

● CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

Creation of the

中国创世神话

Written by Cui Maoxin & Song Dongyang
Illustrated by Tai Shuangyuan

Universe

Pan Gu: Creator of the Universe

Nü Wa Creates Humanity

Nü Wa Patches Up the Sky

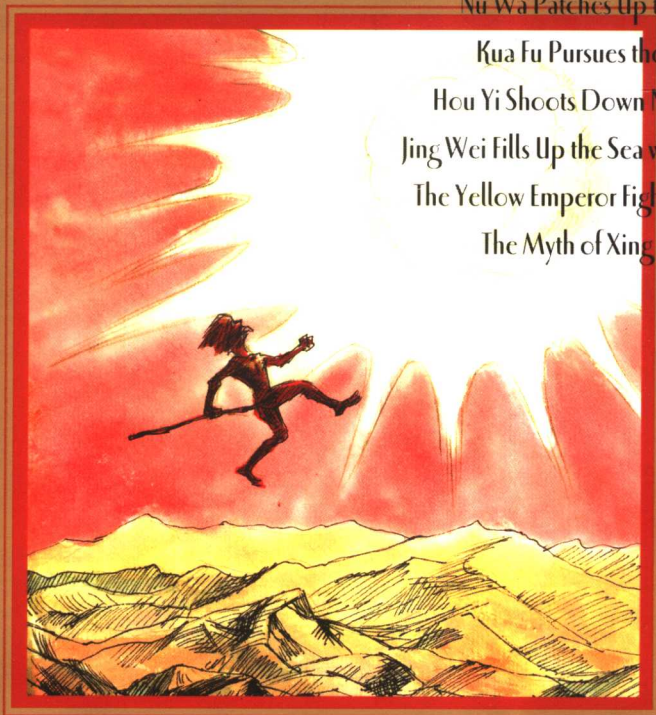
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The Myth of Xing Tian

Preface

All must grow from innocent childhood to adulthood. Similarly human society has also developed from naive infancy—the primitive tribal societies of ancient times—to the modern, urbanized, technological world we live in today.

Children are by nature curious creatures. Their default mode is a questioning one. Why is the sky so high? How was it created? Why is the Earth under our feet so solid? How was it created? How did we come to have a sun, a moon and twinkling stars in the universe? Why do they insist on rising in the east and setting in the west? How is it that those winged creatures, the birds, can fly so freely in the air? Why are fish so at home in water? Where did humans themselves come from? What happens to us after we die?

People living thousands of years before us in ancient societies asked these and many more questions about the universe they inhabited. The world they encountered was greatly puzzling. Remember that this was a time before science and experimentation did so much to explain the world to us. Ancient peoples, with no such knowledge, speculated, guessed and made presumptions to try to explain to themselves the natural phenomena they observed, ideas of the Heavens and hell and the origins of their own species.

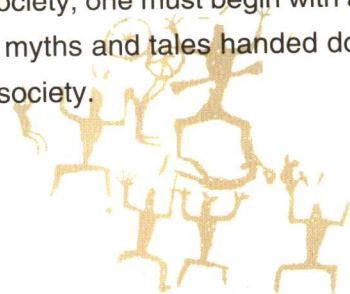




The Heavens and Earth were originally an integrated whole, often likened to an egg. Interestingly most ancient societies came to a general consensus about this basic concept. Pan Gu who lived in the “egg” was responsible for splitting the “egg” apart into the Heavens and Earth; Man, the ancient Chinese believed, was created by Nü Wa with yellow clay; ten scorching suns in the sky boiled all the water on the Earth, scorching the land and destroying crops. The suffering lasted until the great hero, Hou Yi, shot nine of the ten suns out of the sky with his unerring arrows....

Though these stories appear absurd to us, schooled as we are in the certainties of modern science, these fables embody the way our ancestors understood the world in ancient times. Legends were created by our forebears in order to reflect the way in which they saw the relationship between man and nature; between nature and human society.

If one can picture Chinese culture as a long and winding free-flowing river, then the source of this river can be traced back to these ancient tales; If one can picture Chinese culture as a mature, leafy tree, then the roots of this tree lie in the soil that is ancient Chinese tales; If one wishes to delve deeper into Chinese culture and the essence of Chinese civilization and society, one must begin with a thorough investigation of the myths and tales handed down to us from ancient Chinese society.





