

Illustrated Version

Ancient Chinese Wisdom

CHINESE MYTHOLOGY & THIRTY-SIX STRATAGEMS

ZHANG CIYUN

Shanghai Translation Publishing House



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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国神话故事与三十六计 = Chinese mythology & thirty-six stratagems;

英文 / 张慈贇著 — 上海: 上海译文出版社, 2015. 7

(中国传统文化经典系列)

ISBN 978-7-5327-6891-2

I. ①中… II. ①张… III. ①神话—作品集—中国—英文

IV. ①I277.5

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2015) 第 005596 号

Chinese Mythology & Thirty-Six Stratagems

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上海世纪出版股份有限公司

译文出版社出版

网址: www.yiwen.com.cn

上海世纪出版股份有限公司发行中心发行

200001 上海福建中路193号 www.ewen.co

浙江新华数码印务有限公司印刷

开本 850 × 1168 1/32 印张 5.75 插页 5 字数 148,000

2015年7月第1版 2015年7月第1次印刷

ISBN 978-7-5327-6891-2/H · 1243

定价: 46.00 元

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Introduction

Fictional or semi-fictional stories and practical concepts are like yin and yang, the two fundamental principles of ancient Chinese philosophy. Although apparently contradictory, the two aspects are often complementary, interconnected and interdependent in Chinese culture.

In this book, we present just such yin and yang, namely, "Chinese Mythology" and the "Thirty-Six Stratagems."

The mythology here describes ancient beliefs in origins, ancestors, history and deities. It explains how the universe was created and how human beings came into existence. Many elements of mythology were later adapted or assimilated into the three major belief systems in China: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

On the other hand, the "Thirty-Six Stratagems," a term first used in China more than 1,500 years ago, were originally a collection of strategies or practical ruses for warfare. But today, many Chinese people apply them to politics, business, sports as well as daily living habits.

By reading both the "yin" — mythology — and "yang" — the stratagems — in this book, you may arrive at a deeper understanding of exceptional ancient Chinese wisdom.

Chinese Mythology

- 2 / 盘古开天地 (pán gǔ kāi tiān dì)
Pangu creates the world
- 5 / 女娲造人 (nǚ wā zào rén)
Nuwa makes man
- 8 / 女娲补天 (nǚ wā bǔ tiān)
Nuwa mends the sky
- 11 / 伏羲的故事 (fú xī de gù shì)
The works of Fuxi
- 14 / 神农的故事 (shén nóng de gù shì)
Hail the 'Divine Farmer'
- 18 / 精卫填海 (jīng wèi tián hǎi)
Jingwei tests the sea
- 21 / 燧人钻木取火 (suì rén zuān mù qǔ huǒ)
Saved by Fire Fetcher Suiren
- 25 / 夸父追日 (kuā fù zhuī rì)
Kuaifu chases the sun
- 28 / 嫫祖的故事 (léi zǔ de gù shì)
Tale as smooth as silk
- 31 / 仓颉造字 (cāng jié zào zì)
Birth of a language
- 34 / 后羿射日 (hòu yì shè rì)
Sun-birds bake Earth

- 38 / 嫦娥奔月 (cháng é bēn yuè)
Restless Chang'e flees
- 41 / 鲧盗息壤 (gǔn dào xī rǎng)
Gun steals Magic Soil
- 44 / 大禹治水 (dà yǔ zhì shuǐ)
Yu harnesses flooding
- 47 / 瑶姬的故事 (yáo jī de gù shì)
Goddess Peak of Wushan Mountain
- 50 / 牛郎织女 (niú láng zhī nǚ)
The cowherd and the girl weaver
- 54 / 十二生肖 (shí èr shēng xiāo)
Zodiac animals
- 58 / 愚公移山 (yú gōng yí shān)
Moving mountains
- 61 / 钟馗的故事 (zhōng kuí de gù shì)
The Demon Queller

Thirty-Six Stratagems

- 64 / 瞒天过海 (mán tiān guò hǎi)
Deceiving the heavens to cross the sea
- 67 / 围魏救赵 (wéi wèi jiù zhào)
Besieging Wei to save Zhao
- 70 / 借刀杀人 (jiè dāo shā rén)
Killing with a borrowed knife
- 73 / 以逸待劳 (yǐ yì dài láo)
Waiting at ease for a worn-out enemy

- 76 / 趁火打劫 (chèn huǒ dǎ jié)
Looting a house when it's on fire
- 79 / 声东击西 (shēng dōng jī xī)
Making a feint to the east, but hitting out
in the west
- 82 / 无中生有 (wú zhōng shēng yǒu)
Creating something out of nothing
- 85 / 暗度陈仓 (àn dù chén cāng)
A ruse to divert your enemies
- 88 / 隔岸观火 (gé àn guān huǒ)
Watching the fire burning from the other
side of the river
- 91 / 笑里藏刀 (xiào lǐ cáng dāo)
Hiding a dagger behind a smile
- 94 / 李代桃僵 (lǐ dài táo jiāng)
A plum tree sacrificed to protect the
peach tree
- 97 / 顺手牵羊 (shùn shǒu qiān yáng)
Pilfering a goat in passing
- 100 / 打草惊蛇 (dǎ cǎo jīng shé)
Startling the snake, or not
- 103 / 借尸还魂 (jiè shī huán hún)
The ploy of incarnation
- 106 / 调虎离山 (diào hǔ lí shān)
Luring tiger out of the mountains
- 109 / 欲擒故纵 (yù qín gù zòng)
Letting up on your pursuit

- 112 / 抛砖引玉 (pāo zhuān yǐn yù)
Throwing out a brick to attract a piece of
jade
- 115 / 擒贼擒王 (qín zéi qín wáng)
To beat the enemy army, capture their
leader first
- 118 / 釜底抽薪 (fǔ dǐ chōu xīn)
Removing the burning firewood from
beneath a boiling cauldron
- 121 / 浑水摸鱼 (hùn shuǐ mō yú)
Fishing in turbid waters
- 124 / 金蝉脱壳 (jīn chán tuō qiào)
Ruse of the golden cicada
- 127 / 关门捉贼 (guān mén zhuō zéi)
Shut the door to catch the thief
- 130 / 远交近攻 (yuǎn jiāo jìn gōng)
Making distant states allies while
attacking a neighbor
- 133 / 借道伐虢 (jiè dào fá guó)
Defeating one enemy at a time
- 136 / 偷梁换柱 (tōu liáng huàn zhù)
Swapping good wood for bad
- 139 / 指桑骂槐 (zhǐ sāng mà huái)
Achieving the result without waging too
many battles
- 142 / 假痴不癫 (jiǎ chī bù diān)
Feigning weakness to wait for the right
time to strike

- 145 / 上屋抽梯 (shàng wū chōu tī)
Cutting off escape routes
- 148 / 树上开花 (shù shàng kāi huā)
Defending with 'blossoms'
- 151 / 反客为主 (fǎn kè wéi zhǔ)
Guest outstaying welcome
- 154 / 美人计 (měi rén jì)
Beaten by womanly wiles
- 157 / 空城计 (kōng chéng jì)
An empty fortress strategy
- 160 / 反间计 (fǎn jiān jì)
Sowing distrust in enemy camp
- 163 / 苦肉计 (kǔ ròu jì)
When one hurts himself, he is really to hurt
his enemy
- 166 / 连环计 (lián huán jì)
Multi-ploy scheme at play
- 169 / 走为上计 (zǒu wéi shàng jì)
When everything fails, retreat

移千古開天地



Chinese Mythology

盘古开天地 (pán gǔ kāi tiān dì)

Pangu creates the world

At the very beginning, there was no sky, no earth, no light and no sound. The whole universe was a gargantuan mass of mixed substances in the shape of an egg of an inconceivable size.

However, in the core of the egg there was a giant called Pangu. He slept in the darkness for 18,000 years. One day, he woke up but felt very uncomfortable and had difficulty breathing because his body was tightly wrapped up in a mass of substances. So, he tried to stretch out his long arms and, accidentally, found a very big ax. He grasped the tool and used all his might to strike out. Following a deafening bang, the egg shell broke.

Then, the relatively lighter and clearer substance in the mass began to float upward and get 10 feet (3.04 meters) higher every day. Gradually, the substance started to form the sky. Meanwhile, the heavier and muddier substance was settling down and becoming 10 feet thicker every day to form the earth.

Finally, Pangu could stand up and stretch out his arms and legs. But he was concerned that the sky and earth might fall into a mixed mass again someday in the future, so he decided to use his head to uphold the sky while putting his feet firmly on the earth.

As the giant continued to grow taller by 10 feet a day, after another 18,000 years, the sky and earth were nearly 30,000 miles (48,280 kilometers) apart and the possibility of the two merging

into one mass again became very unlikely.

But by that time, the giant had used up all his strength. He collapsed and died.

Before his death, he yelled out loudly, and that sound later became the rumbling thunder. His bright eyesight became the blinding lightning. His last breath became the wind and cloud.

Meanwhile, his left eye transformed into the sun and the right eye the moon.

His spreading arms and legs were turned into rolling mountains; his blood became flowing rivers. His flesh became fertile land and his hair turned into grass and trees. Also, precious metals and minerals were formed out of his teeth and bones.

When he was alive, Pangu used all his strength and stamina to create the sky and earth. After his death, his body was transmuted into all the necessary elements for nurturing future lives on the earth.

In the Chinese culture, Pangu creating the world remains a conventional belief other than the Big Bang Theory of the universe.

People also tend to use the phrase *pan gu kai tian di* to mean the very beginning of the universe. For instance, when Chinese speakers say *pan gu kai tian di* or “since Pangu created the world,” it means “since the dawn of time” in English.



女娲造人 (nǚ wā zào rén)

Nuwa makes man

After Pangu created the world, there were mountains, rivers and plants on earth but no creatures.

One day, the Goddess Nuwa started to wander around for the first time and soon felt lonely. She thought it was a beautiful world, but it should not be so deserted. To fill it with life, she decided to make creatures to inhabit earth.

On the first day, she used clay to mold a chicken, the second day a dog, the third day a lamb, the fourth day a pig and the fifth day a horse. Then Nuwa breathed life into all these clay sculptures.

Suddenly, she found herself surrounded by these lively creatures. But, it was a bit chaotic. Although she made bigger animals every day, none of them was powerful or intelligent enough to rule the world.

When she took a rest on a river bank, she saw her own reflection in the water and it suddenly dawned on her that she needed to create a creature resembling herself, beautiful and intelligent.

So, she chose some fine yellow clay and began to mold a new creature with delicate features and a unique figure. It took her days to finish the first figurine. When she put it down on the ground, it sprang into life and became a strong and highly intelligent man. Then she created a smaller version of the man and it turned into a woman.

Nuwa was extremely satisfied with her creation and spent all her time in the following days molding more men and women. But she

soon became exhausted. It seemed almost impossible for her to mold enough humans to fill the vast world.

Then, she went to a mountain and brought back a wicker cane. She made a mud pool and then immersed the cane into it. When it was coated in mud, she whirled the cane over her head. All the mud drops that fell to the ground instantly transmuted into men and women.

In this way, Nuwa began mass production of human beings.

However, the men and women created by the whirling cane were a bit coarse and less refined compared with those molded by Nuwa with fine yellow clay. As a result, the latter became the wise and noble and the former the poor and common.

Nuwa later found another problem. All the men and women she created would grow old and die. To make this life form last forever, she taught the human beings how to form families and breed the next generation. She also taught them how to build shelters, how to gather seeds and fruit, and how to hunt.

So, in the Chinese culture, Nuwa is widely worshiped as the mother of all human life.



女娲补天 (nǚ wā bǔ tiān)

Nuwa mends the sky

After being created by the Goddess Nuwa, human beings led a peaceful life around the world for a long time until one day the four corners of the sky suddenly collapsed.

The sky began to crack and the water falling through the developing holes and gaps turned into fierce floods sweeping across all lands. Separately, great fires broke out and raged in all directions and would not die out.

To make things worse, all sorts of savage beasts and vicious birds came out to prey on the helpless human beings.

After Nuwa learned about the cataclysm, the goddess turned her attention back to earth and looked for ways to help the innocent people.

First, she piled up a mountain of firewood and found rocks of five different colors. She lit the wood with a big tree and melted the rocks into igneous magma and used it to mend the cracks and holes in the sky. Later, the magma became bright and colorful clouds.

Then, she tried to find something that could be used to elevate the four corners of the sky. When she was at a loss, a giant turtle swam to the shore and offered its own four legs to Nuwa.

The goddess was moved to tears. She thanked the kind-hearted creature and bid farewell to the turtle as it gradually sank to the bottom of the sea.

Using the four legs of the giant turtle, Nuwa propped up the