

The Myth Studies of Wen I-to: A Question of Methodology

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An early draft of this paper was prepared in 1977 under the direction of my professor, C. H. Wang, at the University of Washington, Seattle. I should like to thank him for his initial encouragement and guidance. Since that time Hsu Kai-yu's major study of Wen I-to's life and work has been published, which effectively puts Wen I-to's contributions to Chinese scholarship in a much better perspective than was before available in English (see Hsu Kai-yu, *Wen I-to* [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980]). Hsu's study, especially the chapter dealing with Wen I-to's work from 1928 to 1938, clearly shows that Wen's study of Chinese classical literature, including myth, is a major part of his intellectual legacy (Hsu, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-34). I believe that over time that scholarship will prove to be *the* major part of Wen's legacy. In light of Hsu's study my original arguments have been slightly modified; in several ways they have been strengthened. Hsu's explication of Wen's intellectual career allows us to better understand the place his myth studies hold in his general academic pursuits. I trust that this study can now be read as a supplement to Hsu's remarks.

Introduction

Wen I-to 聞一多 (1899-1946) was one of the major intellectuals during the formative period of the Chinese republic. His name has most often been mentioned in works dealing with the development of *pai-hua* 白話 poetry, and though his scholarly achievements are extremely wide ranging, it is his poetry that has consistently received the most critical attention. This is true for the largest part of Hsu Kai-yu's recent study as well. He discusses Wen's poetic work at length in the first half of the book, and it dominates his evaluation of Wen's intellectual achievement in general. This, despite the fact that Wen's poetry dates almost entirely from the mid-twenties, with his last

poem written in 1931.¹ Hsu's discussion of Wen I-to's later years is concerned not only with Wen's critical work on classical literature, but also with Wen's political activity of his last decade. What needs to be said about Wen I-to's small poetic corpus has already been said, and it is time to look more closely at the critical work that occupied him during the latter part of his life.

From 1930 on Wen I-to devoted most of his time to the teaching and studying of Chinese classical literature. He wrote extensively on early Chinese poetry, including a critical annotation of the *Ch'u tz'u* 楚辭 and a number of studies on *Shih ching* 詩經 poems. He wrote studies of T'ang poets and poetics, beginning in 1928 with a study of Tu Fu's 杜甫 life and work, as well as his studies on philology and mythology. These studies are nearly all substantial, scholarly pieces, based in large part on philological arguments. Hsu Kai-yu has remarked:

Wen used philological tools developed in the Ch'ing dynasty largely because, pending development of his own methods and approach, the Chinese classicists in the 1930's continued to hold Ch'ing scholarship in high esteem.²

Hsu notes elsewhere that Wen's philological studies are recognized as "at least comparable to the best of Ch'ing dynasty scholarship,"³ while they may be superior in the imaginative approach he developed in his later work.⁴ My intent here is to show that while Wen definitely participated in the philological tradition of Ch'ing scholarship, there are many examples where this philology is different from, if not superior to, that of his predecessors.

Wen I-to began his education in the traditional manner, receiving a thorough introduction to the classical literature of China. Although his formal field of study in college was Western literature and art, his interest in, and devotion to, Chinese literature remained with him throughout his life. His study of English began when he was ten years old, and after his college training in the Western-style Ts'ing-hua University Wen spent three years (1922-25) in the United States studying Western art and literature. Wen I-to was a man of China and his greatest works are concerned with its literature, but his exposure to Western literary concepts and critical methods certainly affected his work.

Hsu Kai-yu has discussed the general scope of Wen I-to's classical studies, including some remarks on his study of myth.⁵ The 1930's were a

period of a great deal of intellectual activity on Chinese myth studies. K. C. Chang has noted that the intellectual foundations of that study were established in the period from 1923 to 1929, and that myth studies "began to proliferate after about 1931."⁶ Wen I-to's studies stand, both chronologically and substantially, at the center of that proliferation.

Modern Chinese scholars' critical interest in their ancient myths can be attributed in part to their discovery of myth studies in the Western tradition, particularly of Greek myths. C. H. Wang clearly demonstrates this kind of discovery in his study of the Hellenism of Chou Tso-jen 周作人.⁷ Chou Tso-jen's myth studies of the first decade of the century were deeply influenced by European scholarship in this field, especially the anthropological approach of Andrew Lang. This influence and that of others can also be assumed in Wen's work. Thus, the intellectual activity in the European community of mythologists just prior to Wen's own work is an important factor in analyzing the development of his critical approach to myth.

In reviewing that activity we find two European schools of mythological studies engaged in an ideological battle. If we use a comparison of those two critical methods to analyze Wen's studies we shall have a system by which we can delineate the possible Western influences in Wen's myth studies, and at the same time see those elements in his methodology that are indigenous to his own intellectual tradition. As I have already noted, Wen I-to was often operating in the philological tradition of the Ch'ing critics, but as Lin Man-shu 林曼叔 suggests:

The thoroughness of his [Wen's] studies of this kind far surpass even those of the textual critics of the Ch'ing period.

他的這種治學之細密更是遠遠超了清代的樸學家。⁸

Thus, we shall be able to see not only what is European about Wen's approach, but also how he was able to push the Chinese tradition of philology to new levels of "thoroughness."

The European Mythologists

The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the relentless debate of two British scholars of mythology, Friedrich Max Müller and Andrew Lang.

Though each of these men had their disciples and promoters their names remain nearly synonymous with the two schools of thought. At the risk of over-simplification I should like to summarize the methodologies offered in the myth studies of these two scholars.

Very simply stated, Müller was a philologist and Lang an anthropologist. Although it was Lang's school that emerged the "victor" after the turn of the century, Müller, as Richard M. Dorson clearly demonstrates in his review of this ideological battle, maintained, perhaps even strengthened his position, up to the very end of his life.⁹ Müller was a classical philologist working primarily in Sanskrit and Greek. His emergence into the field of comparative mythology in 1856 "reoriented all previous thinking on the origin of myths."¹⁰ Müller continued to develop his philological interpretation of myths throughout his life. In 1872 Lang began to attack Müller's ideas, and in 1884 the battle began in earnest with the publication of Lang's *Custom and Myth*, which promoted his anthropological approach and disputed the philological interpretations of Müller.¹¹ With the death of Müller in 1900 there was none who could successfully carry his philological standard. Lang continued to write (the passing of Müller, however, took much away from the poignancy of Lang's work) and the anthropological school gained general acceptance in the study of folklore and myth.

Müller, like other mythologists of the time, sought to explain the anomalies found in myths, especially Greek myths. He did this by tracing Greek terms, especially the names of gods, back to their Sanskrit equivalents in the Vedic literature. He sought what he called the Aryan myths. Müller believed the myths of all Indo-European languages shared a common origin in the "mythopoetic age" of Aryan pre-history, and with the diffusion of the people and the development of their separate (but related) languages these myths were transformed. Since the *Veda* was for Müller the the oldest source in which to study the beginning of Indo-European languages, he felt it was the key to understanding the Aryan myth.¹² Thus, he made phonetic analyses of the Indo-European terms for certain mythic elements, thereby establishing certain inter-language equivalents. He said that:

In order to understand the origin and meaning of names of the Greek gods, and to enter into the original intention of the fables told of each of them, we must not confine our view within the Greek horizon, but must take into account the collateral evidence supplied by Latin, German, Sanskrit, and Zend mythology.¹³

Although Müller used all Indo-European languages in his studies, it was Sanskrit that most often provided the basis for his analyses. He believed that Sanskrit, as the "eldest sister" of the family of Indo-European languages, usually contained information closest to the lost Aryan myths.¹⁴

Müller's equivalents are many and all inter-related, but at the forefront is the correlation of the Sanskrit *dyaus* (*dyu*) with the Greek *zeus* and the Latin *jovis* (*ju*). Müller showed that *dyu* is from the verbal root "to beam," and appears in the literature most often as a noun, *dyu*, to mean sky or day.¹⁵ He then constructed rational explanations of the myths of Zeus and Dyaus on the basic understanding of the concept of sky. He demonstrated, for instance, that the story of Athena being born from the head of Zeus is quite rational if we understand the Sanskrit equivalents. Athênê (Athena) is phonologically equivalent to the term *ahanâ* of the *Veda*, and that term is the name of the dawn. The birth of Athena is then:

no more than the Greek rendering of the Sanskrit phrase that Ushas, the Dawn [thus, *ahana*] sprang from the head of Dyû, the mudha divâh, the East, the forehead of the sky.¹⁶

Athena as the goddess of wisdom can also be explained by this same equivalence. One of the features of the dawn in the Sanskrit literature is to wake people in the morning, and the term "to wake" is the Sanskrit word *budh*. This is also the term for the verb "to know," thus, when used in a causative sense, "the goddess who caused people to wake was involuntarily conceived as the goddess who caused the people to know."¹⁷ The equivalence of *Ahanâ* and *Athenâ*, based on a lost Aryan myth, implies the same characteristics to both. Thus, Athena is the goddess of knowledge.

This type of confusion in the language, ambiguities that give rise to peculiar explanations or characteristics for terms and names, is often called the "disease (or decay) of language." It is this phonetic decay that was the mainstay of Müller's arguments. He believed the language in which these myths were cast "assumes an independent power; and reacts on the mind."¹⁸ Thus, the language itself creates many features of the myths, and by analysis of the language one can determine the rationale behind many of a myth's seeming illogical elements.

Müller's school has often been called the school of "solar mythology." This term comes from his determination of the sun (day, dawn, etc.) as the basis for many of the Indo-European myths. To the questions, "Is everything

the Sun?", Muller replied:

I cannot tell, but I am bound to say that my own researches lead me again and again to the Dawn and the Sun as the chief burden of the myths of the Aryan race.¹⁹

Our concern here is not so much Müller's conclusions about certain myths, but rather his methodology to reach those conclusions, and when critics ridicule his "sun struck" notions we need not understand that necessarily as an attack on his methods. There are, however, attacks on, or at least alternatives to, Müller's philological theories offered by the Lang school of anthropological analysis.

Andrew Lang's theories of the origin of myths are relatively simple when compared to Müller's, and the accessibility of Lang's ideas may be partly responsible for their ascendancy in myth studies. Lang, Müller's junior, studied at Oxford just after the emergence of Darwin's theory of biological evolution. Lang followed Edward B. Taylor in applying the concepts developed by Darwin to human societies. Dorson says that, "his [Lang's] system began with the premise that the history of mankind followed a uniform development from savagery to civilization" ²⁰ Lang felt those elements of myths that were somehow anomalous were a result of that development. He believed there were relics, or survivals, of ages past when they were logical in the savage's concept of himself and the world. Thus, he concluded that:

religious and mythical faiths and rituals which, among the Greeks and Indians, are inexplicably incongruous have lived on from an age in which they were natural and inevitable, an age of savagery.²¹

Lang's school came to be associated with this concept of the savage society and the discipline of anthropology. Lang himself compared his method to that of the archaeologist—while the archaeologist studied the material remains of primitive society, he studied the remains of rituals and religions preserved in myths.²²

This concept of the uniform development of all societies allowed Lang to compare divergent cultures and traditions to prove his theories. He was not, as Müller was, bound to one language-related group of myths. His basic argument against Müller was, in fact, that many parallels to Greek myths can

be found in non-Aryan languages, and Müller's theory of phonetic decay could not have any relevancy to these non-Aryan myths. Thus, the rationale behind all myths (Indo-European included) must be different from what Müller had supposed. Lang said:

The truth is, that while languages differ, men (and above all early men) have the same kind of thoughts, desires, fancies, habits, institutions. It is not that in which all races formally differ—their language—but that in which all races are astonishingly the same—their ideas, fancies, habits, desires—that causes the amazing similarity of their myths.²³

Lang could, and did, cite evidence from the studies of peoples as divergent as the tribes of New Zealand, Africa, and North America to support his analyses of Greek myths.

