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Restoring the *Epic of Hou Yi*

Abstract

The stories of the legendary Chinese archer Hou Yi are contained in a wide variety of scattered and often inconsistent sources, and portray a figure both heroic and tyrannical. Certain scholars in both East and West have proposed that these sources are in fact based on more than one Yi, or that the appellation Yi is actually just a title for an archer. I propose, however, that the scattered fragments that remain once formed a more coherent work that one might entitle the *Epic of Hou Yi*, and that this work was patterned on the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The present paper elucidates the many parallels between the two tales, and between the tragic figures of Yi and Gilgamesh.

Key words: Hou Yi — Gilgamesh — divine parent — Bull of Heaven — elixir of immortality

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HOU Yi 后羿, also known as I Yi 夷羿 or Ren Yi 仁羿, is perhaps the best-known hero of Chinese mythology. A master archer, he is said to have lived in the age of the legendary Emperor Yao 堯, when the Earth had ten suns. In what is perhaps his most fabled exploit, he shot down nine of the ten suns when they appeared in the sky together and threatened to scorch the Earth. This and other feats are mentioned in the "Benjing" 本経 chapter of the *Huainan zi* 淮南子:

> In the reign of [Emperor] Yao the ten suns appeared at the same time. They scorched the grain and the grasses. People had nothing to eat. [The monsters] Yayu 猰貐, Zaochi 鑿歯, Jiuying 九嬰, Dafeng 大風, Fengxi 封豨, and Xiushe 脩蛇 all caused harm to the people. Then Yao sent Yi to destroy Zaochi in the plain of Chouhua 疇華, to kill Jiuying in the water of the Xiongshui 凶水 River, and to bind Dafeng at the Qingqiu 青丘 Marsh. He shot the ten suns above and killed Yayu below. He slew Xiushe in Dongting 洞庭 Lake and took Fengxi prisoner at Sang 桑 Forest. (This and all following translations from Chinese classics are mine)

Yet there is a strange ambiguity in Yi's image, and it is not only as a hero that he is known. Wang Yi 王逸 of the Later Han 後漢 dynasty (23–220) cites the verse, "The emperor dispatched I Yi to the world to save the people of Xia 夏 from calamity," from the "Tianwen" 天問 chapter of the *Chu ci* 楚辞, and comments:

> The emperor is the Heavenly Emperor; I Yi is one of his lords who killed Xiahou Xiang 夏后相 . . . . Yi destroyed the Xia dynasty and set himself up as ruler instead. He recklessly hunted wild animals and changed the laws of the land of Xia, thus bringing grief to the entire nation.

Here Yi is portrayed as a usurper. Elsewhere in the "Tianwen"

chapter Yi is also charged with such wanton acts as ravishing the river goddess Luo Pin 雒嬪 and shooting her river-god husband He Bo 河伯 in the eye.

Faced with these conflicting images of Yi as hero and Yi as tyrant and miscreant, scholars have long wondered who this mysterious figure really could have been. Wang Yi concludes from his analysis of the "Tianwen" chapter that there were two separate Yis. Gao You 高誘, a near contemporary of Wang, reaches the same conclusion on the basis of the *Huainan zi*, where Yi is depicted as a masterful archer during the reign of Emperor Yao in the "Chuzhen"俶真, "Benjing," and "Fanlun" 氾論 chapters, and as a Xia-dynasty ruler (the prince of the You qiong 有窮 tribe) in the "Yuandao" 原道, "Quanyan" 詮言, "Shuoshan" 説山, and "Xiuwu" 脩務 chapters.

The two-Yi theory is also advanced by Guo Pu 郭璞 of the Jin 晋 dynasty (265–420) in his commentary on the *Shanhai jing* 山海経, and by Hong Xing-zu 洪興祖 of the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1276) in his commentary on the *Chu ci*. Guo, for example, comments as follows:

> [Emperor Jun 俊] had Yi use his skill with the bow to rid the world of problems . . . . In later times, Hou Yi of You qiong assumed Yi's name because of the latter's fame as an archer.

Hou Yi of You qiong, in other words, simply adopted the name of the hero of the ancient myths and legends.[1]

The first-century text *Shuo wen* 説文 suggests that Yi was not a person's name at all but an official title for an archer. More recently, Western scholars like GRANET (1926, 370) and EBERHARD (1968, 80–87) have asserted that Yi is the synthesis of a "good Yi" and a "bad Yi." JIANG Liang-fu proposes that there may have been as many as three Yis in the ancient legends (1976, vol, 2. 24–27).[2]

The concept of multiple Yis is criticized by Mao Dun, however, who asserts that the human Yi is simply a historical manifestation of Yi the divinity. MAO writes,

> Yi as a [deity] was originally a half-divine and half-human hero like the Greek Hercules, who accomplished twelve great deeds . . . . However, historians in later times gave birth to a historical Yi from the mythological Yi and regarded this person to be a vassal of Yao or rather Hou Yi of You qiong. (1981, 217–20)