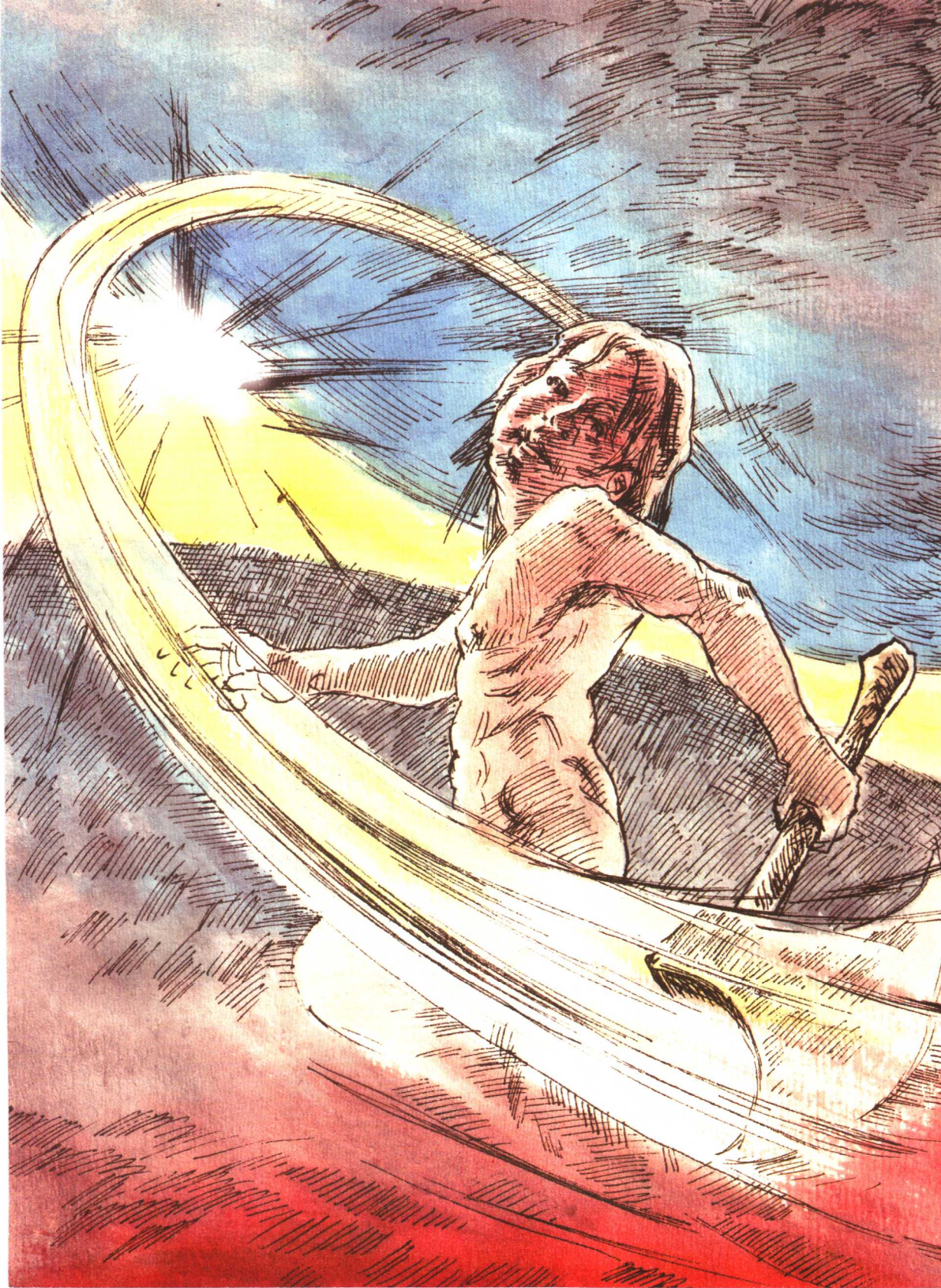
Pan Gu: Creator of the Universe



Typically the first story of any civilization's mythology involves an explanation of how the universe was created. In Chinese mythology, this is the story of how Pan Gu created the world by separating the Heavens and Earth from chaos. Pan Gu, humankind's first ancestor, enjoys an eminent and holy status in the pantheon of Chinese culture and civilization. It was he who, it is said, created the universe and all the creatures who would inhabit it. Myths associated with this deity are still passed on from generation to generation in Chinese households all over the world.

In primordial times, the Heavens and Earth were one, both coexisting in essential unity like the yolk and the white of a great egg. There was no east, no west, no south or north, no back or forth, left or right; there was no sun, no moon, no stars. There were most definitely no living beings let alone humans. But deep inside the egg's yolk over millennia of millennia grew our great ancestor, Pan Gu. There he lived, without sustenance or fluid, sleeping the sleep of ages





for some 18,000 years.