Lang suggested that behind myths lie such primitive practices as totemism, fetishism, and cannibalism. While Müller discussed the myth of Cronus (or Kronos) in terms of the phonetic links between Zeus and Dyaus, and their respective relationships to Cronos and Indra, Lang discussed parallel myths from New Zealand, Africa, and even China.²⁴ Lang suggested that elements of these myths are the result of fetishism, the belief in a united universe, and the animation of the night—all common concepts in primitive societies.

The concept of totemism in particular became an essential one in Lang's theories. Its practice was originally observed in the tribes of the North American Indian, and later applied to the practices of many primitive societies. The term, as defined by Lang, basically refers to the practice of a blood-related group of people being called by the name of some plant, animal, or being (i.e., their totem). There was a strong identification between the people and their totem, nearly as it was their ancestor, and this identification led to certain worship activities and taboos towards the totem. Just as Müller's critics doubted the ubiquity of the sun as the basis for myths, critics of Lang (especially Müller) suspected that he was finding totems where there were none. Lang himself conceded this possibility when he said, "I well know that I myself am apt to press a theory of totems too far."²⁵ Nonetheless, the concept of totemism remained salient in the studies of Lang and his followers, and, as we shall see, its presence can be easily detected in the studies of Wen I-to.

The Chinese Intellectual Milieu

As I have already mentioned, Wen I-to was well trained in English language and literature, and we can assume, it would seem, his exposure to the theories of Müller and Lang, especially the latter who was the dominant mythologist of the early twentieth century. I have not, however, found any direct reference to either of these British scholars in Wen I-to's studies. There are references to Langian type studies in some of Wen's work and it is certainly the shadow of Lang that hangs over most of his myth studies. Lin Man-shu said that:

In order to do research on the myths of prehistoric times [Wen I-to] had to research cultural anthropology, which has primitive society as its subject. At the same time he even studied Freudian psychoanalysis to illuminate certain aspects of primitive society.

爲了研究史前時期的神話又得研究以原始社會爲對象的文化人類學。同時還研究佛羅依德的心理分析來照明原始社會的生活現象。²⁷

This clearly indicates, at least as Lin sees it, Wen I-to's affinity with Lang's anthropological approach. Hsu Kai-yu also discusses at some length the anthropological approach (which he usually calls the sociological approach) as an important element in Wen I-to's analysis of classical literature. This is especially so in Wen's study of the *Shih ching*, and in his development of the idea of totem in ancient China.²⁷ Despite this anthropological orientation, the myth studies of Wen I-to are often very philologically based.

It would not have been necessary for Wen I-to to have read Lang or Müller in the original to have gained exposure to their theories. Other Chinese scholars were writing at that time who displayed at least an acquaintance with Lang and Müller. C. H. Wang has already shown Chou Tso-jen's early exposure to Western mythologists, especially Lang.²⁸ In addition, Mao Tun 茅盾 (Shen Ying-ping 沈雁冰) published his *Shen-hua tsa-lun* 神話雜論 in 1929, and this study uses a nearly pure Langian approach. The study is littered with English anthropological terms that reveal this orientation. Mao, in fact, cites several of Lang's own works, as well as those of other writers associated with the anthropological school.²⁹

We also find in Mao Tun's *Shen-hua tsa-lun* one reference to Müller, and it is an illustrative reference, indeed. In discussing an example of a star myth he says, "There are some who say that this type of myth in India

originated with a misunderstanding in language.”有人說印度的此類神話乃是起於語言之錯誤。³⁰ To this Mao appends a short footnote explaining that this was the theory of Müller (Mou-lo 牟勒), and that recent (i.e., Langian) scholarship suggests that this theory was in error. Mao Tun raises the objection most often seen in the criticism of Müller, that there are many parallel examples of this type of myth in unrelated languages.³¹ Thus, we know Mao Tun was aware of the Müller-Lang controversy, though he dismisses Müller's arguments in a few short lines. We can assume that Wen I-to was familiar with Mao Tun's work, which was published just before Wen entered his period of myth study.³²

In the 1930's, at the same time Wen was doing most of his myth studies, Lin Hui-hsiang 林惠祥 wrote his *Shen-hua lun* 神話論. Lin's work contains a lengthy introduction in which he discusses the different approaches to myth study. He introduces the methods of Müller and Lang as the two basic approaches.³³ Although his final conclusion is the superiority of Lang's approach, Lin does not dismiss Müller with a footnote, as did Mao Tun. He introduces Müller's disease of language (*yü-yen te mao-ping* 語言的毛病) and his philological interpretations of myth.³⁴ Lin summarizes two of Müller's philological arguments of the equivalents in Sanskrit and Greek myths (one being the equivalence of *ahanâ* and *athene* that I mentioned above). Lin's discussion is a fair and clear explanation of Müller's method, and though Lin does not follow Müller, he at least sees his method as worthy of lengthy comment.

Lin follows his introduction of Müller's theories with a rebuttal of several points, the basic one being that which we have seen several times before—the non-Aryan parallel examples of myth. Although his rejection of Müller seems quite total, there is a certain leniency in Lin's remarks. He says that Müller is correct in arguing that elements of the sky (solar) myth can be attributed to the myth of Zeus, but Lin believes that Zeus cannot totally be accounted for by the solar myth.³⁵ Lin seems to be suggesting here that though Müller's equivalents are correct they do not go far enough, they do not account for all the elements of a myth. That is a very sensible criticism. We should note here that no one has really disproved Müller's arguments, at least not philologically, but only claim that they have been superseded. Parallel examples of non-Aryan myths indicate Müller's arguments are incomplete, that there is a method (“savage survival”) that will encompass all myths, Aryan included.