Mori Mikisaburō agrees with the single-Yi theory, but proposes that

he was human in origin. Yi, according to Mori, was a traditional hero venerated by hunting groups in the mountainous district of Shan tong 山東 Peninsula that were unified under a tribe called the Dong I 東夷. The central tribe exerted absolute authority and cultural influence over the peripheral tribes. Yi subsequently lost his heroic status and was condemned as a usurper, laying the foundation for his subsequent evolution into a tragic hero (MORI 1941, 87–101). A similar view is held by SUN Zuo-yun (1984, 201–209), MAENO Naoaki (1975, 393), and SHIRAKAWA Shizuka (1975, 140–44), who believe that Yi was a deity or a chieftain of the Dong I tribe who, when the tribe was destroyed, was relegated to the status of an enemy.

I too adhere to the theory of a single Yi, but my approach is fundamentally different from those of Mao and the others. I believe I can unify the "good Yi" and the "bad Yi," or the "divine Yi" and the "human Yi," into one personality and recover the hero's historical reality. Inconsistent references to Yi are scattered through Chinese literature from the pre-Qin 秦 to the Han 漢 dynastic periods. I believe that all these sources describe a single figure who was one of the most famous heroes of ancient China. There was almost certainly a story — which might appropriately be called the *Epic of Hou Yi* — that related his numerous military deeds, his human limits, and his tragic journey in search of immortality. To support this hypothesis I will compare the fragmentary sources on Yi with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the oldest story in the world and one that profoundly influenced ancient literature.

THE *EPIC OF GILGAMESH*

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was rediscovered only when George Smith successfully deciphered the Chaldean story of the Great Flood in 1876 from a fragment among the enormous quantity of cuneiform tablets in the British Museum's Küyünjik Collection. The epic was originally recorded on twelve large tablets of a total of 3,600 lines and stored in the great library of King Assurbanipal (ca. 668–627 B.C.) in Nineveh. Owing to the tablets' sometimes poor state of preservation only about a half of the whole story is known, although our understanding has been aided by various minor fragments found elsewhere. Certain Sumerian texts relate to the epic (KRAMER 1944), as do several fragments of the *Gilgamesh Cycle* edited in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 B.C.) and the Middle Babylonian period (ca. 1600–1000 B.C.)

The following study is based upon the revised Akkadian version of the epic, used, with supplementary sources, by SPEISER in his English translation (1969, 72–99; Speiser's translation will hereafter be referred

to as *ANET*).[3] The story begins with an introductory description of Gilgamesh:

> He who saw everything [to the end]s of the land,
> [Who all thing]s experienced, [conside]red all! . . . .
> The [hi]dden he saw, [laid bare] the undisclosed.
> He brought report of before the Flood,
> Achieved a long journey, tiring and resting.
> All his toil he engraved on a stone stela.
> Of ramparted Uruk the wall he built.
> Of hallowed Eanna, the pure sanctuary.
>
> *ANET*, 73

The epic then states that he was a composite of god and man, two-thirds divine and one-third human,[4] and that the unparalleled shape of his body was created by the hand of the great god.[5] The text adds that he excelled in handling weapons.

In the next stage of the story, however, the narrator's attitude toward the hero suddenly changes. The arrogance and promiscuity of Gilgamesh are strictly censured. The elders of the city Uruk deplore his wanton acts:

> Gilgamesh leaves not the son to [his] father;
> [Day] and [night] are unbridled by his arro[gance] . . . .
> [Gilgamesh] leaves not [the maid to her mother],
> The warrior's daughter, [the noble's spouse]![6]
>
> *ANET*, 73–74

Anu, the god of heaven, harkened to this appeal and asked Aruru, the goddess of creation, to make a creature equal to Gilgamesh in power. This was Enkidu, a half-human, half-animal being who lived in the steppe:[7]

> [Sha]ggy with hair is his whole body,
> He is endowed with head hair like a woman . . . .
> He knows neither people nor land;
> Garbed is he like Sumuqan.
> With the gazelles he feeds on grass,
> With the wild beasts he jostles at the watering place,
> With the teeming creatures his heart delights in water.
>
> *ANET*, 74

This felicitous way of life ended for Enkidu when he was enticed to leave the steppe by a temple harlot and taken to the city Uruk, where Gilgamesh ruled as king. They met in the royal market place and wrestled ferociously, like wild bulls. The pilasters of the temple door were broken to pieces and the walls were shaken. It was Gilgamesh who surrendered, bending his knees and throwing his legs onto the earth.[8] He was about to leave when Enkidu called him back and reaffirmed his right to rule.

As one alone thy mother
Bore thee,
The wild cow of the steer-folds,
Ninsunna!
Raised up above men is thy head.
Kingship over the people
Enlil has granted thee!

