The Constant and Changing
Faces of the Goddess
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ viii  
Preface ........................................................................................................................... ix

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Part I  
In the Beginning

Chapter One .................................................................................................................. 10  
Issues in Studying Mago, the Great Goddess of East Asia:  
Primary Sources, Gynocentric History, and Nationalism  
Helen Hye-Sook Hwang

Part II  
The Malleable Goddess: Historical Transformations of the Goddess

Chapter Two .................................................................................................................. 34  
Dākinīs and Yoginīs: On the Origin and Development of an Early  
Medieval Indian Buddhist Goddess Tradition  
David Gray

Chapter Three .............................................................................................................. 54  
Sita Masala: From the Vedas to the Kitchen  
Phyllis K. Herman

Chapter Four ............................................................................................................... 65  
Kannon: The Goddess of Compassion in Japan  
Kenneth D. Lee

Chapter Five ............................................................................................................... 81  
From Kuan Yin to Joan of Arc: Female Divinities in the Caodai Pantheon  
Janet Hoskins
Chapter Six ................................................................. 101
Between Bodhisattva and Christian Deity: Guanyin and the Virgin
Mary in Late Ming China
Gang Song

Part III
Meeting the Goddess: Economics and Politics of the Goddess

Chapter Seven .............................................................. 122
Meeting the Goddess: Religion, Morality, and Medicine in a Fishing
Community in Hong Kong Forty Years Ago
E. N. Anderson

Chapter Eight ............................................................... 135
She Dances Madly: Towards a Ritual Political Economy of the Goddess
Piya Chatterjee

Chapter Nine ................................................................. 147
The Politicization of an Icon: Durga/Kali/Bharat Mata and her
Transformations
Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker

Chapter Ten ................................................................. 165
Come One, Come All, to the Fair of the Mother’s Transformations!
Some Glimpses of Kali and Her Temples in West Bengal
June McDaniel

Chapter Eleven ........................................................... 185
Status of Women in an Agrarian Economy: Deconconstruction
of Oriya Laksmi Vrat-Katha
Bidyut Mohanty

Part IV
One and Many: Multiplicity and Manifestations of the Goddess

Chapter Twelve ........................................................... 204
The Goddess and Ecological Sensitivity: The Cultivation of Earth
Knowledge
Christopher Key Chapple
Chapter Thirteen ................................................................. 220
Goma: An Embodiment of the Goddess
Deepak Shimkhada

Chapter Fourteen ............................................................... 228
Sarasvati: Goddess of No Husband, No Child
Malgorzata (Margaret) Kruszewska

Part V
Myth Making and Serving the Goddess Today

Chapter Fifteen ................................................................. 246
The Modern Legend of Miaoshan: The Development of the Sangha
of Vegetarian Nuns in China
Chia-Lan Chang

Chapter Sixteen ................................................................. 273
The Body of the Goddess, Eco-Awareness and Embodiment in Hindu
Myth and Romance
Sthaneshwar Timalsina

Notes on Contributors ......................................................... 290
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would like to thank all the contributors to this volume for their time, energy and research to make the volume come together as a nicely woven tapestry of thoughts. The editors would also like to express their gratitude to the Foundation for Indic Philosophy and Culture, affiliated with the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, and the Gould Center for Humanistic Studies of Claremont McKenna College for grants in support of the volume. To Dr. Marilee Scaff and Mary Hicks for their meticulous editorial hands in shaping the volume in its present condition the editors owe their gratitude. For her many valuable comments on the manuscript the editors are indebted to Prof. Cynthia Humes. Finally, the editors would like to thank the editorial staff at CSP for putting up with them while the volume was in production.

—The editors
The rise of the American women’s movement in the 1970s opened the way for a cultural engagement with the goddess traditions of Asian religions. This cultural engagement, however intellectually challenging or experientially transforming, was nonetheless framed by the ideological and social system of western monotheism. In the harsh light of a newly awakening feminist consciousness western monotheism appeared as thoroughly masculinized. Visual representations of the Christian deity and the savior who appeared in the world were male. Further, the notion of the incarnation of the deity in the form of a son only intensified the experience of the divine as masculine. Finally the powers and benefits of the divine were mediated exclusively through a male hierarchy of priests and clergy. These mediators, popes, bishops and priests are richly represented in Christian iconography.

In terms of social organization western patriarchy had much in common with patriarchal social orders in the rest of the world. Political power was exercised primarily, if not exclusively, by males in the social order and male dominance was the norm in the family. However, in monotheistic patriarchal societies the fact that the symbolic order was masculine meant that male dominance in the social order was difficult to dislodge. The interest, then, of American feminists in Asian goddess traditions arose out the need to imagine an alternative symbolic order where the cosmic powers of the divine were not thoroughly masculinized. The Asian context provided them with an unimaginable wealth of resources. Their encounter with Asian goddesses was mediated by monographs on particular goddesses and anthologies of goddess traditions from a region that provided an introduction to the myths, character, and exploits of the goddesses. American feminists saw in these resources the possibility of imagining a different symbolic order and appropriated them as a “theology,” an alternative to the system of ideas and symbols of Christian theology.

Much was missing in this first encounter. The goddess traditions of Asia are richer and more complex than the narratives and iconographies of their goddesses. They are essential elements of a vast diversity of cultures,
integrated and integrating factors in social, familial, agricultural, economic, and political life. A fuller encounter with Asian goddess traditions will require meeting the goddesses as they participate in the cultural worlds of their devotees. To study goddess traditions will also require studying the cultures in which they play important roles.

Specific cultural contexts are complex, with ethnic, racial, class and religious diversity within them, and the figure of the goddess becomes increasingly complex when read in terms of such a cultural microcosm. Piya Chatterjee in “Towards a Ritual Political Economy of the Goddess” provides an excellent example. The plantation economic of Northern Bengal with its feudal, colonial and post-colonial social orders creates an economic and social matrix within which the goddess appears differently. In the lavish celebrations organized by the plantocracy her powers are mediated by patrons and priests, in the domestic space of a Nepali woman her powers are mediated by the possession trances of a Nepali woman. Power—political, economic and religious power—is mediated differently in each of these contexts. The modes of mediation are multiple, through festivals, temples, ritual, propitiations, dance, discipleship, trance, and dreams; each of these intersect with gender, ethnicity, caste and class in different ways. Some modes of mediation stabilize existing economic and political relationships, others challenge or subvert them. Although the goddess is integral to multiple contexts, her roles simply mirror the complexities of the social world she inhabits.

In fact the political and social contexts generate ever new incarnations of the goddess and configurations of her power as Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker shows in her “Politicization of an Icon.” The nationalist movement in India called forth a new manifestation of the goddess as Bharat Mata, Mother India, who was at the same time a symbol of the nation and an embodiment of the land itself, invoked even as a secular symbol to make her appeal universal. During the bloody struggle with the British her iconography drew on the fearless warrior goddess Durga and the ferocious bloody Kali. The revolutionary freedom fighters called on their followers to imitate her. After independence Bharat Mata was invoked as a purely Hindu goddess, an icon for the emerging Nationalist Party.

This collection of articles gathered under the title, The Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess: Goddess Traditions of Asia, offers the possibility of a genuine cross-cultural encounter with manifestations of the
goddess in Asia, for most of these articles are interested in the goddesses at work in their cultural contexts. This collection goes beyond questions of who is the goddess? what are her manifestations? what are her characteristics? to the larger question of what work does the goddess do in her cultural context?

This collection is further enriched by the inclusion of articles that deepen the conversation between eastern and western perspectives on the feminine divine. Gang Song’s article explores the influence of the Virgin Mary brought to China by the Jesuits on the figure of Gunayin, the beloved Chinese goddess of mercy. The most fascinating of these east/west conversations is Janet Hoskins’s sketch of Caodaism, a new religion that emerged in the 1920s as a Vietnamese synthesis of Asia religions resulting from the domination of China and French Catholic Christianity imposed during the colonial period into a nationalist religion with a universal message. The addition of Joan of Arc to the pantheon of nine female immortals responds both to the women’s movement and the need to make the French colonial legacy decidedly Vietnamese. Through these articles we see the goddess traditions operate also as a form of international currency that passes between cultures and is transformed in the process.

Goddess traditions are dynamic, continuously evolving, shaped by the local dramas of politics, the tensions between ethnic groups, the struggles over economic resources, and the needs to claim, subvert or defend class identities. Goddess figures are also fluid, they are capable of multiple manifestations; they borrow from each other’s stories, and absorb each other’s characteristics. This collection documents both the constant and the changing face of the goddess.

—Karen Jo Torjesen
Dean, School of Religion and Director, Women’s Studies
Claremont Graduate University
INTRODUCTION

THE EDITORS

The genesis of this volume originated when Shimkhada was asked to host the 2005 Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast (ASPAC) conference in Claremont, California.¹ The conference presentations focused on the multiplicity of Asian goddesses: their continuities, discontinuities, and importance as symbols of wisdom, power, transformation, compassion, destruction, and creation. The title of the volume, Constant and Changing Faces of the Goddess: Goddess Traditions of Asia, reflects the inherent complexity and paradoxical nature of the goddess. Although the nucleus of this volume resulted from the 2005 ASPAC conference, the editors wanted the book to be more than a “conference proceedings.” To that end, additional scholars were invited in order to provide a more varied representation of the goddess tradition of Asia, culminating in our selections drawing from research on Indian, Nepali, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese traditions.

The essays contained herein demonstrate that while treatments of the goddess may vary regionally, culturally, and historically, it is possible to note some consistencies in the overall picture of the goddess in Asia. She can be, among others, lover, wife, mother, destroyer, transformer, agent of salvation, and ecological archetype.

This book provides a comprehensive treatment of subjects that we hope will be useful for students in religious studies, gender studies, and women’s studies. With the intent of making the volume truly broad in scope, an effort has been made to include works written by art historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and religious studies scholars.²

¹ It was the thirty-ninth conference of the Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast since it began organizing conferences annually. Although other universities on the Pacific Coast had previously hosted the conference, Claremont Graduate University was honored to host the conference for the first time in 2005.
² For example, the essay about the Bharat Mata is written by an art historian using art historical methodology, such as iconography, to study the evolution of the ontological concept of the goddess, whereas “Meeting the Goddess: Religion, Morality, and Medicine in a Fishing Community in Hong Kong Forty Years Ago,”
cannot be separated from religion; they are intertwined as an organic whole, and variations manifest themselves in the rituals and daily lives of the people. In this sense, all the essays are interconnected: the goddess manifests in many forms and appeals to differing aspects of a particular culture as a paradigm of the divine feminine, yet we recognize the unique nature of each of the Asian goddess traditions.

For the sake of thematic convenience the volume has been divided into five sections: 1) In the Beginning, 2) The Malleable Goddess: Historical Transformations of the Goddess, 3) Meeting the Goddess: Economics and Politics of the Goddess, 4) One and Many: Multiplicity and Manifestations of the Goddess, and 5) Myth Making and Serving the Goddess Today.

In her essay, Helen Hye-Sook Hwang reconstructs the ancient Korean religion devoted to Mago, the Great Goddess from East Asia. Magoism, as she terms it, was the primary tradition of Korea up until the seventeenth century. Hwang argues that because of its fierce adherence to female principles, the ancient roots have been erased and distorted by official historiographers and East Asian patriarchal ideologues. She shows how nationalism, ethnocentrism, and colonialism contributed to an effort to perpetuate male domination over women and nature.

In the section “The Malleable Goddess: Historical Transformations of the Goddess,” our contributors focus on how the identity of a goddess can shift through history. David Gray shows how Dākiniś and Yoginiś are incorporated into the ostensibly “nontheistic” Buddhist religion. They appear to have been originally considered by Buddhists to be demonic entities, but have eventually become important but sometimes dangerous, not completely “rehabilitated” Buddhist goddesses, who inspired Tibetan female practitioners.

Phyllis K. Herman’s “Sita Masala: From the Vedas to the Kitchen” reveals how the Valmiki heroine, Sita, the “embodied furrow,” encompasses and integrates many of the pre-historic and historic functions of an agricultural great goddess figure. Through morphologies of gold, fire, agricultural prosperity, and purity, Sita proves herself to be the embodiment of the wealth of the earth: a furrow made fertile by fire, and always a gold, luminescent being. Ancient goddess worship associated with agriculture and especially the production of plentiful food may have combined in the history of Hinduism to situate Sita in the most suitable site for her worship in the modern age—the kitchen.

and “Lakshmi and Alakshmi: The Kojagari Lakshmi Vrata Katha of Bengal” are written by anthropologists. Similarly, other essays are written by experts in the religious studies field.
Kenneth D. Lee introduces the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara, who has gone through various transformations for the sake of helping sentient beings in different cultures and time periods. Technically speaking, he explains, a bodhisattva does not have any gender characteristics because ultimate reality is emptiness (śūnyatā). Through multicultural engineering, however, the East Asians envisioned Avalokiteśvara in the forms of Kuan-yin in China, Kwansé’um in Korea, Kannon in Japan, and Quan-um in Vietnam, graceful and powerful feminine symbols that illustrate the quintessence of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Lee demonstrates how these multiple images have been inspired and popularized by many legends, folklore, and artistic work, revealing historic trends and cultural differences throughout Asia.

Janet Hoskins describes Caodaism, a new religion born in 1926 in Saigon. Known officially as Dao Dao Tam Ky Pho Do, “The Great Way of the Third Revelation,” Caodaism celebrates new revelations through spirit messages that affirm the common origin of all world traditions. Accordingly, Caodaism presents an Asian synthesis of the three great East Asian traditions; includes Judeo-Christian figures such as Jesus Christ and Moses; and even integrates the veneration of spirits of nature and great heroes, such as Victor Hugo, the Chinese poet Li Bai, and Joan of Arc. Veneration of the Mother Goddess and of female saints and deities such as Quan Am (also Kuan Yin, Kannon, Guanyin), Joan of Arc, and the Virgin Mary appeal to followers of feminist spirituality, but rules pertaining to marriage, divorce and the family seem to reassert traditional sex roles rather than displacing them. Still, Hoskins notes the ideological gender parity of Caodaism, and further documents the historical “feminization” of the religion in both its leadership and membership.

Using both visual and textual sources, Gang Song explores the competitive relationship between the Virgin Mary and Guanyin in late Ming China. Gong first draws a comprehensive picture of religious life in early seventeenth-century China. Next, Gong shows how both Guanyin and Mary were depicted as intercessors between two worlds: humanity and divinity, male and female, good and evil, and body and spirit. The Virgin Mary arrived at a time when Guanyin had gained great popularity as savior of the world and rekindled the goddess tradition in China, setting up a favorable environment for the introduction of the Holy Mother who shared many similarities in iconography, miraculous life, and worship patterns. These deities were meaningful to worshippers in different periods and places in a process of continual negotiation as religious rivals.

In the third section, “Meeting the Goddess: Economics and Politics of the Goddess,” our authors examine the various forces of the goddess
propelled by distinct economic and political factors in society. E. N. Anderson, for example, reevaluates in light of recent scholarship his meeting the goddess Tin Hau as she possessed a spirit medium in a Hong Kong fishing community decades ago. Tin Hau was merciful, familial, and gentle—dutiful daughter and sister to her father and brothers, and then dutiful mother-figure to her seafaring worshipers. Just as Tin Hau acted dramatically and bravely to save her male kin, as a divine savioress she was a powerful defender and protector, combating other supernaturals to care for her charges on the water. As we have seen in the case of other deities studied in this book, Tin Hau could take on the iconography and features of Kun Yam (Guanyin), the most popular female deity in China, to such a degree that in some areas the two are equated. In her mode of possession, the goddess interacted with humans as one of their community, a living, breathing, vocal person, one they knew and understood.

