



Compiled by Xie Chuntao

China Through the Ages

—from Confucius to Deng

(Vol. I)



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What created China – the legend and the nation?
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Preface

In recent years, China's reform and opening-up movement, as well as her rapid development, have increasingly drawn attention from foreign countries hoping for a deeper peek into what has always been a mysterious land for them. At the same time, China needs to reveal herself to the international community as much as possible, so as to integrate herself smoothly with the rest of the world.

However, rarely do we see books on China's evolution by local authors becoming popular with foreign readers, and there are even fewer widely-read books that cover Chinese history, culture, current situation and challenges. This is why I readily agreed when Mrs. Zhang Haiou, Deputy Chief Editor of New World Press, asked me to compile a book about Chinese history. I knew I would meet with many difficulties, but it would be worthwhile.

The idea for this book came from Mr. Lin Liangqi, former Deputy Chief Editor of China International Publishing Group. He has worked on media and cultural exchanges between China and the world, and is well experienced in this field. He proposed that the basic content of this book be centered on China in the past and present China. In his proposal, China's past would focus on the changes that have taken place in the country, her population and territory as well as her contributions to politics, economy and culture. Present China would mainly reflect China's independence, changing processes in foreign affairs, national unification—especially China's reform and opening-up—and the achievements related to her modernization. He also incorporated the suggestion of a senior journalist to name the book *China Through the Ages—from Confucius to Deng*, hoping to connect China's 5,000-year history with the two world-famous figures.

This book targets foreign readers knowing little about China and introduces Chinese history by telling typical stories in different eras. These stories can reflect Chinese territory evolution, national components, and origins of institutions, as well as Chinese ancient prosperity, modern weakness and today's rise. Chinese ideas, religions and way of act are exemplified by these stories, too. In one word, the goal of this book is to show foreign readers what China, Chinese people and Chinese culture are really like, and to enhance their knowledge and understanding of China.

The difficulties I encountered during compilation were quite beyond my estimation. The problems lay not only in the lack of knowledge my partners and I had about the reading habits of foreigners and the difficulties inherent in selecting stories from a 5,000-year-long history, but also in the dilemma of how to embody the essence of Chinese culture in these stories. Despite being exposed to Chinese culture for a long long time, I still find no simple way to summarize Chinese ways of thinking and behavior.

When this book was on the verge of being completed, the 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan. China's humanitarian efforts and quake relief operations were unprecedented in their scale and magnificence. I was deeply moved and felt the necessity to ponder further about Chinese national traits and their connection with the outstanding attributes of the people in other nations of the world. This is why there may still be some flaws in this book, despite our best efforts. Given another chance in the future, and after hearing different opinions, we will definitely improve on it.

Thanks are due to Mr. Lin Liangqi whose ardent guidance on content and method benefited us a great deal. Mrs. Zhang Haiou and Mrs. Li Shujuan, Director of the English Department of New World Press, made important contributions to this book. My colleagues and partners Mr. Liu Yuebin, Mr. Zhang Jun, Mr. Li Qinggang and Mr. Shen Chuanliang did much of the compiling for this book, apart from their regular work. My sincere respect and gratitude to them all.

Xie Chuntao
May 20, 2008

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Chapter 1

Prehistoric Legends and Mythologies



How did the world we live in come into existence? How was this universe created? How did human beings appear? Mankind had begun to explore these questions even during primeval times. People from different areas of the world offered different answers.

Christianity believed God created the world. Prometheus was the creator of man, in Greek mythology. People in ancient China also had their theories. The most popular one stated that the world was created by Pangu, and mankind was created by Nuwa. Several remarkable historic figures appeared one after another, teaching people life skills such as using fire, hunting and fishing, planting crops, building houses and treating diseases; there also appeared some who had management skills, and they organized people, fusing different tribes together through tribal wars, forming the rudiments of the Chinese nation.

1. Pangu Created the World

Long long ago, the whole world was just a big black ball of chaos. Inside this big egg lived Pangu, the earliest ancestor of the Chinese nation. He slept in this ball, grew and developed. Eighteen thousand years passed and Pangu suddenly woke up one day. When he opened his eyes, he was surrounded by darkness and couldn't see anything. He felt suppressed. So, with his broad, shining axe, he cracked the big ball open with all his might, and all the light (the good part of the ball) floated up, making up the blue heaven. All the cold and dark stuff stayed below, comprising the earth. The earth was finally separated from the heaven with clear air in between. Pangu was enormously relieved.

As the distance between the two was not that great, Pangu was afraid that the heaven and the earth would be joined again. So he stood on the earth and held up the heaven with his hands, trying to separate them further. Every day the sky rose ten feet, the earth became ten feet thicker and Pangu grew ten feet taller. Another 18,000 years passed and the distance between the heaven and the earth reached 90,000 *li* (45,000 kilometers). This is why the Chinese call heaven "*Jiu Chong Tian*". Pangu also became a giant, with a height of 90,000 *li*.

Standing alone between the heaven and the earth, Pangu was the sole master of the world. When he was happy, the world would be clear and clean; when he got

After his death, Pangu's left eye turned into the sun, and the right one into the moon. His limbs and body turned into the five big mountains.