ANET, 78

Thereafter the heroes entered into a fast friendship and were always together. It was Gilgamesh that always took the initiative, however, while Enkidu was satisfied to be his attendant.[9] Their first adventure together was to defeat Humbaba (Huwawa in the Old Babylonian version), a monster who lived in a dark cedar forest. Enkidu was rather skeptical when Gilgamesh first proposed the expedition:

How can we go
to the Cedar Forest? . . . .
Humbaba — his roaring is the storm-flood,
His mouth is fire, his breath is death.[10]

ANET, 79

Gilgamesh finally persuaded him, and they set out on a long journey to the cedar forest and killed Humbaba. Displaying the monster's severed head, they returned home in triumph.

In Uruk, however, another adventure awaited them. The goddess Ishtar became enamored of the handsome and manly Gilgamesh and made advances. These he flatly refused, however, criticizing her promiscuity and her poor treatment of past lovers. Furious, Ishtar went to her father Anu and asked him to send the "Bull of Heaven" to earth. This bull brought seven years of poor harvests,[11] and its fierce breath killed hundreds of men (HEIDEL 1946, 53–54). Gilgamesh and Enkidu suc-

ceeded in killing the beast, and consecrated its heart to the sun god Shamash and the oil from its huge horns to Lugalbanda. In spite of this, however, the council of great gods, Anu, Enlil, Ea, and Shamash, reached the following decision:

> Because the Bull of Heaven they have slain, and Huwawa
> They have slain, therefore — said Anu — the one of them
> Who stripped the mountains of the cedar
> ["Must die!"]
>
> *ANET*, 85

Enkidu was chosen and subjected to a painful death. Gilgamesh, grief-stricken, decided that what he wanted was not fame and glory but eternal life. Knowing that Utnapishtim, king of the city of Shuruppak before the Great Flood, had been granted immortality by the gods and still lived at the farthest end of the earth, Gilgamesh set out alone toward the west in search of eternal life.[12] Wandering in the wilderness, beset by wild animals and hunger, he at last reached Mt. Mashu,

> Which daily keeps watch over sun[rise and sunset] —
> Whose peaks [reach to] the vault of heaven
> [And] whose breasts reach to the nether world below.
>
> *ANET*, 88

The gate of Mashu was guarded by scorpion men who prevented anyone except the sun god from entering: "Their terror is awesome and their glance is death. Their shimmering halo sweeps the mountains." Gilgamesh was an exception, however, and, owing to the friendly attitude of the scorpion men, he was allowed to enter and proceed along the long passage of darkness. Finally he saw light in the distance. This was "paradise on earth," where there were forests of stones with rich fruits of carnelian and lapis lazuli.[13]

He continued on, crossing the "Dead Sea" with the help of Urshanabi, the boatman of Utnapishtim. At last he reached his final destination. Utnapishtim could not give him immortality, but told him that there was at the bottom of the sea a plant that renews youth. Gilgamesh tied weights to his feet in order to reach the seabed, and managed to obtain this precious plant. When he bathed on his way back to Uruk, however, the plant was stolen by a snake.

> Thereupon Gilgamesh sits down and weeps,
> His tears running down over his face . . . .

> [For] whom, Urshanabi, have my hands toiled?
> For whom is being spent the blood of my heart?
> I have not obtained a boon for myself.
> For the earth-lion have I effected a boon!
>
> *ANET*, 96

Gilgamesh thus despaired of immortality and returned home. But for the rest of his days, he remained proud of his magnificent city and its great wall.

> Go up, Urshanabi, walk on the ramparts of Uruk.
> Inspect the base terrace, examine its brickwork,
> If its brickwork is not of burnt brick,
> And if the Seven Wise Ones laid not its foundation!
>
> *ANET*, 97

A Comparison of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Epic of Hou Yi*

The story of Gilgamesh undoubtedly had a long history in the oral tradition, acquiring, one by one, various episodes that had originally been independent (Jacobsen 1976, 195–219). The final story seems to have been compiled with great care. For example, the wall of Uruk, cited as one of the grandiose deeds of the hero in the prologue of the epic, is mentioned again in its epilogue. The entire story has a remarkable consistency.[14]

In contrast, however, our sources for the tale of Yi are extremely fragmentary and contain numerous inconsistencies. No editorial work appears to have ever been carried out on the tale — it never had a Homer nor a Sîn-liqi-unninni to weave the disparate threads into a coherent fabric (Tigay 1982, 246–47). In its fragmentary condition the epic, like other mythological materials in China, has been treated rather arbitrarily by later philologists (Ito 1978, 202–204). I will attempt, therefore, to restore the lost sequence of the *Epic of Hou Yi* through a comparative analysis with the Gilgamesh epic.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* begins by describing the hero as king of the city state of Uruk. In the Sumerian King List he is mentioned as the fifth sovereign: Meskiaggasher, Enmerkal, Lugalbanda, Dumuzi, and Gilgamesh (*ANET* 265). His reign is calculated to have been between approximately 2,700 and 2,500 B.C. (Tigay 1982, 13). Furthermore, the Sumerian text *Gilgamesh and Agga* says that the former defeated the latter, who was a king of Kish, and deprived him of his sovereignty. This anecdote tells us that the historical Gilgamesh was a leader on the battle-

field as well as a usurper (JACOBSEN 1976, 209).