Piya Chatterjee offers an ethnographic case study of divine embodiment, women, and labor in the tea plantations of North Bengal. She shows how gender and power affect the “labors of spiritual action” for her subject, Durga Mata. Durga Mata is believed to have direct access to the sacred; in “becoming” the goddess, she allows us to see some of the gendered complexities inhered with heterodox and folk traditions of religious belief—and the politics of literacy and faith. When the goddess’ manifestations are situated within the terms of “political economy,” it troubles the Durkheimian binary between the “sacred” and the “profane.”

Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker describes how the once-gentle, docile figure of Bharat Mata—Mother India, initially secular in nature and universal in its inclusiveness, was transformed into the patron deity of the Indian Independence movement Swaraj. Bande Mataram (Hail to the Mother) became the rallying cry for the revolutionaries. Over a period of decades, Mother India absorbed the iconography and mythical powers of various deities. Yet the author shows that Mother India is portrayed variously by new artists even today, demonstrating the power and variability of this goddess.

In her essay June McDaniel offers multiple glimpses of Kali in some of her temples in West Bengal. She demonstrates that in the Bengali tradition of Shaktism, the worship of Shakti or feminine divine power, there are three major outlooks or types: folk, tantric/yogic, and bhakti. Each of these types understands the goddess in different ways. Further, Kali manifests herself in various forms. She may be seen in visionary experiences or darshan, she may be ritually placed in statues, she may spontaneously appear in rocks and springs, and she may pervade the
atmosphere of sacred sites. She may also enter the minds of human beings, and fully or partially take them over.

Bidyut Mohanty focuses on the linkages between Orissa’s agrarian economy, the role of women, and the Oriya language scripture called the *Laksmi Vrat-katha*. Since the sixteenth century, the *Vrat-katha* or vow story of Lakshmi, has been annually recited in each and every household of rural Orissa on the occasion of *Laksmi puja* in the months of late October and early November. The *Laksmi Vrat-katha* was consciously developed by a social reformer to help make people aware of the contributions of women in the agrarian economy. It has been a continuous legitimizing force in Orissan society. Mohanty’s textual analysis of the Oriya *Vrat-katha* shows the ways in which the text acknowledges the contributions of women, as well as how it reflects and informs images of women in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of society.

In the section on “One and Many: Multiplicity and Manifestations of the Goddess,” the goddess manifests in many forms—*bhudevi* (as mother earth), *goma* (as mother cow), and of course, as the beautiful Saraswati, the goddess of learning, among others. Here lies the ability of the goddess to appear in as many forms as the situation demands.

Christopher Key Chapple explores historical references with import for modern Hindu views of ecology. According to traditional Indian philosophy and cosmology, the world is a gendered, feminine place. Throughout the Indian story tradition, women have embodied the power symbolized by numerous goddesses. By giving honor to the earth, women give honor to the goddess and recognize the power of the goddess who resides within them. Chapple shows that women in all corners of India and beyond draw on the imagery of the goddess to communicate a modern message. He asserts that devotion to the goddess in both traditional and contemporary forms can stir the world to an increased sense of urgency in regard to the plight of Mother Earth. He closes with a brief survey of contemporary work by women scholars and activists in creating dance, dramas, artwork, and rituals that honor the earth. Through this connection between the earth goddess and the current state of the world, these women have publicized the contemporary issue of environmental degradation.

Shimkhada writes of Goma, an embodiment of the goddess who serves as the protagonist of the Sanskrit text *Swasthani Brata Katha*. Although Goma is portrayed as an ordinary woman in the story, the extraordinary circumstances in which she was born and the challenges she faced clearly place her in the category of a goddess. Goma is depicted as a goddess in mortal form who, like her counterparts Sati and Parvati, overcomes multiple obstacles hurled at her by the Lord Shiva in an attempt to force
her surrender. Born of cow dung, Goma the mortal girl transforms herself into a goddess incarnate in her later life.

Drawing from her position as a feminist and non-Indian goddess devotee, and therefore not obliged to fulfill what is still perceived to be the ultimate role for every woman in India, Małgorzata (Margaret) Kruszewska reconsiders the myths and iconography of Sarasvati. She proposes that by acknowledging Sarasvati as “She who has no husband, no child,” followers can begin to redefine for themselves the female principle in goddesses. Rather than the traditional role models of female shakti powers that are tied to domesticity and motherhood, Kruszewska suggests revisioning and reclaiming Sarasvati as another aspect of the sacred feminine, thus becoming a viable alternative to goddesses defined mainly in their duties as mothers and wives. Kruszewska demonstrates Sarasvati’s ability to serve as a potent resource for modern feminist Devi adherents.

Chia-Lan Chang discusses the appearance of vegetarian nuns serving as abbesses in convents and temples in the late nineteenth century. Chang explains that these vegetarian nuns are not bhiksunis (fully ordained Buddhist nuns), because they receive neither bhiksuni precepts nor tonsure, according to Vinaya Pitaka (Buddhist discipline). Similar to the unshaven laywoman image of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the legend of Miaoshan, an indigenous manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Guanyin in China, vegetarian nuns do not express their religious piety in the form of receiving tonsure or Buddhist ordination rites, but rather in their religious consciousness and daily practice. Vegetarian nuns leave their families, practice pancakesila (Five Precepts) or Bodhisattva-samvara (Bodhisattva Precepts), and live in convents under a vow of celibacy. They subjectively identify themselves as orthodox Buddhist nuns and obtain recognition as such from both Buddhists and the public in Quanzhou. Vegetarian nuns thus embody the legend of Miaoshan and constitute an alternative female sangha (monastic order) between fully ordained Buddhist nuns and upasikas (female lay devotees). The goals of vegetarian nuns are to seek purity and assurance of a favorable reincarnation through celibacy. Resistance to marriage and influence of family members are the most common motives for vegetarian nuns’ participation in the monastic order.

