

CHAPTER ONE

FLOOD TAMING AND COSMOGONY

As noted in the introduction, flood myths are accounts of the *re-creation* of the world, so they are often closely linked to the creation myths. While there is no surviving evidence of a creation myth in early China, in a handful of accounts the world emerges out of a primal, undifferentiated chaos through the process of division. These accounts in turn are part of a broader range of ideas and models in which every aspect of the human world depended on the maintenance of divisions. Theoreticians of physical cultivation argued that the embodied self was menaced by the collapse of the division between inner and outer, theoreticians of kinship and ritual argued that the social order could be maintained only by preserving fundamental divisions—primarily those between men and women, and theoreticians of the state argued that the political order endured only through the preservation of divisions between ruler and ruled. Even ideas about the afterlife were drawn into this complex, because in the Warring States and early empires the cult of the dead came to be devoted to the task of maintaining the *separation* between the living and the deceased. At every level, the early Chinese perceived the threat of a looming chaos, and argued for the necessity of maintaining clear lines of division to prevent a collapse back into this void.¹ The tales of the flood can only be understood against the background of these broader concerns, for the flood was the image par excellence of the collapse of divisions into chaos, and tales of taming the flood provided models for the maintenance of order through the reimposition of vanished distinctions or the repeated drawing of lines. Consequently, this study of the flood myths must first briefly examine the broader complex of theories and practices devoted to the avoidance of or escape from chaos through the imposition of division.

COSMOGONIES AND SOCIAL DIVISIONS

The earliest surviving Chinese account of the origins of the world from chaos is the Chu silk manuscript.² Although this text was stolen from a tomb, the tomb was later systematically excavated and dated to the middle of the Warring

States period.³ Around the edges are twelve figures, largely human–animal hybrids, distributed three on each side. Each figure at its side has a three-character name. Since the first character of each name is one of the twelve months recorded in the *Er ya*, Li Xueqin argued that they represent the gods of the months.⁴ Each god is accompanied by a brief passage describing what one should and should not do in that month. As the instructions are addressed exclusively to the ruler, the document clearly anticipates the “monthly ordinances” texts that dictated the actions of the ruler in accord with the seasons, and described the disastrous consequences of failure to observe their prescriptions.⁵ At each corner of the silk is also the image of a tree, and perhaps one intended in the center.

In the center are two passages of text that read in opposite directions. One tells the story of the creation of the world out of the primal chaos by Fu Xi, his wife, and their four sons. They first established the proper order of the mountains and the waters. This pairing of mountains with water, and the emphasis on the placing of each in their proper positions, is routinely attributed to Yu in accounts of his taming the flood. Fu Xi and his family then fixed the celestial lights. Following this, the directional spirits or the sons paced out the four seasons. It is important to note this identification of the sons with the four cardinal directions and the edges, for as we will see, several myths of taming the flood entailed the expulsion of four criminal sons to the edges of the earth. When the sons were pacing out the seasons, there was no sun or moon, and the seasons remain fixed only by the pacing of footsteps. At this point, Heaven fell off balance and obscured the five trees that corresponded to the Five Phases. These are presumably the trees depicted on the manuscript. Then the Fiery Thearch commanded Zhurong, another fire deity and divine ancestor of the Chu ruling house, to lead the spirits of the four seasons to restore the Heavens. It was only then that the seasons fixed by the movement of the sun, moon, and stars came into existence.⁶ This account forms a cosmogony in which the establishment of a regulated space through its division into four directions preceded and made possible the introduction of time divided into four seasons and Five Phases. This cosmogony figures in the illustration, with its four sides corresponding to the four directions and seasons, and its trees indicating the Five Phases (assuming that a central tree mentioned in the narrative should be found in the place where the two passages are located). The final establishment of order in the world is credited to the ancestor of Chu, where the manuscript was presumably created.

The second passage in the center of the manuscript reads in the opposite direction, probably to indicate that the passages form a cycle like the months and seasons in the outer illustrations and in the narrative. This text is longer than the other and deals with astral phenomena in a seasonal context. Although the relation of the two is disputed, this seems to follow the other passage, for it deals with the situation established in the earlier cosmogony. The first section discusses how the moon, which appeared only near the end of the cosmogony, must follow a fixed pace. If it is too quick or too slow,

then the normal attributes of the seasons would be lost. Moreover, all the asterisms would lose their order, and calamities—such as the fall of comets, the collapse of mountains, the death of vegetation, the descent of untimely frost and snow, and the outbreak of wars—would take place. The second section speaks of the Sui cycle and the need of people to match their actions with the cycle to avoid Heaven's punishment. The passage concludes that people must make regular seasonal offerings to Heaven, Earth, the mountains, and the rivers. Failure to offer sacrifices, like the failure to observe the taboos, will result in disaster.⁷

Although not dealing explicitly with a flood, this manuscript does presuppose a state of primal nondifferentiation brought to an end through the initial division between mountains and waters. This is followed by the imposition of a series of procedures to create an ordered space and time through dividing both into regular units. Moreover, it includes a tale in which the initial order—represented by Fu Xi and his pacing sons—collapses back into chaos, only to be replaced by a new dispensation based on regular astral phenomena that provide a structure for time and a model for human action. This new dispensation entails the activity of a ruler whose failure to observe the routines imposed by the cosmic order would lead to the resumption of chaos. In this way, the story structurally parallels the themes of several flood myths discussed in the introduction, and employs several of the themes and images that figure in Chinese flood myths.

The early Chinese themselves had already developed discourses dealing with the historical construction of ordered human space. These began from the image of a primal state of undifferentiated chaos out of which all objects and ultimately human society emerged. Perhaps the most influential was a cosmogonic discourse preserved as a complete narrative in four texts, as well as in references scattered through the *Dao de jing*, the *Huainanzi*, and other texts.⁸ These describe a formless, watery chaos at the beginning of time, and then depict the emergence of objects through a process of sequential division. This is sometimes described in mathematical terms as the division of an original unity into two parts, then three or four, ending in the formation of all things. While these divisions are not the work of men, the texts repeatedly insist that only the sage could understand the principles underlying this emergence of ordered space and use that understanding to regulate the world.

The earliest of these cosmogonies appear somewhat later than the Chu silk manuscript in a handful of cosmogonic accounts in texts associated with what came to be called the Daoist tradition. The opening section of the received version of the *Dao de jing* states: "The nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth; the named is the mother of the myriad things." Other passages refer to "the gate of the primal female, which is known as the root of Heaven and Earth" or to "the ancestor of the myriad things" that "seems to be prior to God-on-High." Even closer to a full cosmogony is the following passage: "There was something formed in chaos, born prior to Heaven and Earth. Isolated! Still! Independent and unchanging, endlessly revolving, one

can take it to be the world's mother. I do not know its name, but one might style it the 'Way.' The passage that comes closest to describing the actual process of origins states: "The Way produced the One, the One produced the Two, the Two produced the Three, and Three produced the myriad things." This makes explicit what is suggested in many of the other passages, that the world began in an undifferentiated chaos that through the imposition of sequential divisions—above all, that between Heaven and Earth—gradually formed a complete cosmos.⁹

Cosmogonies also appear in several texts discovered in association with the *Dao de jing* in an early Western Han tomb at Mawangdui. In the section "Observations (*guan* 觀)" from the so-called Sixteen Classics (*shi liu jing* 十六經), the Yellow Thearch gives a long account of the primal chaos, the initial division into *yin* and *yang*, and the subsequent emergence of the four seasons. From this he develops a theory of government through the imitation of natural principle. In four other sections of the same work, either the Yellow Thearch or one of his ministers describes the origins of the cosmos through the emergence of Heaven and Earth out of chaos and then uses this account to ground a theory of government. The text that modern editors have entitled "The Origin of the Way (*dao yuan* 道原)" consists of two parts. The first is a description of the primeval chaos and the attributes of the Way that preceded Heaven and Earth. This section has several watery epithets, suggesting the flood-like nature of the primal state, as well as terms for stillness and void. It also describes how the primal Way existed prior to the division of Heaven and Earth, permeates all things, is the source of all existence, and how all things can collapse back into it. The second is devoted to the unique capacity of the sage to perceive the actions and attributes of the Way and thereby to bring order to the world.¹⁰

More elaborate versions of this account of the origins of the world and the powers of the sage figure in chapters entitled "Yuan dao" or "Dao yuan" in two texts, the *Huainanzi* and the *Wenzi*, which are probably slightly later than the Mawangdui materials.¹¹ In addition to their other differences from the Mawangdui text, both these chapters add long passages on water as the image of the Way. Indeed the *Huainanzi* applies identical epithets to water and the Way.¹² In addition to the "Yuan dao" chapter that begins the *Huainanzi*, chapters 2, 3, 7, and 14 open with accounts of the original state of the universe as watery, formless, and lacking all divisions.¹³ All of these further describe the processes of division or separation that culminate in the world experienced by people, but in the form of the Way the initial chaos remains as a permanent background condition of existence. Thus, while the primal chaos was an original state that had since vanished, it also survived as a permanent background condition to human existence in two ways. First, it formed a constant reservoir of infinite potentiality accessible only to the sage who thereby obtained the power to alter the spatially structured present. Second, it remained as a constant menace of universal dissolution and chaos should the principles that had forged order out of nondistinction ever be aban-

done. This is the source of the specter of “chaos (*luan* 亂)” that has haunted the Chinese imagination through the centuries.

While accounts of the physical emergence of the world from a primal chaos that prefigures the flood are largely characteristic of the traditions that formed Han Daoism, the other traditions articulated social versions of the same schema. In these accounts, the primal chaos took the form of a world in which humans lived intermixed with animals, dwelling in caves or trees, wearing furs, and eating raw meat. This free intermixing of the human and the animal, as discussed in the introduction, figures in many versions of flood myths found around the world as well as in several Chinese versions. In these stories of primal nondistinction, the human world was progressively separated from the animal realm through a series of technological and moral innovations introduced by the sage-kings. These accounts were employed polemically by rival traditions, for each identified the key factors that separated people from animals with their own teachings.¹⁴ Consequently, as we will see, rival philosophies could be equated with the flood or with wild animals as that which destroyed proper distinctions and reduced the world to savagery and chaos. These stories of the sages’ invention of human society, more clearly than the cosmogonies, present a model of the *construction* of human society through the imposition of divisions. Several Warring States accounts linked the cosmogonies and the separation from animals as either two steps in a larger process or as parallel recurrences of a single category of event.¹⁵

In addition to these early Chinese accounts of the original formation of space and society out of chaos through the process of division, several texts insisted on the importance of continued action in their own day to ward off the threat of nondifferentiation. First, early discussions of ritual repeatedly asserted that it maintained order through imposing divisions, which thus became its defining role. It was through separating men from women, senior from junior, ruler from subject, or civilized from barbarian that ritual constituted social roles and groups. Without ritual’s constant guidance to create and maintain these divisions, society would collapse back into undifferentiated chaos or animal savagery. These divisions were part of a broader schema running through the philosophical and ritual texts, which repeatedly insisted that the role of ritual was to separate people into their respective social categories and thereby maintain social order. This idea is most clearly articulated in remarks that pair the roles of ritual and music. These routinely assign to ritual the task of creating distinctions, while music then serves to forge a harmonious unity from the disparate units:

Music creates identity [*tong* 同] while ritual creates difference [*yi* 異]. When there is identity, then there will be mutual kinship [*qin* 親, or “closeness”]. When there is difference, then there will be mutual respect. If music conquers, then things flow together [*liu* 流]; if ritual conquers, then they fall apart [*li* 離]. To join feelings and decorate appearances are the tasks of ritual and music. When ritual duties

are established, then noble and base will be ranked. When musical patterns are shared [*tong*], then superiors and inferiors will be in harmony.¹⁶

