

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910821639403321
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Titolo	The flood myths of early China // Mark Edward Lewis
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Albany, : State University of New York Press, c2006
ISBN	0-7914-8222-7 1-4237-6619-9
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (vii, 248 pages)
Collana	SUNY series in Chinese philosophy and culture
Disciplina	398/.363
Soggetti	Floods - China Floods - China - Religious aspects
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. 153-229) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Intro -- The Flood Myths of Early China -- CONTENTS -- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS -- INTRODUCTION -- COMPARATIVE FLOOD MYTHS -- CHINESE FLOOD MYTHS -- 1. FLOOD TAMING AND COSMOGONY -- COSMOGONIES AND SOCIAL DIVISIONS -- SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND THE FLOOD -- THE FLOOD AND THE HUMAN-ANIMAL DIVIDE -- THE FLOOD AND HUMAN NATURE -- THE FLOOD AND LOCAL CULTURES -- CONCLUSION -- 2. FLOOD TAMING AND CRIMINALITY -- CRIMINALITY AND THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS -- GONG GONG AS A CRIMINAL -- GUN AS A CRIMINAL -- CRIMINALITY AND FLOOD IN THE SHAN HAI JING -- CRIMINALITY, FLOODS, AND THE EXILE OF SONS -- CONCLUSION -- 3. FLOOD TAMING AND LINEAGES -- THE SAGES AS BAD FATHERS AND SONS -- THE DEMON CHILD -- FATHERS, SONS, AND THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS -- CONCLUSION -- 4. FLOOD TAMING, COUPLES, AND THE BODY -- THE MYTHOLOGY OF NÜ GUA AND THE FLOOD -- THE MYTHOLOGY OF NÜ GUA AND FU XI -- THE ICONOGRAPHY OF NÜ GUA AND FU XI -- YU, MARRIAGE, AND THE BODY -- CONCLUSION -- CONCLUSION -- NOTES -- WORKS CITED -- INDEX -- A -- B -- C -- D -- E -- F -- G -- H -- I -- J -- K -- L -- M -- N -- O -- P -- Q -- R -- S -- T -- V -- W -- X -- Y -- Z.
Sommario/riassunto	Early Chinese ideas about the construction of an ordered human space received narrative form in a set of stories dealing with the rescue of the world and its inhabitants from a universal flood. This book

demonstrates how early Chinese stories of the re-creation of the world from a watery chaos provided principles underlying such fundamental units as the state, lineage, the married couple, and even the human body. These myths also supplied a charter for the major political and social institutions of Warring States (481–221 BC) and early imperial (220 BC–AD 220) China. In some versions of the tales, the flood was triggered by rebellion, while other versions linked the taming of the flood with the creation of the institution of a lineage, and still others linked the taming to the process in which the divided principles of the masculine and the feminine were joined in the married couple to produce an ordered household. While availing themselves of earlier stories and of central religious rituals of the period, these myths transformed earlier divinities or animal spirits into rulers or ministers and provided both etiologies and legitimation for the emerging political and social institutions that culminated in the creation of a unitary empire.