Lin Hui-hsiang's review of Lang is a thorough and logical one, in which he introduces the concepts of survival and totemism. He illustrates Lang's method with examples from many divergent cultures and traditions. His evaluation of Lang is entirely favorable, and it is Lang's method that Lin chooses to use in his studies.³⁶

A short study by Hu Shih 胡適 of 1923 displays an affinity with the method of Müller.³⁷ The piece merely notes the linguistic similarity among the terms for deity of several different languages (Sanskrit, *deva*; Greek, *zeus*; Latin, *deus*; Chinese, *ti* 帝 and *t'ien* 天). Hu Shih notes, in a Müller-like vein, that the terms *ti* and *t'ien* are similar in meaning and sound, and suggests that they share a common origin with the terms of the other languages. Although Müller himself notes the *conceptual* similarity of *t'ien* with such terms as *zeus* and *dyaus* (all referring to the celestial), he makes no attempt to connect the origins of the terms.³⁸ Certainly Hu Shih's attempt to associate Chinese with the Indo-European languages would not have met with Müller's approval. Whatever Müller's faults may be, he never allowed anything but the most solid philological evidence into his proofs, and Hu Shih's arguments are anything but solid.

Liu Fu 劉復 criticized Hu Shih's suggestion in 1926.³⁹ Although he agreed with Hu's understanding of the nature of the term *ti* (as supernatural, not human), he found Hu's remaining arguments less than convincing. Liu, for example, did not like the equivalence between *zeus* and *deus* (Müller equated *zeus* with *jovis*, not with *deus*), to say nothing of *zeus* and *ti*. Liu Fu investigates the possible graphic and phonological equivalence of the Chinese terms with the hieroglyphics of the Babylonian script. Although Müller would not have approved of either Hu Shih's or Liu Fu's arguments, we can suggest that they were, either directly or indirectly, inspired by Müller's theories.

Thus, it is obvious that the Müller-Lang controversy was part of Wen I-to's intellectual milieu, with the consensus in this controversy strongly in favor of Lang—in China as well as in Europe. Now we should turn our attention to the myth studies of Wen I-to, to look for influences from and affinities with these two divergent European schools of mythology.

Wen I-to's Myth Studies

In the foreword to his annotation of the *Ch'u tz'u*, the *Ch'u tz'u chiao-pu* 楚辭校補, Wen I-to briefly discusses the problems met when one attempts to explicate old and difficult texts.⁴⁰ The problems (and solutions to them) found in the *Ch'u tz'u* are similar to those in studies of Chinese myths. Thus, Wen I-to's outline there is, no doubt, applicable to his myth studies—many of those studies, in fact, use the *Ch'u tz'u*, especially the "T'ien wen" 天問, as a major source.

Wen I-to says there are three major problems to be addressed: 1) a lack of understanding concerning the historical setting for the work and the psychological setting of the author, 2) the ability of the language (because of its antiquity) to lead the reader astray (this is especially so with phonetic loan words), and 3) the often seen textual errors incurred in the centuries of transmission of a text.⁴¹ While it might be desirable to deal with three areas of misunderstanding simultaneously, Wen believed it was necessary to first solve the problem of collation, then of language, and finally of background. The sequence of analysis that Wen outlines ends with the explication of the background of the text, and, although the other two problems (collation and language) may occupy a major part, or even most, of his study, it is this social, anthropological aspect of the study that constitutes Wen's final analysis of the myth.⁴² In this overall design we see the basic tenets of Lang's school of interpretation; intent is, however, not synonymous with method, and the critic's method is the major concern of this study. Does Wen I-to use a Langian method to pursue his Langian conclusions?

Although almost all of Wen's critical work shows some of this anthropological orientation, there is, as Hsu Kai-yu's study suggests, a general chronological trend towards a more anthropological and less philological method in Wen's work. The methodology of his early studies is more in line with the philology of the Chinese tradition, while that of the later ones generally more anthropological. Those studies of the middle period (ca. 1940) are special in that they reveal a unique blend of these two approaches, and are I believe the most successful. Thus, my review here will first look at several studies chronologically as a general indication of the trends in Wen's work, and then conclude with a closer look at one major study from this middle period.

Hsu Kai-yu examines Wen's relatively early study (1935) of the term *hung* 鴻 as it appears in the *Shih ching*, poem number 43—a study in which Wen "took us on a long and fascinating philological journey."⁴³ In that journey, which includes the citation of 25 classical sources and the explication

tion of ancient consonant clusters, Wen effectively resolves a seeming illogical image in the poem. The term *hung* had been traditionally understood as a "wild goose," but with Wen's demonstration that it actually was a term for a "toad," the image of it being caught in a fishnet becomes exceedingly more appropriate to the general tenor of the poem and to logic. Wen's proof is much in the vein of the philological method of Ch'ing scholarship, especially in his amassing of textual references. Hsu Kai-yu has noted that in Wen's later work (1941) on the *I ching* 易經 he used a similar method to show that "seemingly obscure and esoteric references were no more than plain statements about daily life. . . ." ⁴⁴ As with Müller's explication of anomalies in Greek myth, the "esoteric" quality of these references were the result of the change in language, which philology was able to penetrate. The intent in Wen's study is compatible with his general desire to illuminate the sociological background of the literature, but his method is totally philological. This is a philology that is largely dependent on the accumulation of textual references as evidence of proof.

The proof by citation of various sources on a given subject, and a collation of those remarks, is a technique often seen in traditional Chinese studies. If traditional Chinese scholarship can be said to display one major characteristic, it is its ability to amass evidence from the great wealth of literature available. Wen I-to uses this proof of textual collation exclusively in his "Ssu-ming k'ao 司命考" ⁴⁵ His ability to identify the god, Ta ssu-ming 大司命, with various stars is based entirely on the collation of different texts. Although his remarks might be somehow anthropologically oriented they are no more so than traditional studies might have been. His use of the *wu-hsing* 五行 and astronomical evidence, for example, does indicate a certain sociological interpretation, but this is entirely compatible with Ch'ing criticism, and certainly does not involve any Langian concepts. ⁴⁶ His conclusion that the Ch'u people had at an early date migrated to the south from the northern part of China stands on this textual evidence alone.