One day, his slumber ended. He woke up suddenly and opened wide his eyes, seeing nothing but darkness and obscure chaos all around him. "Where is here? Why so dark?" he wondered. As he had for so long inhabited this humble eggshell, Pan Gu felt very constrained and claustrophobic. He longed to stretch out his numbed limbs. "What an oppressive place!" he cursed. Angrily, he laid hands on a big axe, which came from he knew not where, and slashed madly with all his might at the dark chaos which swirled all around him.

With an enormous, universe-shaking crash, the eggshell cleaved in two. The elements of light drifted up to form the Heavens while the dark elements descended below to form the Earth. It was in this way that what had been primordial, unitary chaos was separated by Pan Gu's great slash of the axe.

"How much better things are now!" Pan Gu exclaimed contentedly after the Heavens and Earth had separated themselves into distinct entities. He drew a deep breath and made to stand up, but found he could not do so. the Heavens had formed itself at a distance so close to the Earth





that the great Pan Gu could not stand up to his full height. This was most unsatisfactory for Pan Gu. Not only could he still not stretch himself out fully but he also realized there was a danger that the Heavens and Earth could reform into unitary chaos in the future if greater distance was not put between them. Never one for delaying a necessary action, Pan Gu pushed up against the Heavens with his enormous hands, simultaneously pushing the whole weight of his body down through his feet to the Earth in order to further separate the duality of the universe.

With the enormous strength of Pan Gu, the Heavens was raised another *zhang* (3.3 meters) and the Earth lowered by the same distance. The effort resulted in the huge frame of Pan Gu's body being extended by one *zhang* also.

This was the situation that pertained for the following eighteen thousand years. The enormous Pan Gu, now some ninety thousand *li* (two *li* equal one kilometer) in height propped up the sky like a towering giant pillar, personally ensuring the separation of the Heavens and Earth.

Millennia passed and the essential structure of the Heavens and Earth solidified to such an extent that there was now no possibility of them reuniting and plunging the





universe back to primordial chaos. Pan Gu had utterly exhausted his vast reserves of physical strength. The utterly fatigued god loosened his hands from the Heavens and laid down to rest. He never woke again.

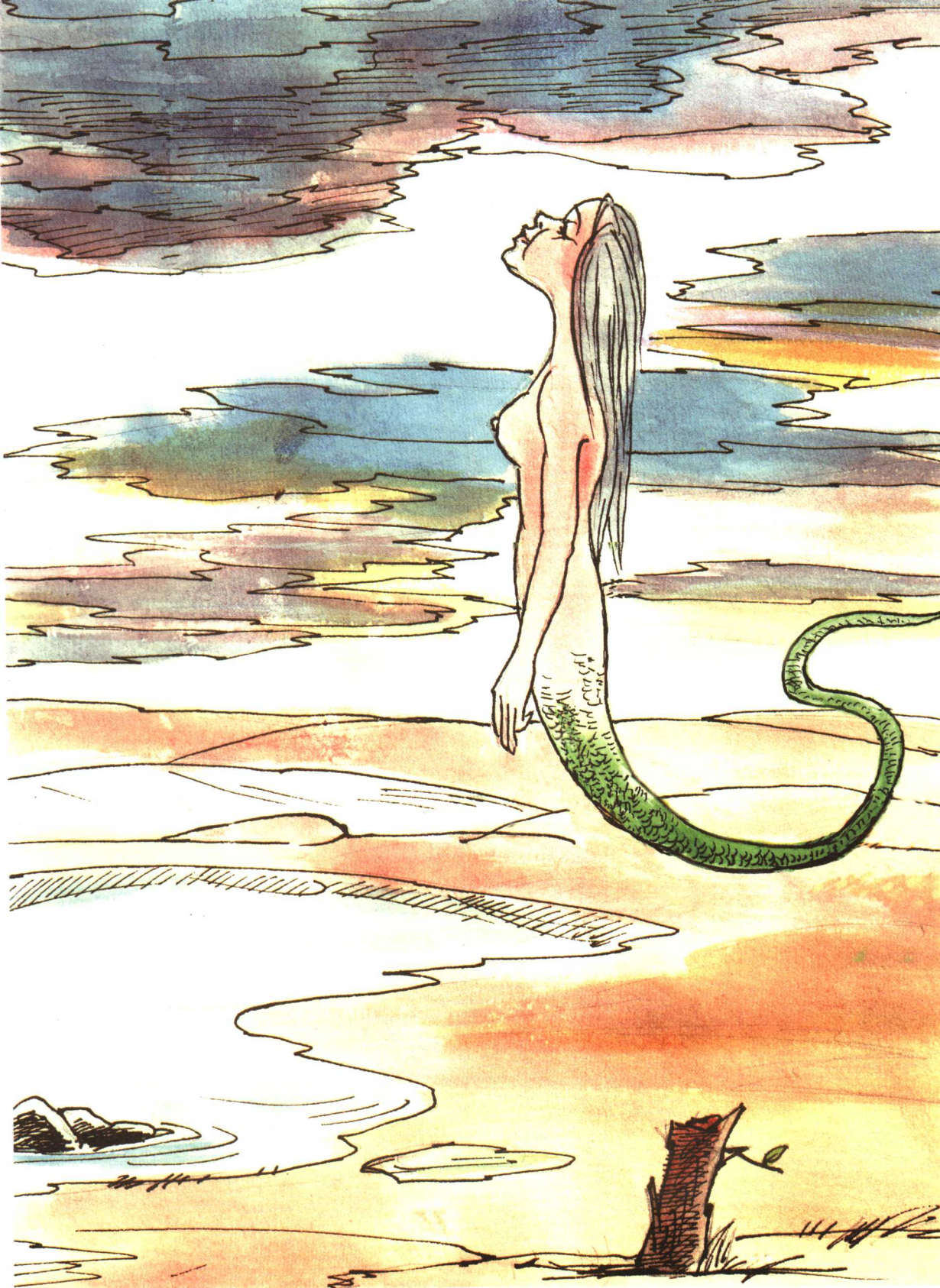
His enormous body underwent a profound metamorphosis: his head, feet, torso, left arm and right arm became great mountains in the east, the west, the centre, the south and the north respectively. These five holy mountains, which formed a matrix defining the four corners and the center of the land formed huge columns of stone soaring to the sky from the land, continuing Pan Gu's arduous mission to separate the Heavens from the Earth. Meanwhile, Pan Gu's left eye became the sun in the sky, providing warmth and life to the Earth; his right eye became the silvery moon ensuring that the land would never plunge into complete darkness when the left eye had to rest. The moon is full and round when Pan Gu's right eye is wide open and is in crescent every time he blinks.