Like Chang, Sthaneshwar Timalsina sees an opportunity for goddess imagery to support newly important sensibilities. Timalsina explores select Hindu myths of the goddess that reverberate in romantic literature to support an embodied cosmology and enlightened ecological vision. He puts forth a non dual argument that plants and humans coexist in partnership, and should remain free from the complex of domination. This
new rationale redefines what is perceived as right action. If one adopts the rationale that a human being does not own the land or control property but is a caretaker and steward, the human being is thus not removed from the land but is part and parcel of the dust from which he comes and to which he returns. Timalsina illustrates this sentiment through various myths, and thereby provides an Indian model of ecological awareness.

Like the goddess with her multiple personae, this volume brings together multifaceted papers that place the goddesses of Asia in proper perspectives. Although most of the primary sources on Asian goddesses began to appear in English translations in the 1960s and 1970s, the study of the South, East, and Southeast Asian goddess as a subject of academics has been somewhat lacking. These works tended to focus primarily on iconography or history. Interpreting the goddess within the context of cultural, religious, social, economic, and even political contexts is a recent development. We will consider this volume a contribution to this current trend of study if it enables readers to trace the varied threads in which the tapestry of the Asian goddess is woven.
PART I

IN THE BEGINNING
CHAPTER ONE

ISSUES IN STUDying MAGO, THE GREAT GODDESS OF EAST ASIA:
PRIMARY SOURCES, GYNOCENTRIC HISTORY, AND NATIONALISM

HELEN HYE-SOOK HWANG

Mago 麻姑 is the Great Goddess from East Asia whose tradition has been forgotten in the course of history but nonetheless survives to this day. Although the subject of Mago remains largely unexplored, I have documented a wealth of primary sources from Korea, China, and Japan. In analyzing and theorizing these sources, I have unveiled a complex and systemic tradition that is derived from the veneration of Mago as supreme divinity and named it Magoism. While the term Magoism is my neologism, its concept proves to be ancient in origin. Magoism is explicitly and implicitly referred to as "the State of Mago," "the Principle of Mago," and "the Affair of Mago" in various literature from Korea. Magoism connotes

1 Pronounce Ma as in Mama.
2 The Budoji (Epic of the Emblem City) records that most people forgot “the Affair of Mago” and that “the Principle of Mago” became vain, when the reign of Dangun, more commonly known as Old Choson (ca. 2333 BCE-ca. 232 BCE), ancient state of Korea, which I call the third oldest Magoist confederacy, underwent the process of disintegration caused by the invasion of neighboring Chinese regimes (See the Budoji, Chapter 25, 90-91). Also, as I will quote later, the Goryoesa (Chronicle of the Goryoe Dynasty) records that people sang, “Ah, ah, if the State of Mago leaves us now, when will it return?” during the late period of the Goryoe (918-1392) Dynasty. As I will also cite below, one Chinese example stands out: Ta’ao T’ang (Tang poet) of the mid 8th century sang, “Once Miss Hemp [Magu] has gone away, none knows when she will come again.” Ta’ao T’ang’s nostalgia for the lost history of Magoism remains unrecognized among the Chinese and the Daoist until today. People’s longing for the return of the State of Mago
the trans-patriarchal cultural matrix of East Asia in which East Asian women have held religious and political authority. Revivifying Magoism restores East Asian female agency, which has been underrepresented and misrepresented within East Asian, patriarchal, and/or Euro-American ethnocentric discourses.

This article introduces a gamut of Magoist primary sources widely interspersed throughout Korea, China, and Japan, and explores the mythohistorical implications of Magoism. The pan-East Asian existence of the Magoist literature comes across as surprising if not anomalous, because the official historiography does not hint a transnational gynocentric unity in ancient times of East Asia. Appropriating C. W. Sydow’s theory of oicotyfication (the same folktale type that is found in different regions), which explains the mechanism of folktale transference from one region to another, I postulate that East Asian peoples thrived under the political and cultural banner of Magoism in ancient times. In explicating ancient Magoism I find nationalist and/or ethnocentric perspectives fundamentally inadequate. Magoism as pre-patriarchal in origin is also pre-nationalist and pre-ethnocentric. It shows nationalism as a by-product of patriarchal political establishments.

Characteristically, primary sources suggest the primacy of Korean Magoism not only in quantity but also in quality: Magoist sources from Korea outnumber her counterparts. Also, Korean sources witness Mago’s supreme divinity and a coherent history of Magoism. The Budoji (Epic of the Emblem City), the primary text of Magoism, asserts Magoism as the

appears in many folk literature pieces as well as written records of Korea, China, and Japan. For further discussion, see Helen Hye-Sook Hwang, “The Female Principle in the Magoist Cosmogony” in Ochre Journal of Women’s Spirituality (Fall 2007), 5-6.

I limit my reference of East Asia to Korea, China, and Japan from which the corpus of Magoism has been documented.

