

Flying Women in Chinese Folklore - Male Narrator's Rejection of Gender Role Division in Patriarchal Societies

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Abstract : In *Women Who Fly* (2018), Serinity Young connects tales and legends of flying women in Greco-Roman, Indo-European, Mesopotamian, and Asian cultures with ancient matriarchal bird goddesses and argues that tales of flying women are reminiscent of the rituals and rites related to the worship of goddesses in pre-patriarchal times and that flying women, including swan maidens, harpies, fairies, and witches are “abnormal women” because they reject patriarchal order, defy, and desert their domestic roles. Tales of flying women in Chinese folklore, exemplified by the story of The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, replicated in countless tales that depicts the courtship between a mortal man and a divine or magical woman suggest otherwise. In these tales, the divine woman exhibits idealized Confucian femininity and fulfills the needs of the male protagonist by providing him with marriage, children, social status, and financial affluence. This paper argues that the flying women in Chinese folklores are not a symbol of defiance but are exemplars that embody ideal Confucian femininity. These tales are instead a reflection of male rejection of gender division in patriarchal societies. The male protagonists, like the male storytellers, reject the necessity to pursue and provide for women in courtship and marriage. Though these tales show their authors’ and readers’ discontent with gender role division, they do not subvert the patriarchal social order but rather offers an escape through fantasy.

Keywords : bird goddess, folklore, gender role division, patriarchy

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