (under the control of officials); possibly codified, to be formally learned ¹¹⁸	Model I: election by a spirit Model II: the shaman must have shaman ancestor Models I and II: no formal training; performance highly individual ¹¹⁹
Connection with political powers	The <i>wu</i> is under the control of the power; is sometimes described in some texts as a male high officer (case of Wu Xian). His/her negative function (sorcery) can be used as a political tool (he/she is, as a sorcerer or a witch, to be destroyed by the king or by the authorities)	Models I and II: non-existent or rivalry (shaman eliminated). ¹²⁰ He holds no official position, within the state hierarchy.

nevertheless very different. In Siberia, the shaman is most prominent where the livelihood of the group depends on hunting. The status of the *wu* is less easy to scrutinize: most texts systematically present the *wu* in negative terms. They seem to have been relegated in historical times to dealing with misfortune; this is particularly apparent in the case of the female *wu*. Therefore, the original place of this kind of person in early ages is hard to ascertain. The association of the *wu* with rituals performed in order to make it rain is certainly consistent with the economy of early China, given the importance of agriculture. Then, the relationship established between the gods responsible for meteorological phenomena and humans was interpreted as being vertical: the gods are enticed to come down to the earth and bring rain, an act that can be further provoked by the performance of public copulation, which functions as an image of the relation between Heaven and Earth, where Earth (identified with the female) is in a position of submission. In Siberia, if the shaman is strongly linked to the general fecundity of his society, the relationship between this society and nature is interpreted as horizontal, and between partners of equal status. These differences force me to conclude that it is better for now not to use the term 'shaman' as a translation for the Chinese 'wu'.

If the concept of seduction is used in both civilizations, it is clear that archaic China, socially much more tightly organized than Siberian groups, emphasized the need for ritual order and submission to ancestors, nature then being constrained through ritual. Siberian shamans are central to the exchange between culture and nature (the two domains perceived as equal). In archaic China, *wu* were assigned especially to dealing with misfortune, natural or not. They were perceived also as deeply connected with the most chaotic manifestations of nature or with negativity in general, and sometimes conveniently destroyed by the ritual order.

¹¹⁷ Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 511, 530.

¹¹⁸ von Falkenhausen, 'Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums', 294.

¹¹⁹ Hamayon, *La chasse à l'âme*, 440–41, 451. The shaman is fully in control of the séance with the help of an assistant who is directed by the shaman himself.

¹²⁰ See Hamayon *La chasse à l'âme*, 739–43. In cattle husbandry societies, which had a high level of political organization, the political figures did not retain shamanistic practices as a part of their functions. For details of the difficult relationship between political leadership and shamans, see the example of Gengis Khan and Teb-Tenggeri, a most powerful shaman in Roux, *Le Roi, mythes et symboles*, 133–4.