Of Wen's early work on myth, his study (1935) of the goddess in Sung Yü's 宋玉 (third century B.C.) "Kao t'ang fu" 高唐賦 most reveals the direction of his later work. ⁴⁷ Hsu Kai-yu has said that this study shows "Wen's increasing interest in cultural anthropology." ⁴⁸ The study is a lengthy work that seeks to construct a tradition for the goddess of seduction seen in this early *fu*. Although anthropological in intent, the complex arguments rely very much on philological method. The philology is primarily

the explication of graph variants and loan words used to show parallels in texts where none are usually seen.

Wen begins his discussion by introducing the symbol of the fish, which itself will be subject of a later lengthy study (discussed below). The symbol is basically one of feminine fertility. He expands this basic identity to account for certain symbols of the fish, or fish related images. The arguments here are based on textual collations, anthropological suppositions, and more "philological journeys." His desire to find equivalence between the terms *chao chi* 朝濟 (of the *Shih ching*) and *chao yun* 朝雲 (of the "Kao t'ang fu") provides an example of Wen I-to's complex philological arguments.⁴⁹ To illustrate that display of philology I shall attempt to summarize his intricate argument.

Wen, using textual collation, shows that the *Chou li* 周禮 writes *chi* 濟 as *tzu* 資, and says this second graph was based on the graph *tz'u* 次. According to the *Shuo wen chieh tzu* 說文解字, this graph (*tz'u* 次) was written in its archaic form as 𠂔, but this certainly must be, as Wen sees it, the writing of the graph *tz'u* 茨, not *tz'u* 次. Therefore, we know that *tz'u* 次 was originally written as 𠂔. This graph, 𠂔, is obviously a graphic representation, according to Wen, of the rainbow. Thus, when the *Chou li* used the old form of *tzu* 資 for *chi* it retained the graphic meaning of the word, rainbow. In the hard text and seal forms of the graph *ch'i* 氣 one recognizes the form for the *tz'u* 次 graph (this is different from the one in the *Chou li*), so in these cases *tz'u* 次 has a meaning similar to *ch'i* 氣 (atmosphere). This is why most texts use the graph *chi* 濟; it is phonologically equivalent to *ch'i* 氣. Wen concludes:

From the first example we see that *chi* means rainbow, and in the second example we see that it means atmosphere. Because clouds (*yun*) are a kind of atmosphere we can say that *chi* means cloud.

由前說濟即虹由後說濟即氣而雲也是氣之一種則濟也可以說即是雲了。⁵⁰

Wen continues to complicate the argument with more phonological equivalents, proving that *tzu* 資 is a phonetic loan word for *ni* 霓, another term for rainbow.⁵¹ He concludes that *chi* is a double phonetic loan word for *ni* (*ni te erh ch'ung chia-chieh tzu* 霓的二種假借字), therefore the texts gloss *chi* as *hung* 虹, rainbow.⁵²

How Wen supposes the semantic equivalence of the rainbow, atmosphere, and clouds is by relying on some anthropological speculation, supported by textual evidence. He says that primitive peoples did not distinguish between these three types of celestial phenomena. Thus, he can identify the term *chao chi* with *chao yun*. The remainder of the article relies mostly on proof by textual collation, along with some anthropological interpretations, for example, the association of rain with gods of an agricultural society.⁵³

Whether we can understand the above philological argument as influenced by Müller's ideas is not entirely clear. Surely much of what Wen offers is part of the Chinese critical tradition, but certain elements of the argument reveal characteristics similar to Müller's method. Wen's use of graphic change of the language, where the graphic sense of the word was lost and its interpretation thusly affected, suggests a Müller-like analysis. Whether it is significant that Wen is involved in only one language instead of several, as Müller was, is debatable. One could argue that the expanse of time that is involved in the language(s) of Wen's study (from Shang dynasty bone texts to Han *belles lettres*) makes them equivalent to those used by Müller.

The general conclusions of Wen's study of this goddess image are broadly anthropological—what Hsu Kai-yu has summarized as the proof that “much of Chinese legends, songs, and mythology was inseparably intertwined with primitive ritual practice.”⁵⁴ These primitive ritual practices were obscured by changes in language and by sociological forces, especially by what Hsu calls the later “prudish traditionalists.”⁵⁵ This type of linguistic and sociological manipulation of a text's meaning is clearly at the heart of another of Wen's studies. This one is of a myth found in the *Shih ching*.

Among the myths of the Chou dynasty, the one surrounding the birth of Hou Chi 后稷 is one of the most interesting. According to the “Sheng min” 生民 poem (#245) of the *Shih ching* the lady Chiang Yuan 姜原 became pregnant with Hou Chi by treading on the footprint of god (*lü ti wu min* 履帝武敏).⁵⁶ This part of the myth is the subject of Wen I-to's “Chiang Yuan lü ta jen chi k'ao” 姜原履大人跡考 (1940).⁵⁷

The intent of Wen's study is to prove that this line actually refers to illicit sexual activity associated with fertility rites of the agricultural society of Chou China.⁵⁸ He suggests the line was changed to avoid direct reference to sexual intercourse; it was first changed to tread on a man's footprint, then to make it even more respectable, to tread on god's footprint.⁵⁹ This

then evolved into a ritual dance that symbolized the primitive ploughing (treading) that was part of the Spring fertility rites; someone representing god lead the woman in a dance, thus she tread on his footprint.

In the formulation of this theory Wen once again combines textual collation and philology. This philology is used to clarify passages by deriving equivalents or substitutions for terms under discussion. This substitution of loan words is then applied to the explication of the rituals and beliefs of the Chou people, which he uses in the general proof of the dance. Thus, the philology functions chiefly as an aid in his anthropological interpretations—the concept of ritual survival and its lost meaning is very much a Langian interpretation of myth. This study predates much of Wen's work on the *Shih ching*, but does share those later studies' emphasis on the "importance of sexual rites and festivals," which Hsu Kai-yu has noted.⁶⁰ One Müller-type concept developed by Wen in this study is the textual changes that resulted from the accommodation of that lost meaning of the line, which actually brought the myth into being. Muller discusses this type of "popular etymology" at length, but his discussion involves only phonetic decay, not the lost meaning of ritual.⁶¹ Here we see Wen's eclectic method, and find it somewhat difficult to place his methodology in one school or the other of the European schools.