Gilgamesh, as a historical king of Uruk, has a counterpart in Yi, who in several sources is treated as a historical figure. For example, in the entry for the fourth year of Xiang Gong 襄公 in the *Zuo zhuan* 左伝 we read, "When the realm of You xia 有夏 declined, Hou Yi returned from a distant country and replaced the Xia sovereign with the help of the people of Xia." Thus Yi apparently ruled the country during the Xia dynasty's decline. The "Wuzizhiqe" 五子之歌 chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 substantiates this:

> Taikang 太康, king of Xia, was immoderate and debauched. He was away from his palace for a hundred days during which he hunted along the Yellow River. Because of the people's suffering under Taikang, Hou Yi of You Qiong prevented him from returning home at the crossing of the river.

Similar accounts are found in the *Cai zhuan* 蔡伝 of the Song dynasty, which tells of Yi deposing Taikang after stopping him on the north bank of the Yellow River (IKEDA 1976, 557), and in the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年. These records suggest that Yi was a historical figure like Gilgamesh, and like him a usurper of power.

Gilgamesh, however, is also a typical representative of the ancient hero, possessing all five features identified by Matsumura Kazuo as characteristic of the heroic figure: 1) his father or mother is divine; 2) he is abandoned in infancy; 3) he grows up in a peripheral region; 4) he performs superhuman feats; and 5) he dies a heroic and untimely death (MATSUMURA 1989, 58–59, 61).

As mentioned above, Gilgamesh is represented as the son of the goddess Ninsun, and as being himself two-thirds divine and one-third human. How about Yi? None of the sources describe him as semi-divine, but I believe that he may nevertheless be seen in this way. To be half-divine is to possess supernatural powers and the ability to communicate with the divine world (MATSUMURA 1989, 59), both of which are qualities clearly seen in Yi. He was, like Gilgamesh, of great strength and of incomparable skill in combat.[15] His ability with the bow is praised in the "Xianwen" 憲問 chapter of the *Lun yu* 論語, the "Ruxiao" 儒効, "Wangba" 王覇 "Zhenglun" 正論, and "Jiebi" 解蔽 chapters of the *Xun zi* 荀子, the "Xingshi" 形勢 chapter of the *Guan zi* 管子, and the "Gengsangchu" 庚桑楚 chapter of the *Zhuang zi* 荘子 (several sources suggest that Yi was not only a master archer but the inventor of the bow as well).[16] The "Shuilin xia" 説林下 chapter of the *Hanfei zi* 韓非子 states:

> When Yi was ready to shoot with his bow, the people of Yue 越 — who knew of his skill — vied with each other to hold the target for Yi in their own hands. They were certain that he would never miss.

Though Yue was a far distant country, even there Yi's skill was legend.

Yi's close connections with the heavenly world are also clearly mentioned in several of the sources. There is, for example, the above-mentioned passage from the *Chu ci*, "The [Heavenly] Emperor dispatched I Yi to the world to save the people of Xia from calamity." A similar statement is found in the "Hainei jing" 海内経 chapter of the *Shanhai jing*: "[The Heavenly] Emperor Jun gave Yi a vermilion bow and arrows with white wings; with the help of these Yi saved the world from many troubles."

Thus Yi is similar to Gilgamesh in his possession of heroic powers; moreover, the lives of both heroes were interwoven with the heavenly world. They also share a heroic background in that they were both abandoned as children and were raised in peripheral regions (the second and third of Matsumura's characteristics; cf. RANK 1922). Claudius Aelian (170–235) in his *De animalium natura*, comments, "As soon as Gilgamos was born, he was immediately thrown away from the citadel. He was rescued by an eagle . . . and, later, he made himself the king of Babylon" (TIGAY 1982, 252–53). Regarding Yi, the *Lushi houji* 路史後記, edited by Luo Mi 羅泌 in the Song dynasty, says, "Yi was cast away in the mountains when he was five years old . . . . He was nursed by mountain animals, and when he grew up, he became a master archer." Both sources are of a later period, but they nevertheless indicate that these heroes overcame adversity to attain heroic stature.

That Gilgamesh and Yi both performed superhuman feats (the fourth of Matsumura's characteristics) is almost unnecessary to mention. Gilgamesh's expedition to the cedar forest to slay the monster Humbaba has been described above, as has Yi's conquest of the six destructive monsters Yayu, Zaochi, Jiuying, Dafeng, Fengxi, and Xiushe. If anything, Yi's feats superseded those of Gilgamesh. Altogether about eight or nine such exploits are mentioned in the sources; Gao You's annotation to the *Huainan zi* adds Yi's victories over He Bo, who drowned people, and Feng Bo 風伯, who destroyed houses.