I explicated in detail C. W. Sydow’s theory of oicotyfication in my dissertation. To summarize, the pan-East Asian existence of Mago folktales supports two speculations: First, the active story-tellers of Magoism migrated across the subcontinent of East Asia. Second, East Asian peoples were once under the cultural influence of Magoism and then were later subdivided into different nation states. In the case of Mago oicotype, both scenarios are relevant. See C. W. Sydow. Selected Papers on Folklore (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 11-59 cited in Helen Hye-Sook Hwang, Seeking Mago, the Great Goddess: A Mytho-Historico-Theological Reconstruction of Magoism, an Archaically Originated Gynocentric Tradition of East Asia (Claremont Graduate University, Claremont: CA, 2005), 6-9.
primal tradition of ARCHAIC KOREA. The Korean corpus systematically portrays Mago as progenitor, creator, and sovereign, while its Chinese and Japanese counterparts are fragmentary and partial. Magoism remains invisible in the latter two sources. Consequently, neither Mago’s provenance nor the history of Magoism is explicitly stated in the latter two sources. Why do Korean sources attest to Magoism, whereas Chinese and Japanese counterparts vaguely adumbrate it? This question is not only crucial but also potentially controversial because its answer requires a reconstruction of the pre-Chinese Magoist history that is primarily identified as Korean.

This study argues that archaic Magoists later known as ancient Koreans were not only the creators of pre- and proto-Chinese [read patriarchal] magoractic [read Magoist theocratic] civilizations but also the bearers of Magoist sovereignty to different peoples. This is nothing less than what the mythology of Magoism from Korea conveys. Of course, such history is unthinkable within the realm of official [read patriarchal and nationalist] historiography. In the foreground, the mytho-history of Magoism remains hypothetical subjected to further studies. Nonetheless, its implications are ground-breaking and far-reaching. The mytho-history of Magoism offers an alternative paradigm by way of mapping out a supra-nationalist consciousness with which ancient Magoist Koreans resisted patriarchal ideologies of nationalism and ethnocentrism. I posit that, because of its fierce adherence to female principles, the ancient history of Magoist Korea has been subjected to erasure and truncation in the official historiography of East Asia. Both Magoism and the history of ancient Koreans, inextricably predicated on the gynocentric world, have

---

5 By ARCHAIC KOREA, I mean the Magoist peoples of East Asia who were pre- and supra-nationalist and multi-ethnic. Linguistically speaking, the root “han” in Hanguk (State of Han, Korea) adumbrates this Magoist origin, as its meaning includes “one,” “big,” “great,” “same,” “full,” “middle,” “right,” or “outward.” See YongSu Bak, GyoeRyeMal YongRye Sajeon (the Dictionary of Korean Spoken Language), 2166-2167. Also “Hanguk” refers to the first confederacy of Magoism to be mentioned in a later section of this article.

6 I do not suggest that Chinese and Japanese sources are similar in any way. From the limited amount of data from Japan, I infer that Japanese Magoism is more closely tied to Korean Magoism than is Chinese Magoism.

7 The discussion of how the ancient history of Magoist Korea has been made occult is beyond the scope of this article. I explained in my dissertation three major historical processes brought by patriarchal ideologues of China, Korea, and Japan respectively. See Hwang, Seeking Mago, 86-8.
been subverted by East Asian patriarchal ideologues.

**Primary Sources of Magoism**

The *Budoji* (Epic of the Emblem City) and the *Handan Gogi* (Archaic Histories of Han and Dan), which I deem as two major texts of Magoism, reemerged in the mid 1980s. My first acquaintance with the *Budoji*, an extraordinary text allegedly written in the late 4th or early 5th century, opened my eyes to the unusual tradition of Magoism. Along with its complex and sophisticated language, the overt gynocentric principle that runs through this mythic epic immediately caught my attention. My fascination with the *Budoji* increased as I learned that the *Budoji* was the first and only “extant” volume of fifteen books entitled the *JingSimRok* (Literature of Illuminating Mind/Heart), all possibly written by the same author(s). The titles of the *JingSimRok*’s fifteen books include a broad range of topics such as musicology, astronomy, mathematics, calendar, history, geography, rituals, healing and medicine, agriculture and silk production, pottery making, and others. The *Budoji* itself occupies a unique place as it presents a universal origin story followed by the history of the oldest magocratic states.

Intrigued by the *Budoji*, I began to seek out a larger corpus of Mago texts around 2002. The results were beyond expectation. I soon learned that Mago literature exist not only in Korea but also in China and Japan. An abundance of Magoist texts was soon discovered in such various genres as myths, toponyms, folktales, sagas, poetry, and paintings. Even more revealing was the evidence of Magoism within the historical and

---

8 I have studied Magoism independently. I embarked my study on Magoism as I sought my own cultural roots as a self-motivated Korean feminist. I first encountered the *Budoji* in 2000 in an unexpected way. For detailed discussions, see Hwang, “The Female Principle in the Magoist Cosmogony,” 4-5.

9 I suggest that Bak JeSang, the alleged author, and his wife Kim, along with their familial members, be the co-authors of the *Budoji*. See Hwang, *Seeking Mago*, 109-114. Nonetheless, the authorship of the *Budoji* remains to be an area of further study.

10 Mago was already, albeit limitedly, familiar to the Korean populace in the late 1990s. Various cultural and literary events associated with Mago included a storybook, film, festival, and village ritual by 2002. Numerous folktales of Mago were readily available on, besides academic sources, websites operated by various organizations such as province and city information sites, tourist sites, and general interest sites.
religious texts from these countries. With that, it was not difficult to find a link to another unusual text, the *Handan Gogi*, a complex text that, to say the least, chronologically records the pre- and proto-Chinese history of Korea.\(^{11}\) The *Handan Gogi* not only accords with the mytho-history of Magoism recounted in the *Budoji* but also complements it with rich chronological, cultural, theological, and mythic materials.

The aforementioned primary sources can be classified into the following five categories:

1. The *Budoji* (Epic of the Emblem City) and the *Handan Gogi* (Archaic Histories of Han and Dan), both of which were translated and published in modern Korean in 1986;\(^ {12}\)
2. Folktales and toponyms from Korea, China, and Japan;
3. Mythic accounts from the *Samguk Sagi* (History of Three Kingdoms) and the *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms), the alleged oldest books of Korea;
4. Folklore including sagas, poems, paintings, and miscellanies from Korea; and
5. Daoist texts, toponyms, and folklore including legends, paintings, and miscellanies from China.

A serious reading of the *Budoji* and the *Handan Gogi* necessarily exposes the lost mythology and history of Magoist Korea. In other words, both the *Budoji* and the *Handan Gogi* attest to Korean Magoism, which have been largely forgotten by modern Koreans. The *Budoji*, written in the late 4\(^{th}\) or early 5\(^{th}\) century of Silla Korea, recounts the mythic beginning of Mago followed by the ethno-genesis of East Asians. It discloses a yet-to-be known magnificent epic that illumines, in an unbroken stroke, the female-centered narrative of cosmogony, ethno-genesis, and pre- and proto-Chinese history of magocratic Korea. Its thirty-three chapters envisage a panoramic history of the gynocentric world, its beginning, flowering, and declining of archaic Magoist Korea. While mainstream

\(^{11}\) The authorship of the five texts compiled in the *Handan Gogi* varies from the mid 7\(^{th}\) century Silla through the 16\(^{th}\) century. See Hwang, Seeking Mago, 118-119.
academics remain silent about these books, independent scholars and amateur historians have taken them seriously. A commentary of the Budoji has been recently published by Thomas Yoon in English as well as Korean. Commentaries, which support the archaic history and culture of Korea recounted in the Handan Gogi, have mushroomed since its publication. Among them, I find II Bong Yi’s resourceful for my study as it corroborates the Handan Gogi within the context of Chinese historical and mythological writings.

Over three hundred folktales and toponyms are found from Korea. These orally transmitted stories, with the exception of a small number of them documented in the Hanguk Gubi Munhak Daegye (A Survey of Korean Oral Literature), have not been systematically complied by scholars. Magoist toponyms include Mago-san (mountain of Mago), Mago-am (rock of Mago), Mago-seong (Walled City of Mago), Mago-dong (village or cave of Mago), and many others. Sources from Japan mark only four entries. While more comprehensive documentation is required from Japan, Japanese sources are no less pivotal in piecing together seemingly isolated Magoist data across time and vast geography. The Chinese corpus, despite its fragmentary and derivative nature, is by no

---

13 Both the Budoji and the Handan Gogi continue to be dismissed by academic Koreanists. I discussed the authenticity issues of these books in my dissertation. See Hwang, Seeking Mago, 98-101.
15 II Bong Yi, SilZeung Handan Gogi (Verified Handan Gogi) (Seoul: Jeongsin Segyesa, 2003).
16 When I completed my dissertation in 2004, I documented over two hundred folktales and toponyms. The number continues to grow, as I further research.
17 See Hwang, Seeking Mago, 250-253.
18 Place-names take up about thirty percentages of folktales that number around 300.
19 Japanese sources of Mako (as is pronounced in Japanese) are: Mt. Mako occurs in Miyako, Okinawa; Mako-iwa (rock of Mago) occurs in Yamanashi; and Mt. Mako is mentioned in The Tale of the Heike, tr. by Hiroshi Kitagawa and Bruce T. Tsuchida, (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1975), 226. Two entries are stated to connote Mako in the Nihon Kokugo Daijiten (Japanese Language Dictionary) (Tokyo: Japan, 1976). First, it refers to the passage from the Chuang Tzu. Second, it indicates the Palace of former-emperor.
Chapter One

16

means small or insignificant. My documentation of the literature of Magu, as it is pronounced in Chinese, includes Daoist texts as well as hitherto unknown folklore and landscapes including numerous toponyms. Magu, as the goddess of longevity, appears as a minor deity in the Daoist pantheon. However, these various sources prove to be pre-Daoist. Along with Japanese sources, Chinese sources provide integral information to the overall feature of Magoism in East Asia.

Last but not least, the fact that Mago is mentioned in the *Samguk Sagi* and the *Samguk Yusa*, the two allegedly oldest texts from Korea, is indicative of the very archaic nature of Magoism. Once we are able to recognize that Mago is referred to as Nogo or Nogu (Crone or Ancient Goddess), a common name for Mago, Magoism is no longer invisible in these texts. Besides, Magoist literature appears in the 17th and 18th century renowned Korean literature (sagas) including the *SukHyangJeon* (*Tale of SukHyang*) and the *SimCheongJeon* (*Tale of SimCheong*); poetry of Kim Sagot; an anonymous poem engraved on the rock of Nakhwa (Fallen Flowers); a painting of Kim HongDo, and miscellanies. These folkloric fragments are crucial in valorizing the survival of Magoism throughout the dark period whose historical scheme I will explain at a later section. They demonstrate the transitory process in which Magoism has become demythologized and trivialized among Koreans.

20 By pointing out the extensive records of Nogu in these texts in association with the imperial or heroic myths of Silla, Baekje, and Goguryoe, ancient States of Korea, GwangSik Choe, Korean historian, discloses the divine status of Nogu as Samsin (Triad Deity). Choe reports that the records of Nogu disappear from these texts around the fourth and fifth century CE. In the case of Goguryoe, it does not appear after the reign of Sovereign Micheon (r. 300-331), in the case of Silla the reign of Sovereign SoJi (r. 479-500), and in the case of Baekje the reign of DongSeongWang (r. 479-501). *Samguk Sagi* and *Samguk Yusa* cited in GwangSik Choe, *Uri Godaes-ui Seongmuneul Yoelda* (*Opening of Our Ancient History*) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 2004), 141-8. According to Choe’s research, it appears that Korean historiographers began to dismiss the archaic tradition of Magoism from the early 4th century (Goguryoe) through the end of the 5th century (Silla and Goguryoe).

21 Among these, the *SukHyangJeon* (*Tale of SukHyang*) thematically centralizes the providence of Mago who is portrayed as “crone,” grandmother and the divine for SukHyang, the main female character. Among miscellanies, included are the Baridegi, a Shamanic lyric, and the *PyoHaeRok* (*Logbook of Shipwreck*) by Hancheol Jang in the 1770s.
The Mytho-History of Magoism

Some archaeologists have advocated an urgent need of using myths and folktales in interpreting “prehistoric” archaeological discoveries where written records are simply absent. According to Fumiko Ikawa-Smith, archaeologist from Japan, the study of folklore began to be developed as a new method in an effort to pursue “scholarly inquiry” about women in Japanese ancient history in the first half of the 20th century. This, alongside the method of archeomythology, which Marija Gimbutas advocates in her pioneering work, the Language of the Goddess, lends credence to my effort to study Magoist folktales as historical data. Unlike the studies by Ikawa-Smith and Gimbutas, however, this study faces a much more fundamental difficulty. Due to the prevalence of Sinocentric views, the pre-Chinese Korean history has been utterly “unthinkable.” There exists no “hypothesized history” of ancient Korea that the pre-patriarchal mythology of Magoism testifies. When history is absent, it is implausible to study archaeology of the time. In the case of Magoism, archaeological artifacts remain meaningless if not anomalous, while myths and folktales are abandoned as non-data.

This study is an effort to reconstruct an ancient history of Korea from a Magoist perspective. While the Budoji and the Handan Gogi provide systematic accounts on the diachronic developments of Magoist Korea from the mythic beginning of Mago until the onset of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1919), mythic tales and popular literature of Magoism from both Korea and China offer a folk history of Magoism. This study’s historical assessment not only gives an overview to the vicissitudes of Magoism but also pieces together particular records on women and Goddesses from East Asia, which may otherwise be viewed as isolated or irrelevant data. Based on my feminist hermeneutics of the Budoji and the Handan Gogi, I posit that women were the primary agents of Mago’s sovereignty. I postulate that the political/religious leaders of early Magoist polities—from HwangGung to YuIn, HanIn, HanUng, and Dangun—were predominantly women. Based on the Budoji’s account of the Magoist cosmogony and its cultural implications in numerous data, I deem that these women leaders

---

operated political regimes that are substantially different from patriarchal monarchical rules. I name ancient Magoist political leadership as magocracy where the female principle is venerated as religious and political authority for everyone including men. Magocracy connotes the archaic gynocentric political system of East Asia, which represented Mago’s sovereignty. Accordingly, I recognize the three oldest confederacies of Magoist Korea, Hanguk (ca. 7199 BCE-ca. 3898 BCE), Danguk (ca. 3898 BCE-ca. 2333 BCE), and Budo Choson (ca. 2333 BCE-ca. 232 BCE), otherwise known as Old Choson as historical embodiments of magocracy. Dating of the archaic states of Hanguk, Danguk, and Old Choson follows the *Handan Gogi*. These dates are subject to debate and modification based upon further study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Heroines and/or states</th>
<th>Major Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mythic</td>
<td>- Mago SamSin (Triad Deity)</td>
<td>- The Paradise of Mago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- HwangGung</td>
<td>- The First Diaspora northward, northeastward, and farther migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- YuIn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaic or Golden</td>
<td>Hanguk (HanIn) ca. 7199 BCE-ca. 3898 BCE</td>
<td>- First Magocratic Confederacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Danguk (HanUng) ca. 3898 BCE-ca. 2333 BCE</td>
<td>- Second Magocratic Confederacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budo</td>
<td>Old Choson (DanGun) ca. 2333 BCE-ca. 232 BCE</td>
<td>- Third Magocratic Confederacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Second Diaspora</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Budo</td>
<td>Silla (57 BCE-935), Goguryoe (37 BCE-668), Baekje (18 BCE-660), Gaya, and other states-Goryoe (918-1392)</td>
<td>- The Third Diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Korean States gradually lost the confederated system; Magocracy lost hegemony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Choson (1392-1910)</td>
<td>- The Fourth Diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>- Magoism underwent a political and cultural suppression in Korea; Choson lost the major territory of East Asian subcontinent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Korea and North Korea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revival</td>
<td>After 1986</td>
<td>- Magoism partially revives in Korea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>