Wen's later studies are more strictly anthropological in approach. Of these, Hsu Kai-yu discusses those that take a "sociological approach" to the Feng 風 section of the *Shih ching*,⁶² Wen divided this set of poems into three categories: marriage and courtship; family life and conjugal love; and social life, with each group subdivided into male and female voice. Hsu has observed that:

In studying the metaphors and symbolism, represented by the Chinese term *yin-yü*, in the *Book of Poetry [Shih ching]*, Wen I-to found that they belong to two types: the first type was the symbolical or allegorical; the second type conveyed the meaning of commonly used words by means of homophones . . . The fish metaphor was also the subject of a larger study in which he assembled evidence from numerous classical works and folk songs to prove that fish had always been a Chinese symbol of fertility and love.⁶³

This study of fish in early Chinese literature best represents the approach of Wen's later studies.

Wen I-to's study of the fish image, his "Shou yü" 說魚 of 1945, is very much anthropologically based.⁶⁴ After introducing the term *yin-yü* 隱語, Wen discusses the function of taboo (he uses the English term) in society.⁶⁵ Wen implies that taboos on certain activities can give rise to the use of symbols. Thus, when he later shows the fish is a symbol of a lover or mate, he is suggesting that there was a "taboo" against the overt discussion of this topic. It is doubtful that Wen's understanding of taboo is anthropologically correct; taboos are maintained by awe of a supernatural or magical power. Wen here seems to be referring to a societal restraint or custom, not taboo. Nevertheless, Wen's intent is anthropological, and taboo, whether his understanding of it is correct or not, is a concept adopted from the Langian school of mythology.

Wen I-to's proof of this anthropological interpretation involves once again a collation of references from different early sources; it does not involve, however, much philology. The few digressions he makes into philology are usually short and peripheral in nature. Wen concludes his discussion of the fish symbol by suggesting the rationale for its identification with the lover or mate. His explanation is purely anthropological. He says that all primitive societies believed marriage was of primary importance because its function was to produce progeny for the group. Because the fish was seen as a most productive animal it came to be associated with the couple. Thus, referring to a lover or mate by the use of the fish symbol indicated the desirability of that person. Wen says that this symbol lost its significance as the view of marriage changed: to one in which happiness was its primary association, not fertility. Fortunately, according to Wen, this "disease of civilization" (*wen-hua ping* 文化病) did not affect the lower strata of society as much as the upper, and we can still find remnants of the belief there.⁶⁶ For proof Wen cites two Chinese folksongs. Wen concludes this study by noting that other societies, such as Greek and Central Asian, possessed similar beliefs regarding fish and marriage—ending with a comparative anthropologist's proof.

The "Shuo yü" study was written after Wen had once again become politically active, and shares somewhat the tenor of another short study of this period on the symbols of *lung-feng* 龍鳳 (dragon-phoenix).⁶⁷ Here Wen I-to adapts his basic anthropological approach to overt political ends. The concept of totemism provides the basis of this short discussion of images in the classical texts. In their brevity the arguments contain only the simplest

philological digression. The proof of totemism, the dragon for the Hsia people and the phoenix for the Shang, is based primarily on two short quotes.⁶⁸ The argument revolves around the transformation of the *lung-feng* image from one of totems representing two distinct peoples to a general image representing the imperial family. The discussion also involves the association of the *lung* with Lao-tse as a descendent of the Hsia people and the *feng* with Confucius as a descendent of the Shang. This too is developed by the use of textual citations. Although Wen I-to uses the Langian concept of totemism, his intent is not really an anthropological explication of the images, but rather a general political statement.

These later studies, especially the detailed investigation of the fish image, show Wen's anthropological method in its furthest development. He had by that time begun a projected general history of Chinese literature, and he was very much interested in the description of the general flow and over-riding principles of Chinese cultural history. It is indeed a great loss that Wen was assassinated before this general history could see anything but its opening, fascinating chapter.⁶⁹ I should like now to return to Wen's myth studies that date just prior to the re-emergence of his political interests in 1943, to that middle period of his work on classical literature.

The identification of the influence of Lang and Müller on Wen I-to's myth studies is easiest in those studies of the early 1940's. Wen by that time had moved deep into anthropological interpretation (as we have seen in his 1940 study of the Hou Chi myth), but still remained interested in philological work. Although Wen never mentions Lang by name and, unlike many of his contemporaries, did not freely use English terms in his studies, it is still relatively easy to identify Langian elements in his work because of the distinctive terms and concepts of the anthropological school.

Wen's major study of this period on the myth of Fu hsi 伏羲 is clearly under the influence of Langian interpretation.⁷⁰ Hsu Kai-yu has summarized this study as follows:

His impressive work on ancient legends can be represented by the study of Fu Hsi published in 1942, in which he analyzed in great detail forty-nine legends of the flood and the genesis of man, and compared many graphic and glyptic representations of Fu Hsi. His sources included classical records and the oral traditions of the ethnic minorities in Southwest China, Central China, Indo-China, and Central India.⁷¹

Hsu then notes four major conclusions of this study: 1) the totemic quality of Fu-hsi and his companion Nü-kua 女媧, 2) the dragon (snake) as a totem of ancient China, 3) legendary wars as the battles between different totemic tribes of China, and 4) the identity of Fu-hsi and Nü-kua with the gourd in the deluge myths of the Miao 苗 tribe. As this summary indicates, the Langian concept of totemism permeates the study—Wen *does* use the English term “totemism” here.⁷² We can also find among Wen’s sources several anthropological studies (some in Western languages) of primitive societies, including those of India and Borneo.⁷³ His method here is obviously in the comparative anthropological school, but it is not entirely so.

In Wen’s discussion of the relationship of Fu-hsi and Nü-kua to the Miao tribe deluge myths he notes two separate and seemingly illogical elements in the myth. In some accounts the myth designates Fu-hsi and Nü-kua as the parents of the tribe’s post-deluge ancestors; in other accounts, however, the ancestors are said to have been born from a gourd (*hu-lu* 葫蘆). In what Andrew Plaks calls a “display of philological gymnastics” Wen demonstrates that the names, Fu-hsi and Nü-kua, are phonologically equivalent with the names of gourds.⁷⁴ Thus, Wen can phonologically account for the two divergent accounts of the myth; he claims that:

Although the names, Fu-hsi and Nü-kua, are separate, their meanings are actually identical. The two people originally designated the bodily transformation of the *hu-lu* gourd.

