

Peace: China in the cave

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Jul 2009

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Stephen Hoy — 22 Jul 2009, 16:07

Suddenly (it was something I was still unused to) she whistled piercingly, and Ming-Sno and Sun-Sun came bounding, panting with pleasure, their deformed mouth opening almost split by their wide "kylin" mouths.

"Are you going to take both of them?"

"Why not? I'll hold Ming-Sno, and Den can hold Sun-Sun. You hold the basket, Robert."

- Peace, ch 1.

While pursuing the yang/yin of Olivia's Shih-Tsu dogs, I was unsurprised to discover that Ming signifies shining while Sun signifies diminishing. In general, would other readers agree that Olivia is the shining light of Peace, while Den is its encroaching darkness?

Moving further into the Cave incident, recall that Aunt Olivia left there a porcelain platter covered with a milk-glass hen. There was a human skull in the cave, but we have few hints to its significance, other than Olivia's words to Den reminding him that the bottom is china. Searching for an explanation in Chinese mythology, I found an intriguing chapter in Myths of the Dog-Man, http://books.google.com/books?id=glmjo9UrP2YC&lpg=PA279&ots=_Oa8b7FTDw&dq=P'an%20Hu&pg=PA140, which I condense, re-combine, and re-tell with an unmalicious liberality. [Any errors or mis-interpretations are my own--I refer anyone with an interest to the original sources.]

An old woman noticed a swelling in her ear, and worried at it until she drew out a large white blob, not too much different from the blob you might find in egg drop soup. For some reason, she felt compelled to place this amorphous mass into a gourd [hu] which she covered with a platter [p'an]. The blob grew and grew until the platter separated from the gourd. Emerging from the "shell" was a dog with parti-colored hair, each brocade of color representing one of the five primal forces of Chinese myth. [One variant goes on to say that the dog, armed with an axe, carved the heavens from the surface of the platter, and transformed the gourd into the earth.] The dog became the honored pet of a ruler who was greatly bothered by invading barbarians. The dog made his way into the enemy camp, bit off the head of the barbarian leader, and carried it back to the ruler. As bounty, the dog was given the hand of the ruler's daughter. The ruler wasn't exactly thrilled to have a dog for a son-in-law, so the couple left the kingdom to dwell in a shallow cave which no one else could find. The dog sired six sons and daughters before he died. The children emerged from the cave to live in the land. In honor of their ancestor, the tribe adopted a style of dress that includes hair braided like a dog's tail, and gowns with dog-like tails.

This is the Yao variant of a creation story in which the hairy dog P'an Hu substitutes for the more common mythical creator of the universe, the coiled dragon Pan Gu.

[Thurlough:] "Have you ever been in a cave, Mr. Weer?"

[Weer:] "Only a very small one when I was a boy."

- Peace, ch 5.

David Duffy — 22 Jul 2009, 21:42 · in reply to Stephen Hoy

I forget if this has been mentioned before, but there was a US painter J. Alden Weir (1857-19--), one of whose impressionist paintings of the Hudson I was looking at over the weekend. J is Julian.

Cheers, David Duffy.