His countless hairs on Pan Gu's body were transformed into a myriad of stars adorning the night sky with flashing fire. His blood became the foaming rivers, lakes and seas that covered much of the land; his flesh became the boun-

teous land rich enough to support all creatures; his bones became the trees, grass and flowers; his teeth the metals and minerals deposited in the Earth's crust; his innards formed all starry pearls, jades and precious stones; his sweat ran into the rain, dew and showers falling lovingly on the seedlings of life-giving crops; his very dying breath called into existence the light wind and the cotton clouds drifting lazily across the azure skies. Every part of his body metamorphised into the elements that make up our world. Thus Pan Gu essentially gave birth to the Earth and the Heavens and through his selfless sacrifice brought into being all things that make existence possible and delightful.

The myth of Pan Gu has been in circulation in countless different variations for millennia. The spirit of his sacrifice, his willingness to perish that others, indeed all, might live and prosper is a spirit cherished by the countless offspring who owe their existence to our great ancestor, Pan Gu the ninety-thousand li tall life-bringing giant.







Nü Wa Creates Humanity

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After Pan Gu separated the Heavens and the Earth from primordial chaos, there appeared mountains and rivers, flowers, grass, and trees, birds, beasts, insects and fish, wind, rain, thunder and lightning. This vibrant environment seemed to possess everything except beings to inhabit it. How did humans come to inhabit the Earth? Every civilization has its own creation myth. This is China's.



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After Pan Gu's death, a great goddess emerged. She was Nü Wa. Possessed of vast magic powers Nü Wa had the body of a woman but the tail of a snake. Despite her immense powers, Nü Wa was a sad and lonely creature wandering the world in solitude with only her shadow for company. She thought sadly of how much pleasure some companions could bring her.

One day while Nü Wa was resting beside a river, she caught sight of the reflection of her face and body in the clear water. She was seized by a sudden inspiration: "Why not fashion a creature in my own image to populate this

world and share its pleasures with me?" Greatly pleased with this idea, Nü Wa immediately set to work.

Her first dilemma was what material to use to fashion these creatures. Nü Wa thought long and hard about this problem. After some time a thought occurred to her: "Chinaware is fine material and it is made from clay. Surely clay could provide a decent material for the molding of Humanity." Nü Wa dug up some yellow clay and mixed it carefully with water. Sitting on the riverbank, she began to mold creatures using her reflection in the water as her model. Soon the clever and deft fingers of the goddess had molded a handsome clay boy who looked unmistakably like his creator. However, Nü Wa decided to give the creature two legs instead of her own tail so as to match the clay boy's two arms. She blew gently on the clay figure thus instantly infusing it with life and vitality. The young boy smiled, opened his mouth and called Nü Wa "mama". The great goddess was filled with joy at the fruit of her labors and set to work again. After some time had passed, Nü Wa found herself surrounded by a crowd of smiling, crying creatures, which could walk upright and speak