Of the monsters killed by Yi, Jiuying is of particular interest for the purposes of our study. Gao You's commentary on the "Benjing" chapter of the *Huainan zi* states that Jiuying was a monster of water and fire. This description is remarkably similar to that of Humbaba, whose cry was like a flood, whose mouth was like fire, and whose breath was like

death. Humbaba was, in other words, a monster of fire and water like Jiuying.[17]

Before turning to the final characteristic mentioned by Matsumura — tragic death (or in this case, the heroes' tragic search for immortality) — let us examine several other features shared by the two protagonists. They were, for one, remarkably similar in the ambiguity of their characters, both displaying a distinct negative aspect in addition to their heroic side. Gilgamesh, for example, was accused of tyranny and promiscuity. A temple harlot in the Gilgamesh epic says, "Where lives Gilgamesh, accomplished in strength / And like a wild ox lords it over the folk" (*ANET*, 75). Yi too, as we have seen, was a tyrant, one proud of his shooting skills, obsessed with hunting, and not overly concerned with the welfare of his people. The entry for the fourth year of Xiang gong in the *Zuo zhuan* says:

> He was accomplished in the art of archery, but did not devote himself to the welfare of the people. He recklessly hunted wild animals . . . . As minister he appointed Han Zhuo 寒浞, who flattered the king and his people and gave bribes to foreigners. Zhuo ridiculed people and encouraged the king in his infatuation with hunting. Zhuo told falsehoods to Yi and tried to usurp his kingdom. Zhuo established his authority inside and outside the country. Even then Yi did not change his attitude. When he returned from a hunting trip, his vassals assassinated him and cooked his body.

The "Lisao" 離騷 chapter of the *Chu ci* contains a shorter but similar statement, upon which Wang Yi comments, "Yi spent his time in an idle manner and was infatuated with hunting . . . . Thus he lost his kingdom."

Yi, like Gilgamesh, was also lustful. He was accused of depriving other men of their wives, as when he seduced Luo Pin, spouse of He Bo the river god (described in the "Tianwen" chapter of the *Chu ci*), or took the beautiful Xuan Qi 玄妻 from her husband Yuezheng Hou Kui 楽正后夔 (described in the twenty-eighth year of Zhao gong 昭公 in the *Zuo zhuan*).

Another point of resemblance concerns the two heroes' companions. Gilgamesh's friendship with Enkidu, who bested him in battle but was thereafter content to be his vassal, has already been described above. Yi had a relationship with Feng Meng 逢蒙 (sometimes Pang Meng 龐蒙) that was more enigmatic but was nevertheless similar in several important respects. Like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the two were nearly equal in combat skills (archery, in their case). The "Wangba" chapter of the *Xun*

xi states, "Yi and Feng Men 蠭門 controlled their bows very well," and the "Waichushuo zuoshang" 外儲說左上 chapter of the *Hanfei zi* says, "Put up a target five inches in diameter, and only Yi and Feng Meng can hit it without fail."[18]

However, in an apparent divergence between the two tales, the "Lilouxia" 離婁下 chapter of the *Meng zi* 孟子 describes Feng as the murderer of Yi: "Feng Meng learned from Yi how to shoot. When he knew all that Yi could teach him, he could not be content with his teacher's superior position and he therefore killed Yi."[19] The *Meng zi* uses this incident to demonstrate that a teacher must be careful in choosing his disciples, and presents Feng as an archetype of ingratitude. However, I believe that originally the story was closer to that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu: Feng's "killing" of Yi alludes to his victory in a contest between the two.[20]

There may be a further point of similarity between Enkidu and Feng. The ideograph for "Meng" 蒙 of Feng Meng contains a part that means "silly" or "childish." This may connote a figure half-human and half-beast, like Enkidu.

There is also a rough counterpart in the Yi epic to the Bull of Heaven that Gilgamesh fought after his return to Uruk. This was Fengxi (in the "Benjing" chapter of the *Huainan zi* and the "Tianwen" chapter of the *Chu ci*), Fenghu 封狐・封豦 (a giant wild boar in the "Lisao" chapter of the *Chu ci*), or Bofeng 伯封 (the son of the above-mentioned Xuan Qi and Yuezheng Hou Kui; in this case this monster is even personified). All have the nature of a wild boar, and are described as being of fathomless avarice and limitless desire. This suggests that the creature — Fengxi, Fenghu, or Bofeng — was, like the Bull of Heaven of Mesopotamia, a beast that devoured crops in the fields. It may also have been a symbol of famine and devastation.[21] The beast was, furthermore, divine, as Wang Yi states in his commentary to the "Tianwen" chapter of the *Chu ci*.