These general remarks take on specific forms in dozens of passage that insist, as in the *Xunzi*, that the purpose of ritual is to maintain social divisions (*fen* 分). These divisions create human society and distinguish humans from beasts. Among the divisions, the ritual texts place particular importance on maintaining the separation (*bie* 別) between men and women.¹⁷ The formula that the role of ritual was to separate (*bie*) also figures in texts that criticize it, such as chapter 14 of the *Huainanzi*.¹⁸

Just as the exponents of ritual, and even its critics, insisted that its role was to divide or separate people in order to preserve social order, the advocates of the new state order argued that its legal codes, systems of rank, and administrative practices served to maintain appropriate divisions and thereby preserve society. Only through maintaining the distinction between ruler and ruled, and through establishing a carefully regulated hierarchy encompassing the entire population, could natural human propensities be contained, social order preserved, and people kept separate from animals.¹⁹ Thus, all major early Chinese theories of society and the physical world assumed an original undifferentiated chaos that remained in the background both as a source of potential power and as the threatening consequence of improper actions.

This model was extended from the world of nature and of humans to include the realm of the spirits. As Lothar von Falkenhausen has argued, the clear division that appeared by the middle of the Eastern Zhou between the ritual vessels of the living and those buried with the dead marks an early stage in the shift away from a Western Zhou world based on the shared existence of the living and the deceased to a world in which the *separation* of the living and the dead had become the ultimate aim of funerary ritual. In place of the costly assemblages of ritual vessels that had defined Western Zhou funerary practice, the grave goods of the late Warring States, Qin, and Han were dominated by objects of daily use (clothing, lacquer bowls and plates, other pottery, food) or by models or images of such objects and other aspects of worldly life (houses, granaries, animals, and tools). Replicas and images also depicted human beings, both those buried in the tomb and all the servants, entertainers, cooks, agricultural laborers, and other people necessary to their leisured existence.²⁰ All this was intended to provide the dead with a happy existence in the tomb, but an existence based on objects that were only miniature replicas or images of the world of the living. Thus, the *Xunzi* and several chapters in the *Li ji* argued that the objects buried with the dead, while imitating those of the living, had to be distinct. Although they were analogous, the two world had to be clearly separated.²¹

While these classicist texts on ritual do not usually discuss the reasons for separating the dead from the living, one passage in the *Li ji* makes the motive

explicit: “When a ruler attended the funeral of an official, he brought with him a shaman carrying a peach branch and reed broom [objects to expel evil spirits], as well as a soldier with a lance. This is because they dread [spirits]. It is the reason why they distinguish them from the living.”²² Here the dead must be kept separate from the living because those who have died are a menace. Anna Seidel traced the emergence of this idea that the dead were potentially demonic figures who if not kept carefully sequestered in the tomb would return to wreak havoc on the living. As she remarked, the dead as depicted in texts in Eastern Han tombs are “terrifying revenants” who could inflict disease or misfortune, and who consequently “have to be securely locked away.”²³ Thus, one “grave ordinance” inscribed on a jar in the year A.D. 175 uses rigorous parallelism to insist on the separation of the living and the dead:

High Heaven is blue [*cang cang*],
 The underworld is limitless [*mang mang*].
 The dead return to the shadows [*yin*],
 The living return to the light [*yang*].
 The living have their villages [*li*],
 The dead have their hamlets [*xiang*].
 The living are subordinate to the western Chang’an [*an*],
 The dead are subordinate to the eastern Mt. Tai [*shan*].
 In joy they do not remember one another,
 In bitterness they do not long for one another.²⁴

Other texts call for expelling the deceased by any means necessary:

The subject who died on the day *yi si* has the ghost name “Heavenly Brightness.” This name has already been reported to the Spirit Master [*shen shi* 神師] of the Heavenly Emperor [*tian di* 天帝, who ruled the realm of the dead]. Instantly remove yourself three thousand leagues. If you do not immediately depart, the [. . .] of the Southern Mountain will be ordered to come and devour you. Act promptly, in accord with the ordinances and statutes.²⁵

Even the lengthy “funeral narrative” found at Cangshan, which asks the deceased to grant prosperity and longevity to his descendants and describes all the pleasures depicted in the tomb’s imagery, ends with a chilling insistence on the need for absolute separation:

Having entered the dark world,
 You are completely separated from the living,
 After the tomb is sealed,
 It will never be opened again.²⁶

This threat of the dead also figured in stories in the *Han shu*, in which the skeletons of the deceased were pulverized and boiled in poisonous substances to prevent them from intruding into the dreams of the living.²⁷ Burial was one method of removing the threat posed by the dead, but should this fail people could employ the more drastic measures depicted in these stories.

All these models—the early cosmogonies, the accounts of the primitive state of man and the inventions of the sage-kings, the discussions of the role of ritual or the state, and the depictions of the relations of the living and the dead—shared a common model in which order and intelligibility depend on separation or division. The chief threat was the disappearance of distinctions that would result in a collapse back into the original state of chaos. Accounts of a great flood provided a vivid dramatization of such a possibility. Furthermore, the tales of how this flood was brought to an end depicted numerous ideas about the necessary distinctions that constituted human society: water/land, criminal/law-abiding, man/woman, father/son, human/animal, and so on. The balance of this chapter will examine the earliest versions of the flood myth and trace their relation to the political ideas and practices of the period.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND THE FLOOD

Like all surviving myths from early China, accounts of the flood are scattered through numerous works that each touch on only selected events or themes. Over the course of the twentieth century, several leading scholars have brought together many of these dispersed accounts to try to reconstruct a hypothetical original form of the myth and to trace its development in later periods.²⁸ Some of these scholars have pointed out that the Chinese myths of the flood, like stories of the taming of floods in many cultures, provide an account of the fashioning of order from primal chaos. As previously discussed, early Chinese stories of the origins of the world largely focus on the way in which order emerged through progressive divisions that extracted defined entities from a chaos of formless energies. Consequently, tales of the channeling of flood waters into rivers so as to divide the land into fixed units form a human version of the accounts of creation that existed in early China.²⁹ As in all such early Chinese tales, the imposition or extraction of order was attributed to the early sages, primarily to Yu but also, as discussed at length in the final chapter, to Nü Gua.

