PART II

REDISCOVERING THE BEGINNING IN TEXTS
The Chu silk manuscript is the earliest and most complete astronomical text from ancient China. Part I of this manuscript (abbreviated as CSM-I in the paper) is a rare pre-Qin text that makes cosmological myths available in a complete version. This paper attempts to explore mythological types and symbolic structures of the cosmogonic myth in the manuscript, from the point of view of comparative mythology and motif analysis. Cosmological myths can be divided into two phases: the first phase is the creation from chaos; the second phase is the re-creation of differentiated order by the gods. Therefore, this paper also further analyzes the relationship between cosmogonic and social orders. The cosmogonic myths in the pre-Qin manuscript still have their original and symbolic power and efficacy. They explain not only the origin of the Chu people’s universe, but also the creation of the earth, the appearance of seasons, the sun and the moon, as well as other astronomical explorations. There is a rich store of observation of astronomical phenomena and of mythical imagination. The cosmogonic myth in the manuscript has some archetypical motifs known from world cosmological myths, showing some cross-cultural similarities. However, its ordering concept of sacred numbers, and its spiritual cosmogony really give it a typical and unique Warring States period Chu style. The basis for symbolic thinking in Chu culture was not only those elements of cosmogonic myth that could lead to explicit astronomical and philosophical principle, but also the overall concept of world order.

Keywords: cosmogonic myth, cosmology order, sacred number

I. Back to Genesis: Chu Silk Manuscript and Cosmogonic Myths Worldwide

Inadequate records of cosmogonic myths in the extant literatures of the ancient and middle ancient times of China had always been an obstacle for scholars to depict a full view of cosmogonic myths in ancient China. However, with the increase of unearthed documents in the last decades, research on Chinese cosmogonic myths has achieved