The divine nature of the beasts in the two tales leads to another development shared by both epics: that of the gods' displeasure with the heroes. As mentioned before, Gilgamesh and Enkidu consecrated the Bull of Heaven's heart to the sun god Shamash and the oil from its huge horns to Lugalbanda, but failed to mollify the deities with their sacrifice. Enkidu must pay with his life for the death of the heavenly creature.

We find a remarkably similar description in the "Tianwen" chapter of the *Chu ci*: "His bow is full of accessories and has shining buckles. He shot Fengxi with this bow and offered the meat and oil to the [Heavenly] Emperor Di 帝. Why did this offering displease him?" "To displease" 「不

若」 as used here in the "Tianwen" chapter is an older form of "not to accept"; it appears quite often in the turtle-bone texts, where it indicates a lack of divine sanction (SHIRAKAWA 1972, 22). Yi's sacrifice of meat and oil were clearly not acceptable to the heavenly emperor.

Gilgamesh, awakened to mortality by his friend's death, sets out on a journey to the western end of the earth in search of immortality, finally reaching Mt. Mashu. This journey westward in search of eternal life is another element that has a counterpart in the tale of Yi. The "Tianwen" chapter mentions a difficult journey by Yi westward and his coming to a rocky mountain. The "Haineixi jing" chapter of the *Shanhai jing* describes this eminence, Kunlun 崑崙, in more detail:

> The hill of Kunlun . . . faces northwest. The emperor's palace is located here. The hill occupies an area eight hundred miles square and is ten thousand feet high . . . . Its walls have nine facades. Each of them has a gate. Each gate has a Kaiming beast 開明獸[22] guarding the entrance. A hundred gods gather on this rocky mountain with its eight corners, which is located on the Red River. Nobody except Ren Yi has been able to climb this rocky peak.

Yi's purpose in climbing to the top of Kunlun at the western or northwestern end of the earth was to obtain the elixir of immortality, which Chinese myth has always associated with this mountain (SOFUGAWA 1981, 170). The "Haineixi jing" chapter continues:

> To the north of the Kaiming are the Shirou 視肉 [miraculous food], the Zhu 珠 tree, the Wenyu 文玉 tree, the Ganqi 玗琪 tree, and the Busi 不死 tree . . . . To the east of the Kaiming are Wupeng 巫彭, Wudi 巫抵, Wuyang 巫陽, Wulu 巫履, Wufan 巫凡, and Wuxiang 巫相. They encircle the body of Yayu and all of them possess the elixir of immortality. They are all eager to protect it from death.

The idea that there is the elixir or perhaps the tree of immortality on this mountain eventually gave birth to the belief that a paradise on earth existed there. For example, the "Zhuixing" 墜形 chapter of the *Huainan zi* says:

> To the west [of Kunlun] are the Zhu tree, Yu 玉 tree, Xuan 璇 tree, and Busi tree. To its east are the Shatang 沙棠 tree and Langgan 琅玕 tree. To its south is the Jiang 絳 tree. To its north are the Bi 碧 tree and Yao 瑤 tree . . . . [There] the Dan 丹 River flows, and if one

> drinks of its waters one becomes immortal. . . . If one can climb to Liangfeng 涼風, the first peak of Kunlun, one becomes immortal. If one climbs farther to the second peak, Xuanpu 懸圃, one can become a spirit and control the wind and rain. If one can reach the top of the third peak of Kunlun, that place is heaven.

Kunlun, like Gilgamesh's Mt. Mashu, was thus the passageway between earth and heaven, and, at the same time, an earthly paradise where trees bore jewels.[23] There, the *Huainan zi* reports, Yi obtained the elixir of immortality from Xiwang Mu 西王母, the Queen Mother of the West. But, like Gilgamesh, he is unable to retain possession of it. The *Huainan zi* continues: "Yi asked Xiwang Mu to give him the elixir of immortality, but [his wife] Chang E 姮娥 stole it and took it to the moon. Yi became completely discouraged and forgot himself. He made no more effort."[24]

Following their failures, both Gilgamesh and Yi are faced by death. Kramer has restored a text called "The Death of Gilgamesh" (*ANET*, 50–52) from fragmentary, badly damaged clay tablets that describes the hero's death from a serious illness and his subsequent grandiose funeral. The principal source for Yi's death is the "Xianwen" chapter of the *Lun yu*, which states: "Yi was a master archer and Jiao 奡 could pilot a ship even on land, but neither met an ordinary death." Yi's untimely death is recorded in the "Lisao" chapter of the *Chu ci*, the "Lilou xia" chapter of the *Meng zi*, and the entry for the fourth year of Xiang Gong in the *Zuo zhuan*. The "Quanyan" chapter of the *Huainan zi* relates that "Yi was killed with a *taobang* 桃棓 [a stick made from the wood of a peach tree]," while the "Shuoshan" chapter of the same work says that "Yi died in Taobu 桃部 [a place name]."

After their deaths, however, both heroes were deified. In a Sumerian text named "The Death of Ur-Nammu" it is reported that Gilgamesh became a king or judge in the nether world (Jacobsen 1976, 211; Tigay 1982, 14). And, according to the "Fanlun" chapter of the *Huainan zi*, "Yi eliminated all the troubles of the world, and after his death became [the god] Zong Bu 宗布.[25] Thus both heroes died human deaths but were subsequently deified, just like the Greek hero Heracles.

Conclusion

The sources concerning Yi are varied and often contradictory. He is sometimes praised and sometimes reviled, leading some scholars to believe that there were two or more Yis, others to argue that Yi was a tragic hero who changed in character over the course of time, and still others to propose that "Yi" was simply an official title.

It seems to me, though, that the pieces from the various sources can be put together to create a large and integrated epic, the *Epic of Hou Yi*. I believe that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* can be used as a pattern to recreate this epic, with each part of the ancient Mesopotamian story having its counterpart in the tale of Yi as we know it from the various fragments.

This, of course, leads to the question, Was the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the prototype of the *Epic of Hou Yi*? Was, in other words, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* transmitted to China, where it influenced the legends on Yi? Or is the similarity between the two simply accidental?

In his book *Das Gilgamesch-Epos in der Weltliteratur*, JENSEN asserts that this epic influenced the heroic legends and foundation myths not only of Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, but also of the Germanic peoples; he even sees its touch in the story of the Buddha (1906, 1928). This "pan-Babylonian" theory is no longer accepted, but the similarity of many of the features of Gilgamesh's life to those of Hercules, Odysseus, Moses, and Jesus is hard to deny; Hercules, certainly, is a clear descendant of the Mesopotamian hero.[26]

I believe that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* diffused eastward as well as westward, and that it mothered the *Epic of Hou Yi* and the "Lisao" chapter of the *Chu ci*; the epic may even have contributed to the Japanese myths concerning Susano-o-no-mikoto 須佐之男命 and Yamato-takeru-no-mikoto 倭建命 (MORI 1989, 140–50).

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* reached China, I believe, in the Chunqiu Zhanquo 春秋戦国 period (B.C. 770–B.C. 221), or perhaps even earlier. Once in China it encountered the legends of the sun-shooting Yi, and the two heroes became identified. Through the influence of the Mesopotamian epic, the stories of Yi and Ling Jun 霊均 (the hero of the "Lisao" chapter) were embellished and expanded. But while the "Lisao" had a single author (believed to be Qu Yuan 屈原) who refined a portion of the imported materials, the tale of Yi appears to have been the product of a number of poets who utilized and adapted a wide range of elements from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. For example, Jiuying and Humbaba are both monsters that wield fire and water as weapons, while Fengxi and the Bull of Heaven are both divine animals that bring famine to the earth. And, as mentioned above, the respective heroes themselves are quite similar in their half-divine, half-human genealogy; their ambiguous natures; their superhuman exploits; their rejection by the gods; their quests for immortality; and their deaths as human beings. In the same way, the similarities between Mt. Mashu and Mt. Kunlun, between the Scorpion men and the Kaiming beast, and between the earthly paradises of Mt. Mashu and Mt. Kunlun are too great to be dismissed as mere coincidence.

In conclusion, I think that the *Epic of Hou Yi* was born in China through the influence of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and that the former is patterned on the latter. Mythology and legend were later suppressed in China, so only fragments of the original epic survived to modern times. It was only with the rediscovery of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* that restoration of the epic could begin.

NOTES

1. Guo Pu also comments on the name Ren Yi, mentioned in the "Haineixi jing" 海内西経 chapter of the *Shanhai jing*: "There is a mount named Kunlun in Hainei.... Nobody except Ren Yi has been able to climb this rocky peak." Guo annotates this passage as follows: "Only a man of *ren* 仁 (righteousness) or a man of talent like Yi can reach the highest peak of this mount." Thus Guo does not regard *ren* to be part of the hero's name. Recent scholarly opinion, however, considers Ren Yi to be simply another name for I Yi (YUAN 1980, 296).

2. According to JIANG, Yi refers to one of the following: 1) a certain lord in the age of Yao (the "Benjing" chapter of *Huainan zi*); 2) the official archer in the days of Emperor Ku 嚳; 3) Hou Yi of You qiong, who lived in the days of Shaokang 少康 of Xia 夏.

3. I augment SPEISER's English translation with THOMPSON (1928), HEIDEL (1946), SANDERS (1960), and KOVACS (1989).

4. The mother of Gilgamesh was the goddess Ninsun and his father was the high priest of Kulab (*ANET*, 266) or Lugalbanda (*ANET*, 49). He was, nevertheless, mortal.

5. This section is not extant in the Akkadian version. I have supplemented it with the Hittite version (HEIDEL 1946, 17).