Yu is the central figure in most accounts of the flood, the one noted in the earliest texts, and the tamer of the flood in the first extended accounts. As Gu Jiegang has pointed out, there are no less than six references to Yu in Zhou odes that date from between ca. 1000 and 600 B.C. These poems praise Yu as the figure who ordered the fields so as to make agriculture possible, established the foundations from which Hou Ji later developed agriculture, channeled rivers to flow to the east and thus regulated the four directions, and fixed the foundations on which all later rulers founded their capitals. One

poem refers explicitly to the “endless flood waters” in response to which Yu laid out the dry land. Similar ideas and phrases, such as references to all dry land as the “traces of Yu,” also appear in a small number of bronzes. Recently, a bronze acquired in Hong Kong that some scholars date to the Western Zhou but others think much later, contained a lengthy inscription that describes Yu’s work in ending the flood by dredging out the rivers and thereby dividing the world into its natural provinces.³⁰ Since these references assume knowledge of the achievements of Yu in ending the flood and thereby establishing a delimited expanse of dry land, there was clearly already by the late Western Zhou a well-known story of his taming the flood. This is of use in showing that the flood myth in some version existed from a fairly early date, and that even then its hero was the same Yu who figured as the central figure in later accounts. It is also noteworthy that Yu’s work was cited as the origin of an ordered human space that made possible both agriculture and city building. His achievements thus figure in the songs as the prototype for those of the Zhou’s founding ancestors and dynastic heroes.

These songs, however, merely *refer* to the story of Yu, but provide no connected narrative or incidents. The fullest early recounting of the story appears in several chapters that are clustered near the beginning of the *Shang shu*, but are almost certainly of Warring States composition. Taken as a group, these chapters narrate the fashioning of an orderly human realm out of chaos. Ordered time emerges through the introduction of the calendar, ordered space through the taming of the flood, and ordered society through the expulsion of animals and the introduction of punishments. The first chapter, the “Yao dian,” retells as historical events a set of early myths dealing with both the movement of the sun and with the flood.³¹ In the first half of the chapter, the sovereign Yao, who according to arguments elaborated by some scholars was probably originally a sun god, stationed four brothers at the cardinal points of the earth to supervise the movement of the sun from its rising to its settings and its shifting positions over the course of the year.³² Having described the introduction of the basic units of time—day, season, and year—by means of the fixing of the directions, the text proceeds to the regulation of space through an account of the taming of the flood. In this section Yao seeks for a man who can subdue the flood that was raging in the world at that time. His officials, including one who is named “Four (Directional) Peaks (*si yue* 四岳)” and thus an extension of the theme of the preceding section of the “Yao dian,” suggest two men: first Gong Gong and then Gun. The former is rejected, and the latter for nine years attempts to tame the flood but in the end fails. At the conclusion Yao fixes upon Yu, to whom he grants his two daughters in marriage as a form of test of his ability to order a household and, by extension, the world.³³

The second chapter deals with the work of Shun, to whom Yao yielded the throne, and it touches on the theme of the flood only briefly. However, it is noteworthy that the theme of the creation of an orderly space through the fixing of the directions is once again central to the text. After assuming

sovereignty on the first day of the first month, Shun gives audience to the minister “Four Peaks.” Over the course of the year Shun makes a tour of inspection to each of the four great directional peaks, where he assembles the lords of each region to fix the seasons, months, and days. After this ritual constitution of time and space, he divides the world into twelve provinces, performs a sacrifice on the central peak of each province, and dredges their rivers. Finally, he publicly proclaims his laws and expels four ministers, including those previously charged with the regulation of the flood, to mountains at the edges of the earth. As a consequence, all the world is brought to order.³⁴ This theme of the ritual expulsion of a numbered set of malefactors to the edges of the earth as a means of creating order will be discussed at length in chapter two.

At this point in the narrative Yu appears as the first in a series of appointments. He is named minister of works for having “stabilized the water and land.” This clear reference to the taming of the flood is followed by the appointment of an official who will teach the people agriculture, one to establish proper social relations, one to introduce punishments to control the barbarians and criminals, one to create all crafts, one to regulate the affairs of the plants and animals that grow in the wilderness, one to introduce ritual ceremonies, one to create music, and one to guarantee truthful speech.³⁵ Thus, while Yu and the flood figure only briefly in the chapter, their placement indicates their significance within the broader process of creating an ordered time and space out of chaos. Moreover, the themes of the invention of agriculture and of the regulation of the plants and animals that lie beyond the human realm figure prominently in several versions of the flood myth.

The next chapter, entitled “The Counsels of the Great Yu (*da Yu mo* 大禹謨)”, again touches on the flood only in passing. The extended discussion of the construction of order from watery chaos appears in the “Yu gong,” which provides the fullest account in the *Shang shu* of the works of Yu.³⁶ This chapter, probably composed in the middle of the Warring States period, describes in detail how Yu brought an end to the flood through opening passages in the mountains and guiding rivers into their courses.³⁷ The lines of mountains and rivers that he traced out divided China into the “Nine Provinces,” a magical number that played a significant role in later Chinese models of the world.³⁸ Yu himself then sketched out the lineaments of this newly structured world with a journey along the rivers that he had fixed and the establishment of the tribute that each region would send to the center.