然則伏羲與女媧名雖有二義實只一二人本皆謂葫蘆化身。⁷⁵

Wen suggests that in the Miao tribe tradition Fu-hsi and Nü-kua were understood as the second generation of the gourd (or pumpkin), but in the original myth the gourd was the actual form of the two people.⁷⁶ Wen does not say as much, but he seems to be suggesting that this confusion is the result of some “decay of language.”

Wen continues the discussion of this myth of Nü-kua and the gourd by introducing some of the other elements of the myth. According to the legend, Nü-kua was responsible for the invention of the Pan pipes (*sheng* 笙).⁷⁷ Wen gives textual evidence to show that the *sheng* were originally made from the *hu-lu* gourd. Since the gourd was originally the form of the goddess, it is logical that the pipes came to be associated with her, and when the original intent of the legend was lost (that Nü-kua’s body formed the

sheng) it was then adapted (she invented the *sheng*) to make sense. Here again we have arguments similar to Müller's concept of the "independent power" that language exercises on the mind.

In introducing his sources for this study of Fu-hsi, Wen I-to designates two as the most important in his approach, the studies of Jui I-fu 芮逸夫 and Ch'ang Jen-hsia 常任俠.⁷⁸ He identifies these two scholars as an anthropologist and archaeologist, respectively. Wen says, however, he also has an addiction (*p'i hao* 癖好) to philology (he uses the English term), and his approach will necessarily differ from those of Jui and Ch'ang.⁷⁹ Wen's study is "addicted" to philology, and this is a philology of a different sort than would be seen in traditional scholarship (thus, his use of the English term). Different unto itself and different in its linkage to anthropological interpretations.

Wen's investigation of the concept of totemism in this myth is based in large part of archaeological evidence—of the snake-like depiction of Fu-hsi (usually depicted with a serpentine body and human head).⁸⁰ Wen discusses the nature of totemistic societies, and the serpent as one of many examples of totems. He relates the confusion of serpent (as a totem of ancient China) with the tradition of the dragon:

The term "dragon" was originally a name for a type of large snake. In other words, the names of the snake and dragon were originally confused, and therefore, when we study the legends of dragons or snakes found in old texts we must not try to distinguish between them.

「龍」在最初本是一種大蛇的名字。總之蛇與龍二名從來就糾纏不清所以我們在引用古書中關於龍蛇的傳說無法也不將它們分清。⁸¹

From this evidence Wen then argues that the dragon is a "survival" (*i-chi* 遺跡—he does *not* use the English term) from an ancient totemistic society.⁸²

Wen I-to explains how members of a totem group closely identify themselves with their totem, and in this process of identification they often wear costumes or decorate themselves in such a way as to resemble the totem animal. Wen supposes that tribes with the dragon (serpent) totem might, as related in Su-ma Ch'ien's 司馬遷 *Shih chi* 史記, "cut their hair and tattoo their bodies" (*tuan fa wen shen* 斷髮文身) as part of this ritualistic identification.⁸³ This practice, he suggests, continued after its ritual signi-

fiance was lost—another example of savage survival. Whether Wen believes this is the origin of the depiction of Fu-hsi with a serpentine body and human head is not quite clear, but logic would certainly suggest that.

In a lengthy philological and textual argument Wen I-to shows that the name Yü 禹 originally represented a type of serpent, probably a totem associated with the Hsia people. Yü's surname was Ssu 巳, another "serpentine" word. Since Fu-hsi's surname was Feng 風, which was derived from the graph *hui* 虫, which in turn was graphically equivalent with Ssu, Wen concludes that Fu-hsi and Yü were of the same family.⁸⁴ Wen believes that since the term for "surname," *hsing* 姓, actually means "born," *sheng* 生, the terms "Feng *hsing*" (surnamed Feng) and "Ssu *hsing*" (surnamed Ssu), employing the above equivalents, both originally meant "born of a snake" (*she sheng te* 蛇生的). Thus, those of the same surname must be of the same totem, and since we know the totem of Fu-hsi was a dragon, we also know that of Yü.

Wen, in his conclusion to this argument, makes a peculiar variation of Müller's phonetic equivalence of names. He says that since surnames were originally designed to indicate a person's origins (thus, "born of a snake"), their semantic characteristics are more significant than their phonetic ones. Thus, he says, the surnames' phonetic equivalents have no relevancy, and one must, as he did with the serpentine graphs, find equivalents in meaning. So while Müller would identify names by their phonetic equivalence, Wen would identify them, according to this statement, by their semantic equivalence, in Chinese represented in their original graphic form. This argument is somewhat contrary to the equivalents Wen found in his discussion of Fu-hsi and the *lu-lu* gourd, where phonetic equivalence led to semantic interpretations. Presumably this is because Fu-hsi and Nü-kua are not surnames, thus the phonetic elements are more significant. At this point one wonders what, if any, is the relationship between Fu-hsi as a "gourd" and as a "serpent." A certain amount of fragmentation in Wen's arguments leads to these seemingly disassociated conclusions.

The anthropological aspect, especially the totemistic quality, of Fu-hsi is certainly Wen I-to's main concern in this study. In the investigation of that concept Wen does employ philology that appears qualitatively different from that indigenous to the Chinese intellectual tradition, and I would suggest that his philology bears the mark, however indirect, of Müller. To clearly identify the relationship between Wen's and Muller's philological

methods remains difficult. This difficulty is not only in the obscuring quality of traditional philology, but also in the fact that Müller and Wen were working in languages with such different graphic representations. Thus, while Müller was often using an argument based on phonetic decay, Wen would be using a Chinese equivalent, "graphic decay."