6. There is also a passage that suggests he copulated with married women. "He comes first, while their husbands come later" (*ANET*, 78).

7. On cylinder seals Enkidu is often depicted with a tail or a pair of horns (PARROT 1973, 140).

8. Gilgamesh is sometimes portrayed as the victor (e.g., HEIDEL 1946, 32), but he was undeniably the loser.

9. In the Sumerian text, Enkidu is never Gilgamesh's friend but always his attendant (KRAMER 1944).

10. This passage appears in the Old Babylonian version; Humbaba is described in a similar way in the Akkadian fragment (*ANET*, 79).

11. In GASTER (1952) this bull is called "the symbol of the storm god." Similar legends of famine are found in Egyptian legends, the Old Testament, and Ugaritic texts.

12. The journey of Gilgamesh was made from east to west along the route of the sun god Shamash (DOI 1977, 296).

13. Much of this passage is lost and there is no supplementary text, but each line does in fact contain the names of jewels and precious stones. This is without doubt a "paradise on earth" (KOVACS 1989, 78–79).

14. Only the twelveth tablet of the Akkadian version is not consistent with the others in content. It might be a later addition (KRAMER 1986, 23).

15. Interestingly, in the "Xiuwu" chapter of the *Huainan zi* Yi is depicted as possessing a physical abnormality: a longer left arm. This is in line with the book's descriptions of other Chinese heroes. Emperor Yao is said to have had eight-colored eyebrows and nine interconnected holes in his body; Shun 舜 is described as having two pupils in each eye; and Yu 禹 is said to have had ears with three holes each.

16. For example, the "Feiruxia" 非儒下 chapter of the *Mo zi* 墨子 says, "Yi made the

bow in ancient times," and the "Wugong" 勿躬 chapter of the *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 says, "I Yi made the bow."

17. The iconography of Humbaba is discussed in KOVACS 1989 (figs. 2–4).

18. Similar statements are found in the "Zhenglun" chapter of the *Xun zi*, the "Yuandao" chapter of the *Huainan zi*, and the "Shuilin xia" chapter of the *Hanfei zi*.

19. It should be kept in mind that there were other legends concerning Yi's death. As noted above, the entry for the fourth year of Xiang gong in the *Zuo zhuan* states that Yi was killed by his vassals. The *Zhushu jinian* reports that he was killed by Han Zhuo. Wang Yi, in his notes to the "Lisao" chapter of the *Chu ci*, states that Han Zhuo asked his vassal Feng Meng to shoot Yi. I find this interpretation too artificial.

20. In the "Tangwen" 湯問 chapter of the *Lie zi* 列子, the teacher-pupil relationship of Yi and Feng Meng is replaced by that of Fei Wei 飛衛 and Ji Chang 紀昌, who after a fight make a vow to live as father and son.

21. Gao You annotates the *Sang lin* as follows: "It was in a mulberry grove that Fengxi was taken prisoner by Yi. In that grove Tang 湯 prayed to prevent famine or drought, which had continued to vex human beings for seven years."

22. A monster with nine human faces.

23. For Yi, Kunlun was "paradise on earth" and his final destination, where he could obtain immortality. For Gilgamesh, however, Mt. Mashu and its earthly paradise were just on the way to where Utnapishtim lived (*ANET*, 91–92). The similarities between Mt. Mashu and Kunlun and the Near Eastern element in Kunlun worship are subjects I hope to take up on another occasion.

24. This marks the end of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and perhaps of the *Epic of Hou Yi*. I add the subsequent events from supplementary sources.

25. Various interpretations of Zong Bu have been proposed: Gao You says that he was the hunting god; Gu Xiegang 顧頡剛 says that he was a disease-curing god; and YUAN Ke says that he was a chieftain who controlled the demons and ghosts of the nether world (1985). I believe that the last theory is the most probable.

26. MÄNCHEN-HELFEN (1935) asserts that the story of Heracles was transmitted to China, where the hero became Yi. OGAWA (1944) sees Heracles as related to Yi and his deeds, a theory accepted by most Chinese and Japanese scholars today.

Postscript

The content of this article was given at the annual meeting of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies in 1988 and at the winter meeting of the Institute of Religious History, Tokyo, in 1988. It was then published in a Festschrift for Professor Seiji Ito (MORI 1991).

While writing this article, I was informed by Tota Kirimoto, an associate professor at Keio University, of an article entitled "*Ri chin fin sang*: Discovering a heroic poem of ancient China," published by Ye Shu-xian in 1988. Ye mentions nine elements shared by the tales of Yi and Gilgamesh; seven coincide with those discussed in the present article. However, Ye's methodology, which he characterizes as "literary anthropology," differs from mine, and his discussions diverge from mine in significant details. For example, he sees the influence of Sun God worship in the portrayal of the personalities of both Gilgamesh and Yi, and he compares the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu to that between Yi and Han Zhuo.

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