Several features of the account in the “Yu gong” merit notice. First, the chapter begins with an echo of the description of Yu’s work in the *Shi jing* to the effect that Yu “laid out (*fu* 敷)” the land. The early commentators gloss the character *fu* as *fen* 分 “to divide,” thus emphasizing the critical importance of the idea that the central act in taming the flood was the division of the water and land. This is followed immediately by the statement that he “fol-

lowed the mountains and cut down the trees, to establish the highest mountains and the greatest rivers." This emphasis on mountains recurs throughout the chapter, in the descriptions of how Yu's work allowed the people to "descend from the hills and dwell in the fields," and the fact that the limits of several provinces are defined by mountains.³⁹ The same theme is marked by the fact that restoring a particular region to order from the chaos of the flood was marked by sacrifices to the surrounding mountains, as they were in some sense responsible for the ending of the flood.⁴⁰ After the pattern of tribute is described, the chapter even provides an inventory of the mountains that Yu crossed or surveyed in the course of taming the flood.⁴¹ This opposition between mountains and rivers figures prominently in many accounts of Yu's taming of the flood, and indeed is a feature of flood myths from all over the world, including the biblical account of Mt. Ararat.⁴² Here it clearly carries forward the theme of the laying out of the land by the separation of the water, for mountain ranges are the feature of landscape that most readily rose above the flood and that in the ordered world divided the major rivers into their respective drainage channels. Thus, they could be used to define boundaries and, as discussed earlier, the establishment of boundaries was a major theme of accounts of ending the flood.

Second, the account emphasizes that the core of the work was to cause the rivers to "follow (*cong* 從)," be "guided in (*dao* 道 = 導)," "gathered in (*zhu* 滙)," or "enter (*ru* 入)" their channels, a point that will be discussed as a major attribute of the work of Yu.⁴³ It also emphasized how the work of Yu made possible agriculture in each region, a theme already noted, and describes the quality of the soil in each region. This theme even forms the substance of semantic parallels, as in the sentence, "The Huai and Yi [rivers] being regulated [*yi* 乂], Meng and Yu [regions] were cultivated [*yi* 藝]."⁴⁴ The emphasis on agriculture, as the natural outgrowth of land that has now been separated from the water, also runs throughout the theme of tribute.

This theme of tribute forms yet another key aspect of the structuring of the world through the process of division. While tribute was a movement of goods, it was a movement that served to define the structure of space. The arrival of tribute marked the capital as the center of the world, while the sending of tribute identified each region as a periphery. Moreover, the different types of tribute defined the character of each region, thus distinguishing southern regions from those in the north, or coastal regions from those in the interior. In this way the lists of tribute in the chapter on Yu were a direct outgrowth of his work in taming the flood, for they served to distinguish the regions one from another and thereby marked the divisions that his work had restored.⁴⁵ This linkage between the theme of tribute and the structure of the world is emphasized by the addition at the end of the chapter of the earliest surviving version of the "Five Zones of Submission (*wu fu* 五服)" model of the world. In this model the center of the world is the royal or imperial capital, and the rest of the world is divided into successive zones

in which the level of civilization declines as one moves away from the capital. Each zone is marked by reduced obligations of tribute and weakened political control.⁴⁶

Another aspect of the theme of tribute in the “Yu gong” that links it to the flood is the emphasis on moving from place to place along rivers. Thus, after each discussion of the limits of a region, the character of its soil, and the nature of its tribute, the chapter narrates how they “floated (*fu* 浮)” down certain rivers until they “reached (*da* 達)” a specific location, at which point the account of the next region begins.⁴⁷ Commentators over the centuries have debated whether those who were floating were Yu or the later bearers of tribute. In either case, the important point is that the end of the flood is marked by the transformation of formless water as a destructive force to controlled water as a positive one. As noted in the introduction, some flood myths in both North and South America are built around the opposition between the deluge and controlled movements up or down rivers that mark out seasonal changes. The movements along the rivers of Yu or the tribute bearers described in the “Yu gong” play an identical role in the Chinese flood myths, which is why the chapter contains a complete inventory of all the major rivers of China and their interlinkages.⁴⁸

The culmination of Yu’s work in transforming the chaos of the flood into an ordered, human space is summarized in a rhyming panegyric passage that follows the comprehensive accounts of the mountains and rivers and precedes the description of the Five Zones:

The nine provinces formed a unity, with the usable land to the four edges of the earth all having been made into habitations. The nine mountains had roads carved through their forests and offerings presented to them. The nine rivers were dredged and flowing, while the nine marches had all been embanked. Everything within the four seas converged [at the capital]. The six treasuries [all natural resources] were all completely put in order. The myriad soils [of the different regions] had all been correctly evaluated, so as to scrupulously impose a levy on resources. He had completely modeled the three soil types, to perfect the levies of the central states.⁴⁹

With its repetition of the number “nine,” which indicates totality, its pairing of mountains and rivers; its insistence on the carving of lines—the chopping of forests in the mountains, the channeling of rivers, the banking of marshes; its emphasis on the creation of land as a space of habitation; its description of the structuring of the world through the fixing of the four directions and the convergence of them all in the capital; and its elaboration of the theme of surveying the newly created land to fix the amounts and forms of tributes, this passage gives a complete summary of how the work of Yu converted the flooded world into a distinctively human space. It is crucial to note, moreover, that his work in establishing this space consisted essentially in perform-

ing the administrative tasks that defined the states of early China. Particularly important in this regard are discussions of the proper methods of water control, a question that reflects not only the technology but the moral philosophy of the period.

A final reference in the *Shang shu* to the flood occurs at the opening of the “Hong fan,” a chapter placed much later in the text than those previously mentioned but probably composed at about the same time. This chapter details a comprehensive model of government supposedly presented to King Wu of the Zhou by a virtuous Shang noble.⁵⁰ The chapter states that the high god had originally presented this model to Yu after the latter had inherited the work of his father Gun. While the account in the “Yao dian” simply stated that Gun had not succeeded, the “Hong fan” asserts that he failed because he had sought to control the waters by blocking them up.⁵¹ This implicitly marks a contrast with Yu, who as described in the “Yu gong” had ended the flood not by blocking water but by causing it to flow along channels to the sea. Moreover, as noted earlier, in the “Yu gong” the use of properly flowing water as a mode of transportation defines the structure of the world that Yu shaped. This opposition between Gun and Yu based on their contrary techniques of water control figures in several other texts that will be discussed later.