Sometimes it is even difficult to distinguish to just which school of interpretation, Müller's or Lang's, a certain argument belongs—hard to believe considering the great divergence in the two European schools. For example, Wen explains how an element in the legend of Yü (dragging the tail of a dragon through the soil to form the channels) was misinterpreted: Yü was not, as suggested by Wang I 王逸, assisted by the dragon, he was the dragon.⁸⁵ Now, is this an example of savage survival (totem), or is it an example of confusion by graphic decay? It actually seems to be a combination of the two.

Conclusion

Wen I-to's myth studies are, it would seem by this review, syncretic in their approach. The anthropological concepts most often constitute Wen's general intent and are used in his methodology. This has been especially so in his development of the concept of totemism in primitive Chinese society. He also experiments some with comparative anthropology, but it usually is of secondary importance in his proof. It is philology and textual collation that Wen relies on most to prove his thesis, whether that thesis is anthropologically based or not. Certainly Wen I-to's own outline of methodology to his *Ch'u tz'u* study proves applicable to his myth studies—collation and philology providing the foundation for his explication of the background of the work. I have attempted to identify the influence of Lang in Wen's anthropological approach, and this has not proved difficult. To identify the influence of Müller in Wen's philology has, however, not been so successful. This problem lies much in the difficulty of distinguishing the indigenous elements of philological criticism from those of foreign origin. It appears, however, that Wen I-to's philology displays a certain breadth of interpretation that is not seen in Ch'ing scholarship, partly influenced by his interest in anthropology, but also influenced by Müller's school of philology.

In the final analysis Wen's studies belong to neither the anthropological

nor philological school. They are integrations of the two, with the addition of traditional Chinese critical methods. Müller did not deal with totems, Lang did not make philological arguments to prove his anthropological conclusions. Wen I-to, however, made just those arguments, combining the European methodologies with that of his own tradition.

Notes

1. Hsu Kai-yu, *Wen I-to* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980). All citations of Hsu are to this volume, unless otherwise noted. Hsu discusses this last poem, *Ibid.*, pp. 124–27. See also Julia Lin's remarks on Wen's poetry in her *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 82.
2. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 123.
3. Hsu Kai-yu "The Life and Poetry of Wen I-to," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 21 (1958), 166.
4. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 123.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–34, 146–50.
6. K. C. Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 175 and 151, n. 1.
7. C. H. Wang, "Chou Tso-jen's Hellenism," *Renditions*, 7 (1977), 5–28.
8. Lin Man-shu 林曼叔, *Wen I-to yen-chiu* 聞一多研究 (Kaolung: Hsin-yuan, 1974), p. 138.
9. Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 57–83. Much of the following discussion of the Müller-Lang debate is taken from Dorson.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
11. Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (1884; rpt. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897).
12. Friedrich Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop* (1867–75; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner, 1891), I, 4.
13. Friedrich Max Müller, *The Science of Language* (1862–64; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner, 1891), p. 516.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 537–39.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 623.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 647.
19. *Ibid.*, 621.
20. Dorson, p. 66.
21. Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), p. ix.

22. Ibid., p. viii.
23. Ibid., p. xvi.
24. For the discussion of this myth see Müller, *Science*, pp. 542–44, and Lang, *Modern Mythology*, pp. 45–57.
25. Lang, *Modern Mythology*, p. xxiii.
26. Lin Man-shu, p. 136.
27. Hsu Kai-yu, pp. 146–48.
28. See above, Introduction, and n. 9.
29. The citations of Lang are in Mao Tun's 茅盾 *Shen-hua tsa-lun* 神話雜論 (Shanghai: Shih-chieh, 1929), 2, pp. 25, 48; 3, pp. 1, 3. For other anthropological studies, see 2, pp. 2, 6.
30. Ibid., 2, p. 25.
31. Ibid., 2, p. 47.
32. The question of the relationship between Wen and Mao Tun at this time is an important one that needs to be pursued. For their earlier relationship, see Hsu Kai-yu, pp. 95–96.
33. Lin Hui-hsiang 林惠祥, *Shen-hua lun* 神話論 (n.d.; rpt. (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1968), p. 7.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 9.
36. Ibid., pp. 12, 14.
37. Hu Shih 胡適, "Lun ti t'ien chi chiu-ting shu" 論帝天及九鼎書, in *Ku shih pien* 古史辨, ed. Ku Chieh-kang 顧頡剛 (Peking: P'u-she, 1926), I, 199–200.
38. Müller, *Science*, p. 550.
39. Liu Fu 劉復, "Ti yü t'ien" 帝與天, in *Ku shih pien*, II, 20–27.
40. *Wen I-to ch'üan chi* 聞一多全集, ed. Chu Tzu-ch'ing (Shanghai: K'ai-ming, 1948), II, 341–495.
41. Ibid., p. 341.
42. Hsu Kai-yu also has a summary of this methodology, p. 140.
43. Ibid., p. 131: much of the following summary from here.
44. Ibid., p. 150.
45. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 139–42.
46. Ibid., p. 140.
47. Ibid., pp. 81–116.
48. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 131.
49. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 89–92.
50. Ibid., p. 90.
51. Ibid., p. 91.
52. Ibid., p. 92.
53. Ibid., p. 106.
54. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 132.
55. Ibid.
56. This myth is retold in detail by Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷, *Shih chi* 史記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959), 4: 111–12.

57. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 73-79.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
60. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 146.
61. Müller, *Science*, pp. 651-59, et passim.
62. Hsu Kai-yu, pp. 146-47: much of the following summary from here.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
64. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 117-38.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-72. This study has been recently translated by Victor H. Mair, *Shin Tarn: New China*, 1 (1982), 49-60.
68. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 69.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-92. Hsu Kai-yu discusses Wen's plans and this chapter, p. 151. The chapter includes a interesting philological argument on the origins of *shih* 詩 poetry, touching on the question of the Chinese "epic."
70. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 3-68.
71. Hsu Kai-yu, p. 149.
72. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 25.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
74. Andrew Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 37.
75. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 60.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, 4: 115.
84. *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi*, I, 36.
85. *Ibid.*, 52.