

Xi Wang Mu. Spirit-Mother of the West



"Once there lived a half-divine and half-human being called Xi wang mu who was the Moon spirit and a daughter of the heavenly emperor. Her face was like a tiger and her tail was like a panther. Her hair was not tied and on the top of it was a comb of jade. She uttered a roaring voice. She lived in a cave and sat on Mount Shao guang..."

Xi Wang Mu. Queen-Spirit of the West



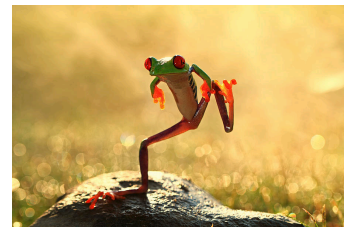
The Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang Mu) is the Great Mother (and for some the Grandmother) Archetype and powerful female goddess. She embodies all that is sacred and mysterious on Earth. A supreme matriarch, her roots which likely pre-date even the bone oracles, from the Shang dynasty of China (c. 1600-1046 BCE) predates Taoism and contains all of the great qualities of mythic creations, from monster to creatrix to supernatural being.

Taoists recognized the ancient great goddess as a divine teacher and initiator of mystic seekers, and in many cases as the ultimate origin of their teachings and practices. She governs the Taoist arts of self-transformation known as internal alchemy, including meditation, breath and movement practices, medicines and elixirs.

Xi Wang Mu's relationship with the Metal Element

From ancient times, the Grandmother of the West relates to all the elements but holds a special affinity for Metal. She is also referred to as Jin Mu Yüan Jün, which means Metal Mother and Primordial Ruler. Her connection to the metal organs (the Lungs and Large Intestines) is evident in her ability to process minerals and oxygen in her high mountain domain. Another aspect of the Metal element embodied by this alchemist-goddess is her knack for bringing things to completion and distilling their essence, creating transformative elixirs of immortality. She symbolizes the principle of Tai Yin, the great female energy, which is also the name of the Lung meridian in Chinese medicine. This principle, as you already know, is closely intertwined with autumn, death, and grief. As the goddess of the underworld, she holds authority over life and death, disease and healing, and determines the lifespan of all living beings. Her Qi energy, known as the Animal Soul, speaks of her profound connection with the instinctual nature of all animals, including humans.

The Kunlun Mountains



Xi Wang Mu lives in the Kunlun mountains, at the threshold of Heaven and Earth. This mysterious mountain is located in the far west, a place outside of time, filled with effortless activity and devoid of pain. In some sources the mountain is associated with Jade, representing feminine energy as the embodiment of darkness, mystery, and creativity. The sacred mountain is inhabited by fantastic beings and shamanistic emissaries. Among them are the three-footed crow, the nine-tailed fox, a dancing frog, and the moon-hare who pounds magical elixirs in a mortar.

In a garden hidden by high clouds, amidst the Kunlun Mountains, Xi Wang Mu nurtures the mythical peaches of immortality that grow on a gigantic Tree. These peaches only ripen once every 3000 years and provide the gods with the opportunity to renew their longevity.

The Tree also acts as an axis mundi that connects the material and immaterial realms, a sacred ladder traveled by spirits and shamans.



The Jade Maidens



At the heart of Xi Wang Mu's community on Kunlun are the *Jade Maidens*, known as the Yü Nü Xi. They are dancers and musicians who play chimes, flutes, mouth organ, and jade sounding stones. They are not merely performers but also revered as "invocators"- women who can perform services to the shapeless and make the spirits come down by dancing.

The Jade Maidens are the ones who offer divine foods, awakening the senses of those who are fortunate enough to attend Xi Wang Mu's banquets. These feasts serve as a profound symbol of both physical and spiritual nourishment, as those who partake in the offerings receive not only sustenance but also the divine blessings that flow from the goddess herself.

Guided by Xi Wang Mu, the Jade Maidens act as her emissaries. They transmit her divine messages and teachings to the Taoist mystics, guiding them on their spiritual journeys.

The Wild Matriarch



In folklore, Xiwangmu embodies the wild and untamable Animal Soul. She is described as a mountain goddess with the fangs of a tiger and the tail of a leopard. Her hair is white and unkempt, and she usually wears a crown made of jade. Her voice is harsh and she sends and cures diseases while three blue birds bring her food. The poet Li Bo referred to the three wild blue birds who circle around Jade Mountain as "the essence-guarding birds." They fulfill the will of the goddess.

Xi Wangmu as the Matriarch of the West was paired with Ma Zi, the goddess of the Eastern Sea. In the divine hierarchy, Ma Zi's paradise island of Penglai held an equivalent status to Kunlun. Ma Zi is another eternal being who oversees vast cycles of time, as the Eastern Sea gives way to mulberry fields, and then back to ocean again. Both goddesses hold the title of "maternal ancestor" or "grandmother" in their names, symbolizing their roles as revered matriarchs.

Patriarchal Revisions



As patriarchy gained dominance, the shamanic shapeshifter side of Xi Wang mu, and her crone aspect, were pushed aside. Writers transformed her from a wild shamanic goddess with tiger features and untamed hair into an elegant lady wearing aristocratic robes and beautiful headdresses. They even invented a husband for her: the Eastern King Sire, even though there is no evidence in the literature of the time that the King Father ever existed in myth.

This evolution not only altered her appearance but also impacted her mythology. Even though ancient texts consider Xi wang mu as the master of Taoist teachings and credit her as the author of the Tao de Ching, the dominant male oriented courtly writers managed to diminish her status and place her below "great men." In essence, she was overshadowed by the emergence of new celestial rulers, imperial lords, and heavenly bureaucracies.



Fortunately, and in spite of the patriarchal efforts to domesticate the goddess, her original shamanic essence and her connection to untamed Nature continued to inspire people throughout history. Even the attempt to marry the goddess did not find favor in popular tradition. Folk religion continued to pair Xi Wang mu with Ma Zi, the goddess of the East.

In some alternative traditions and folklore, her wild and primal aspects were celebrated and kept alive, even as mainstream narratives shifted towards the ideal of an elegant, refined and subdued lady.

Prompts for reflection

Through common language and themes, myths serve as guides to structure what unfolds in daily life. They provide structure, form, and meaning, offering us the keys to unlock a deeper understanding of our very existence. This understanding, in turn, holds the potential to enrich the very fabric of our lives. In the context of the myth surrounding Xi Wang mu:

1. Of all the aspects within the goddess's story, which ones resonate the most with this specific moment in your life?
2. Have you, over the years, experienced a sense of your Animal Nature being tamed? If so, in what ways? If not, please elaborate.
3. What is your relationship with your instinctual body, your "animal nature"?
4. How do you nurture your Body Soul?
5. Who are your companions in you "Kunlun" Mountains?

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