THE FLOOD AND THE HUMAN-ANIMAL DIVIDE

Another Warring States text presenting substantial narratives about Yu and the flood is the *Mencius*, probably compiled from the late fourth century down into the third century. This text contains two major narratives dealing with the flood. One of these that describes the question of Yu’s art for the control of water links the flood to the collapse of distinctions between humans and animals:

In the time of Yao the waters reversed their course and overflowed the middle kingdoms so that snakes and dragons dwelt there. The people had no fixed dwellings, so those in lower regions made nests in trees, while those in higher ones lived in mountain caves. The *Documents*’ saying, “The floods are a warning to me,” refers to this inundation. [Yao] had Yu put it in order. Yu dredged out the land and channeled the rivers to the sea. He expelled the snakes and dragons to the grassy swamps. The movement of the water outward from the land formed the Jiang, Huai, Han, and Yellow Rivers. As the dangers were removed to the distant regions, the harm of the snakes and dragons vanished. Only then were people able to obtain level land to dwell on.⁵²

This passage echoes the “Yu gong”’s references to Yu’s guiding or channeling water to lead it to the sea. This theme will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. What is significant here is its identification of the flood with

the confusion of humans and beasts, and its consequent emphasis on the issue of creating human habitations.

Although the *Mencius's* discussions of the unconstrained mingling of people and animals, discussions that also figure in passages that will be discussed in chapter two, appear primarily in its accounts of the flood and of human criminality, they also figure in a discussion of the sage Shun. This is significant because Shun was the ruler during the period of the flood and the man who appointed Yu to reimpose order and distinctions in the world. The mythic association of Shun with the collapse of distinctions between men and animals runs through many texts, indicating that the theme was not an invention of the *Mencius* but part of a broader and earlier mythic topos in which the ruler at the time of the flood was in fact an embodiment of the flood itself. This is clearly demonstrated in the passage from the *Mencius*, which not only describes Shun's life in the wilds, but also through the choice of epithets and the account of his character that treat him explicitly as an embodiment of the flood:

When Shun dwelt in the deep mountains, he lived together with trees and rocks and wandered freely with the deer and wild boars. He was scarcely different from a wild man of the mountains. But when he heard a single good word or witnessed a single good deed, then it was as if one had opened up the Yangzi or the Yellow River. As he poured out with great force (*pei ran* 沛然), nothing could check him.⁵³

Here Shun is described first as a man of the wilds whose life was marked precisely by the free intermingling with forests and wild animals that characterized the moralizing versions of the flood. This is followed by a description of Shun's character that compares him to unstoppable, flooding water, who, when properly guided, acted like the waters of the flood that became rivers channeled into the sea. Moreover, several passages in the *Mencius* that touch on the topos of the fragility of the boundaries between men and animals cite Shun as the exemplary figure associated with these boundaries.⁵⁴ Thus, it appears that in certain traditions Shun, as a man who lived with wild animals and whose character was like that of a raging flood, embodied the state of the world that was overcome by the labors of Yu. This would provide a mythic substratum to later accounts of the political transition from Shun to Yu.

Nor are these links between Shun, wilderness, and the abolished boundaries between humans and animals limited to a few passages in the *Mencius*. The title of Shun's "kingdom" or reign, which routinely precedes his name, was *yu* 虞, a word whose most common meaning was "forester." This term appears as early as the "Shun dian" chapter of the *Shang shu* as the title given to Yi, the figure who in one of the versions of the flood myth in the *Mencius* previously cited used fire to drive animals out of the human realm. In the

“Shun dian” this figure is charged with the duty of “putting in order the grasses, trees, birds, and beasts of above [mountains] and below [marshes].”⁵⁵ In the *Zhou li*, Yi’s office as forester is divided between two officials, one who is charged with the supervision of the mountains and the other who bears responsibility for controlling the marshes or wastes.⁵⁶ According to the account given in the *Zhou li*, these officials, whose divided responsibilities echo the oppositions of mountain/river and marshland/waste that structured Yu’s labors, controlled the times at which people could enter the wild places and the sorts of materials, largely plants and animals, that they could remove. Thus, the title of Shun’s reign, which was inherited by the states that claimed descent from him, was “forester” and marked his links to the classic realms of the non-human, that is, the mountains and the wastes. This title consequently supports the remarks made in the *Mencius* about Shun’s conduct and character.

While some have argued that the graph *yu* 虞 “forester” is a loan for some other word, there is plentiful material, apart from these passages, to show that Shun was in fact associated with the mountains and wastes. A story in the “Shun dian” relates that when Yao was considering employing Shun: “He placed him in a great forest [*lu* 麓, also glossed “mountain forest”]. Amid violent wind, lightning, and rain he did not lose his way.”⁵⁷ When this story was incorporated into a *Shi ji* passage translated below, the links of Shun with the realms administered by the forester official were made even more explicit. In this account Shun’s entering the wilderness is the final and most difficult test by which he proved himself fit to become Son of Heaven. It is also significant that, according to several texts, Shun’s many exertions culminated with his “death in the wilds [*ye si* 野死].”⁵⁸ Shun’s links to forests are also revealed in his policy of setting up a *tree* into which criticisms could be inserted so that he could judge the quality of his own reign.⁵⁹

The identification of Shun as a man of the wilds in the *Shi ji* forms part of an extended narrative relating a series of achievements by which he progressively imposed order on ever widening spatial units:

Then Yao gave his two daughters [to Shun] as wives to observe his virtuous power in relation to the two women. Shun commanded the two women and kept them modest at Weina, so they acted in accord with the rituals of wives. Yao regarded this as good, so he had Shun carefully harmonize the five teachings [on basic kin and political ties], so the five teachings were all followed. He then had him successively enter all the offices, and the offices were ordered in accord with the seasons. He was made to perform the rituals of welcome at the gates of the four directions. The four gates became truly solemn, so the feudal lords and guests from distant lands were all respectful. Yao had Shun enter the mountain forests and the riverside marshes. In violent wind, lightning, and rain Shun did not lose his way. Yao thought he was a sage.⁶⁰

Here Shun is asked to successively put in order the nuclear household, the broader kin ties that form the lineage, the offices of government, relations with foreign peoples, and finally the savage world of the forests and wastes.⁶¹ Proving himself capable in all of them, he is clearly a sage and receives his charge as Son of Heaven. While Shun's links with the wilds are here incorporated into a much larger spatial schema, they still reveal his older, more exclusive links to the realm of wild plants and animals as revealed in the *Shang shu* and the *Mencius*.

Shun's ties to the animal kingdom are also revealed in a set of passages dealing with the incorporation of beasts into the human world.⁶² In the *Shan hai jing* several passages describe peoples descended from Shun who eat wild animals and the produce of forest trees, and who command "the four birds, tigers, leopards, bears, and dragons." Two passages describe magical birds that accompanied Shun alone as their companion or gathered in the lands of his descendants. Still another passage tells of a giant bamboo forest and a marsh that are associated with Shun. This theme of commanding animals also figures in the "Shun dian" account of Shun's appointing Yi as forester. Yi unsuccessfully attempts to yield the office to two officials named "Red Tiger (*zhu hu* 朱虎)" and "Bear (*xiong pi* 熊羆)." While in the story these are presented as human officials, just as Four Peaks is, their names reveal their animal nature. Moreover, in a celebrated story that appeared in several texts and was quoted repeatedly down through the centuries, Shun's music master Kui struck musical stones and caused the myriad animals to join in a dance. Thus, it is clear that like the Yellow Thearch, who trained an army of wild animals to defeat his enemies, Shun drew animals from their native wilds into his realm where he commanded them as his minions.⁶³ Shun was thus not only a man who prior to appointment lived in the wilds amid animals and forest plants, but who, after attaining sovereignty, drew these animals into his court.

Humans who were originally animals appear not only in Shun's court but even in his family. In early texts Shun had a brother named Xiang 象 who attempted to kill him. However, several texts also refer to "elephants (*xiang* 象)" who work the fields next to Shun's tomb, just like the birds in the Hangzhou region who were taught by Yu to engage in agriculture.⁶⁴ As the Tang scholar Zhang Shoujie pointed out in his commentary to the *Shi ji*, several early texts beginning with the *Di wang shi ji* note that Shun's brother Xiang was enfeoffed in the state "Nose (*youbi* 有鼻)," and that he received sacrifice under the title "Spirit of the Nose Pavilion (*bi ting shen* 鼻亭神)."⁶⁵ The twentieth-century scholar Wen Yiduo collected further examples to demonstrate that Xiang's identifying feature was his nose, which was almost certainly a reference to an elephant's trunk.⁶⁶ Thus, Shun's links to the collapse of distinctions between men and animals extended so far that an animal was a member of his own family.

Finally, there is one striking, if relatively late, story that shows that Shun saved himself from his parents' attempts to murder him by himself becoming animals:

Gu Sou [Shun's father] ordered Shun to clean out the granary. Shun told Yao's two daughters [his wives]. They said, "This time he will burn you. You must make your clothing into a magpie, and depart with this bird art [*niao gong* 鳥工]." Shun then ascended into the granary, put on the bird art clothing, and flew away. . . . Shun was to dig a well, and again told his wives. They said, "Remove your clothing and depart with the dragon art [*long gong* 龍工]." When he entered the well Gu Sou and Xiang dumped down the earth to fill up the well, but Shun was able to get out through another well.⁶⁷

Here through the clever advice of his wives Shun was able to manipulate his clothing to turn himself into a bird to escape from a burning building, and into a dragon to move through the watery underworld where his father and brother had buried him. While this story of Shun adopting animal characteristics is not recorded until the fifth century A.D., the Han dynasty *Lie nü zhuan* already records the tradition that Shun consulted his two wives prior to undertaking the tasks set by his parents. Moreover, the role of wives and other women as prescient counselors figures prominently in this book.⁶⁸ Thus, the story clearly has ancient roots, although we cannot be certain when it took on its present form.

Shun was thus associated with the blurring or elimination of the boundary between humans and animals, to the extent of turning himself into animals in order to use their powers. This blurring of boundaries marked the flood as the replaying during the period of human existence of the original condition from the which the physical world had first emerged. It also became the defining characteristic of the flood as an image of social chaos in the *Mencius* and other texts that employed the flood as an image of criminality or social deviance.

Shun was also associated with the water of the flood itself. This was already demonstrated in the *Mencius's* description cited above of Shun's character as *pei ran* 沛然 "pouring with force, voluminous." It also figures explicitly in several other texts. Thus, the *Mozi* records that Yao raised Shun from the banks of a marsh, where the latter was engaging in fishing.⁶⁹ A couple of passages in the *Shan hai jing* describe countries whose origins are traced back to Shun. One is ringed by deep bodies of water (*yuan* 淵) on all sides, and it is said that Shun bathed in the southern pool. The other state has a raised platform called "Shun's Altar" surrounded on all sides by water.⁷⁰ Interestingly, both the *Shan hai jing* and the *Guo yu* state that Shun's tomb was completely ringed by water, confirming that these water-ringed states or altars were indeed images of Shun.⁷¹ Several Japanese scholars have noted this association between Shun and water. They argue that he was originally a water spirit, and that his association with wild vegetation and animals derives ultimately from the association of these wilderness creatures with water and, above all, marshlands.⁷² Stories of his divine birth also indicate that his mother was

impregnated by a rainbow and that he had the face of a dragon, both associated with water.⁷³ This overlap in the mythical attributes of Shun between the flood waters and wild beasts also appears in tales of the origins of Qin state. Qin's legendary ancestor Da Fei first quelled the flood together with Yu and then assisted Shun in taming the birds and wild animals.⁷⁴

It is clear that the *Mencius's* use of the flood as an image for the collapse of social distinctions and thus for rampant criminality was based on a broader set of myths in which the era of the flood was associated with Shun. As a spirit linked with water, marshes, and wastelands, and with the forest vegetation and wild creatures that flourished in such places, Shun embodied the flood in its aspects both as rampant water and obliterator of distinctions. The ultimate distinction that underlay early Chinese thought on morality was the separation of men from beasts. As spirit of the wilds, or later patron sage of the incorporation of wilderness and wild animals into the human realm, Shun both signaled the original absence of that fundamental distinction and presided over its appearance. It is thus worthy of note that in the myths Shun lives amid water and animals, and rules in the midst of the flood, while it is servants under his control—Yu, Yi, and Kui—who do the actual work of bringing order to the world and either expelling or domesticating the creatures of the wild. Shun himself appears as a positive figure in the moralizing uses of the myths presented by the Warring States philosophers, but abundant traces remain of his liminal role as patron of the wilderness and embodiment of the flood. In this way, the myths around him underlie and inform the *Mencius's* use of the flood as the image of the collapse of the primal distinction between human and animal, and thus as the prototype for social collapse and criminality (see chapter three).

THE FLOOD AND HUMAN NATURE

The passage from the *Mencius* cited at the beginning of the previous section noted that Yu tamed the flood by “dredging out the land and channeling the rivers to the sea.” The idea that the flood was ended by allowing the waters to flow naturally through reestablished channels is reiterated in another passage in which *Mencius* criticizes a contemporary minister who dared to compare his own irrigation works to the achievements of Yu:

You are mistaken. Yu's method of controlling water was the natural Way [*dao* 道, a word regularly applied in the “Yu gong” to Yu's channeling of water] of water. So Yu used the Four Seas as the ditches into which he channeled the water. You only use the neighboring states as such ditches. When the water reverses its course this is called a flood, which refers to an inundation.⁷⁵

The authors mark the close link between this passage and the preceding one by paraphrasing part of the first at the end of the second. Both passages assert

that Yu's art was to avail himself of the spontaneous tendencies of water, which for unspecified reasons had been diverted from its natural course. The other account of the great flood in the *Mencius*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, also describes Yu's technique as involving "dredging (*shu* 疏)" the Nine Rivers, "opening up (決)" the Ru and Han rivers, and "clearing out (*pai* 排)" the Huai and the Si so that they can all be "channeled (*zhu* 注)" into the seas.⁷⁶ This fashioning of order through following the natural tendency of things is specifically contrasted with the practices of the rulers of his day, just as the "Hong fan" had contrasted Yu's technique of following the tendencies of water with that of Gun who did not. This contrast between Yu and the other tamers of the flood proposed in the "Yao dian"—Gun and Gong Gong—will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

This emphasis on the importance of following the natural tendencies of water might well have figured prominently in the *Mencius's* account of the flood because the same issue played a major role in the debates on human nature between Mencius and Gaozi. The relevant passage of Mencius's argument says:

Water truly makes no distinction between east and west, but does it make no distinction between up and down? The goodness of human nature is like water's flowing downward. There is no human who is not good, as there is no water that does not flow downward. Now as for water, if you slap it and cause it to leap up, you can cause it to go over your forehead. If you stir it up and make it flow, you can cause it to ascend a mountain. But how could this be the nature of water? The force of circumstances makes it thus.⁷⁷

Yu's technique for controlling water exactly parallels the Mencian idea of the goodness of human nature, while Gun's practice would be lumped together with those who, according to Mencius, believed that people could become good only by doing violence to people's innate tendencies. Thus, the debate in myth over methods of water control was also about broader questions that preoccupied some philosophers of the day.

The aforementioned contrast between Yu's method of following the natural course of things and the others' attempts to constrain the floods through force, a contrast that also figured in contemporary debates on human nature, became a common theme that appeared in several texts in addition to the *Shang shu* and the *Mencius*. Without specifying the exact nature of the contrast, a set of questions in the "Tian wen," a lengthy poem written in the middle to late Warring States period, posits such a distinction between the methods of Yu and Gun:

When Lord Yu came from the belly of Gun,
How did he transform?
Forcibly seizing his predecessor's task,

He completed his father's work.
 How did he carry on the earlier task with different plans?
 The flooding springs were supremely deep.
 How did he fill them in?
 The earth's square divided into nine,
 How did he shore them up?
 The Responding Dragon of the rivers and seas,
 What did it completely pass through?
 What did Gun contrive?
 How did Yu succeed?⁷⁸

This entire set of questions highlights Yu's success by contrasting it with the failure of his father Gun, and at least two questions specifically posit their reliance on different plans and methods. While we cannot be certain how the author of the "Tian wen" would have answered his own questions, in all other texts from the period the distinction is between Gun's blocking up rivers with dams to halt their flow and Yu's dredging and channeling them.

A final text from roughly the same period that insists on this contrast in methods of controlling the flood is the *Guo yu*. In one anecdote King Ling of Zhou wished to block up a river that threatened his palace. The heir-apparent remonstrated:

This is not permissible. I have heard that those in antiquity who nourished their people did not topple mountains, raise up lowland wastes, block rivers, nor drain swamps. Mountains are the gathering of earth. Lowland wastes are where creatures take shelter. Rivers are where energy [*qi* 氣] is guided. Swamps are the amassing of water. When Heaven and Earth took shape they gathered [earth] on high to form mountains and gave shelter to creatures in the lowlands. They dredged out river valleys to guide the flow of energy, and ringed the stagnant pools in low places in order to amass moisture. Therefore the gathered earth did not collapse and the creatures had a place to take shelter. The energies did not stagnate, but also did not overflow. So in life the people had material resources and in death a place for burial. There were no worries about premature deaths, madness, plagues, or disease. There were no calamities of starvation, cold, or want. Thus the superiors and inferiors could find security together and be prepared against the unexpected. The ancient sages paid attention entirely to this.

In the past Gong Gong renounced this Way. He took his ease in lascivious music and in dissipation destroyed his body. He desired to block up the hundred rivers, and to topple the mountains to fill