Pangu created the world.

angry, the skies would be overcast; when he took a breath, there would be a fierce wind; when he cried, there would be heavy rains; when his eyes twinkled, lightning would appear in the sky; and when he snored, there would be rolling thunder.

The sky was very high and the earth was dense after so many years; Pangu was extremely exhausted. His legs and arms were no longer powerful. He fell slowly and died. His left eye became the shining sun and the right one, the gentle moon. His body and limbs turned into five big mountains, and his blood formed the roaring waters. His veins became far-stretching roads and his muscles fertile land. The innumerable stars in the sky came from his hair and beard, and the flowers and trees from his skin and the fine hair on his body. His marrow and teeth turned into hard metals, round, shining pearls and smooth jade. His sweat turned into blessed rain and sweet dew that nurtured all things on earth.

Pangu was great. He had not only separated the heaven from the earth, but also created a beautiful world with his own body after he died. Pangu was thus lauded as a hero and ancestor by the Chinese nation.

The legend of Pangu was popular with the Han community. Other Chinese communities adopted similar versions of the legend, with different heroes.

2. Nuwa Created Mankind

Pangu separated the heaven from the earth, and created natural landscapes that included wind, thunder, rain and various kinds of birds, animals, worms, fish, among others. But human beings, the rulers of the planet, had not appeared yet. Loneliness and desolation surrounded the whole world. Who created human beings? It was Nuwa, according to a popular legend.

Nuwa walked the desolate lands alone. No one talked to her. She felt lonely, and thought that something should be added to make the world more vital. She then crouched down beside a pool, grabbing some yellow soil and mixing it with water. Nuwa pinched the clay into a little creature resembling her own reflection in the pool.

She put the little thing onto the land, and the tiny thing came alive, screaming and dancing with great joy. Nuwa then named it “Ren” (human beings).

Though Ren’s body was small, he was different from flying birds, crawling animals and swimming fish, as he was created by Nuwa with her own hands. Ren was full of wisdom and had a strong ability to manage all other creations in the world. Satisfied with what she had created, Nuwa was at peace. She continued her work and humans were created one by one. There were now males and females, and all of them screamed and danced joyfully. Then they trooped away from her or ran, scattering in all directions. Nuwa could hear their laughter whenever she wanted. They were her children, and she didn’t feel lonely any more.

Nuwa wanted to scatter these wise things across the earth, yet the vastness of the planet prevented her from achieving her goal even after much hard work. She was already exhausted. Then she came up with a new idea. She got a rope or a cane and put it in a pool. When the rope was filled with clay, she splashed it around, and people were formed. Nuwa was overjoyed at discovering such an easy way of creating people. She flung the rope around without stopping and the land was soon full of humans.

Nuwa was happy. But she was worried that if man was mortal, how would she create new batches? How could the human race



Nuwa



Nuwa used stones to mend the sky.

survive? She thought mankind should multiply by itself. Then she combined a man and a woman together to produce their own offspring and bear the responsibility to raise the next generation. Mankind began to breed and the population grew.

Nuwa has been called Gaomei, goddess of marriage or the earliest matchmaker, as she built the marriage system for mankind and brought men and women together. People offered sacrifices to Nuwa with a grand ceremony every spring, while young people joined together to play, dancing to wonderful music, trying to find their Mr. or Miss Right. So long as they loved each other, they could marry without any interference. Those who were married long but

had no progeny also flocked to the temple, hoping that the goddess would bless them with a child.

Pangu created the world, and Nuwa created both humanity and the marriage system. People lived happily, with vigor and vitality, for many years. But the fire god Zhurong and the water god Gonggong had a great war for some unknown reasons. After his defeat, Gonggong butted the heavenly pillar Buzhou Mountain in the west, causing the sky in the northwest to collapse and the land in the southeast to be flooded. The sun, the moon, and almost all the stars moved to the northwest and the water and dust to the southeast. Another version says that all four heavenly pillars were knocked down, and the heaven and the land were split. A great fire raged and a fierce flood ravaged the land. Savage beasts and birds devoured and preyed on innocent people. Humanity was about to be destroyed.

Nuwa was extremely hurt by what had happened to her kids. She traveled to the four corners of the earth and picked up several

red, yellow, blue, white and black stones to save her kids from the catastrophe. These stones were smelted with fire, and became a pasty liquid. Nuwa then used it to mend the cracks in the sky. She supported the four corners of the sky with the legs she had cut off from a giant turtle. Then she killed the black dragon in the Central Plains and drove the harmful beasts and birds away. Finally, she burned reeds and blocked the flood with the ashes. Mankind was saved by the great mother Nuwa and began to live a happy and tranquil life again. The only flaw was that the sky in the northwest and the earth in the southeast couldn't be restored. Both of them inclined slightly, so the sun, the moon and the stars fell down in the west while the rivers and oceans flowed to the northeast.

Different legends about the origin of humanity reflect those particular cultures' understanding of the world and themselves.

3. Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors

After the great mother Nuwa created human beings, they lived together in a totally natural way, threatened occasionally by natural disasters as well as natural enemies such as wolves, tigers and leopards. Mankind gradually evolved from barbarism to civilization, and some outstanding figures emerged over our long history.

There are different versions of the "three sage kings and five legendary emperors" legend (three sage kings: Fuxi, Suiren and Shennong or Tianhuang, Dihuang and Renhuang; five legendary emperors: Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor), Zhuanxu, Diku, Tang Yao and Yu Shun). Incidentally, unlike Greek mythology, China's myths always lack a clear pedigree. Gods often can not be distinguished from mortals, and sometimes the god is actually a man. For instance, it was said that Nuwa and Fuxi are the primogenitors of mankind. As legend goes, Nuwa married her brother, Fuxi. They

Fuxi and Nuwa, painting on silk, Tang Dynasty. Another legend relating to the origin of humanity goes like this: Fuxi married Nuwa, and they gave birth to human beings. In the painting Fuxi and Nuwa are both shaped like snakes with human heads, facing each other and with bodies tangled. Nuwa holds a pair of compasses, while Fuxi holds a carpenter's square, symbolizing the means of production and social order, respectively.

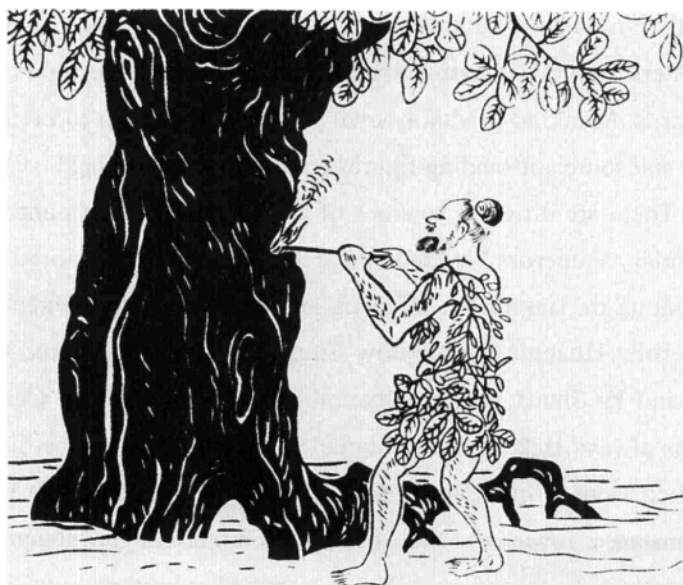


are both shaped like snakes, with human heads. Later they set up the marriage system, stipulating that brothers and sisters were not allowed to marry. This reflected the transition from consanguineous marriage to exogamy.

Although some haven't been listed within the three sage kings and five virtuous emperors, they made fairly great contributions to the development of mankind, therefore they were considered as the heroes in Chinese history.

Sui ren (generally called "Sui renshi") was the inventor of fire-producing tools. At the time, people ate animal meat uncooked, as well as fresh plants and fruits. So Sui ren taught people to rub wood together to produce fire and cook their food. Delicious food was then available to people and their general constitution greatly improved.

Fuxi (generally called "Fuxishi") was the inventor of hunting and the fish-net. He saw people pick up only the available plants and fruits, and they could never find food in colder seasons. Some

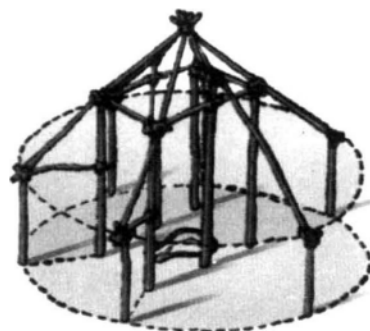
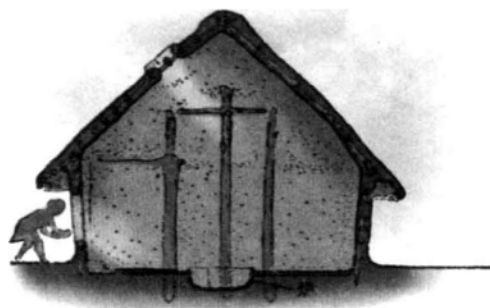


Sui ren drilled wood to produce fire.

people even died of starvation. So he taught people to hunt, raise animals, make fish-net and use them for fishing. He also invented a way to make pottery, and taught people to cook food with it. Food varieties were greatly enriched. It was said that the influential Eight Diagrams was also invented by Fuxi.

Youchaoshi was the inventor of the house. He saw that people living in the wild were often attacked by animals. So he taught people to build houses with wood. The houses were built on stilts and even in trees as protection from wild animals.

Shennong (generally called "Shennongshi") was the inventor of agriculture and medicine. Although food variety was greatly enriched by collecting plants, fishing and hunting, sufficient food could never be secured. So Shennong taught people to cultivate crops and produce more grains with farm tools, including the plough and ploughshare. Shennong was saddened when he saw people threatened by diseases, and some even died young. He went around and tasted hundreds of herbs to discover materials for medicine. He also taught people to cure themselves. People's constitution was greatly



Houses lived in by primitive people



Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs.