

汉英双语

FAMOUS CHINESE MYTHS SERIES

All Birds Paying 百鸟朝凤
Homage to the Phoenix

Retold by Duan Lixin
Illustrated by Liu Xiangwei



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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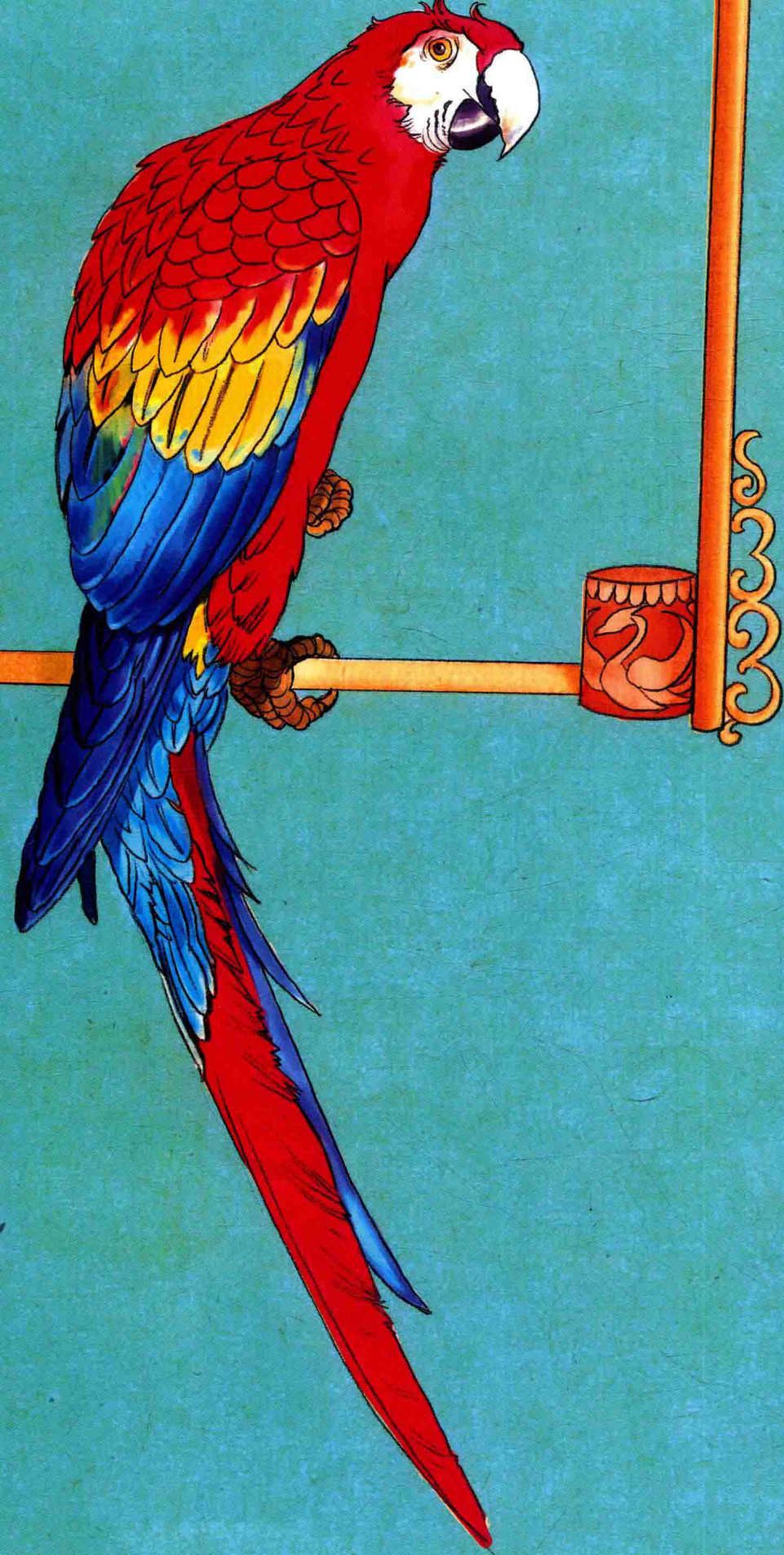


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According to legend, in 26 century BC, there once lived a hardworking emperor called Yellow Emperor, who loved his people. He taught them how to get fire from wood by friction, how to build boats and carts for transport, how to drill wells for water and how to domesticate wild animals.

Around him were a group of able and resourceful officials. Amongst them were Rongcheng who designed the lunar calendar, Jusong and Cangjie who invented hieroglyphs (Chinese pictographic characters), and Linglun who created different musical tunes and melodies.



One day, a number of officials came to have an audience with the Yellow Emperor; however, the latter seemed to be deeply worried. The officials asked, “We would like to know what is troubling you, Your Majesty?”

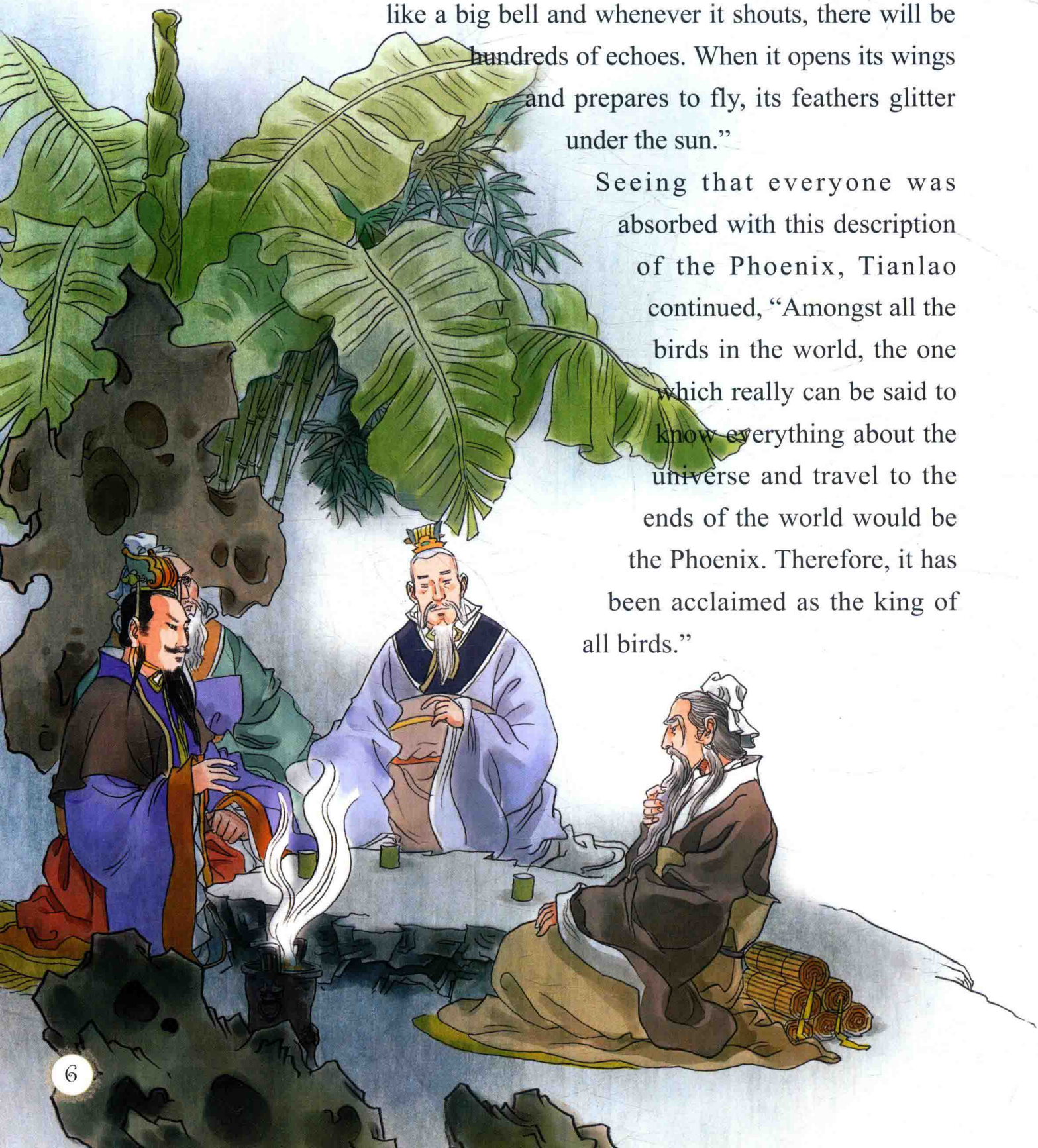
The Yellow Emperor sighed and said, “Well, I have domesticated over a hundred different types of birds in the whole world and I still haven’t had the chance to see what a Phoenix looks like!”

The officials looked at each other and did not know how to answer the emperor. “Why don’t we go and ask Tianlao, the learned man,” an elderly official suggested. “Rumor has it that Tianlao knows everything. Perhaps he will know where to find a Phoenix.”

The Yellow Emperor was very happy to hear the suggestion and could not wait to lead the group of officials to visit Tianlao.

After learning of the intention of the emperor's visit, Tianlao happily answered, "The Phoenix is a divine bird that originated from the East in ancient times. It has the head of a chicken, the jaw of a swallow, the neck of a snake and the chest of a goose but its back is covered with the scales of a tortoise. It has sharp claws like an eagle's and a fish-like tail. With a very tall figure, the Phoenix's sound is loud like a big bell and whenever it shouts, there will be hundreds of echoes. When it opens its wings and prepares to fly, its feathers glitter under the sun."

Seeing that everyone was absorbed with this description of the Phoenix, Tianlao continued, "Amongst all the birds in the world, the one which really can be said to know everything about the universe and travel to the ends of the world would be the Phoenix. Therefore, it has been acclaimed as the king of all birds."

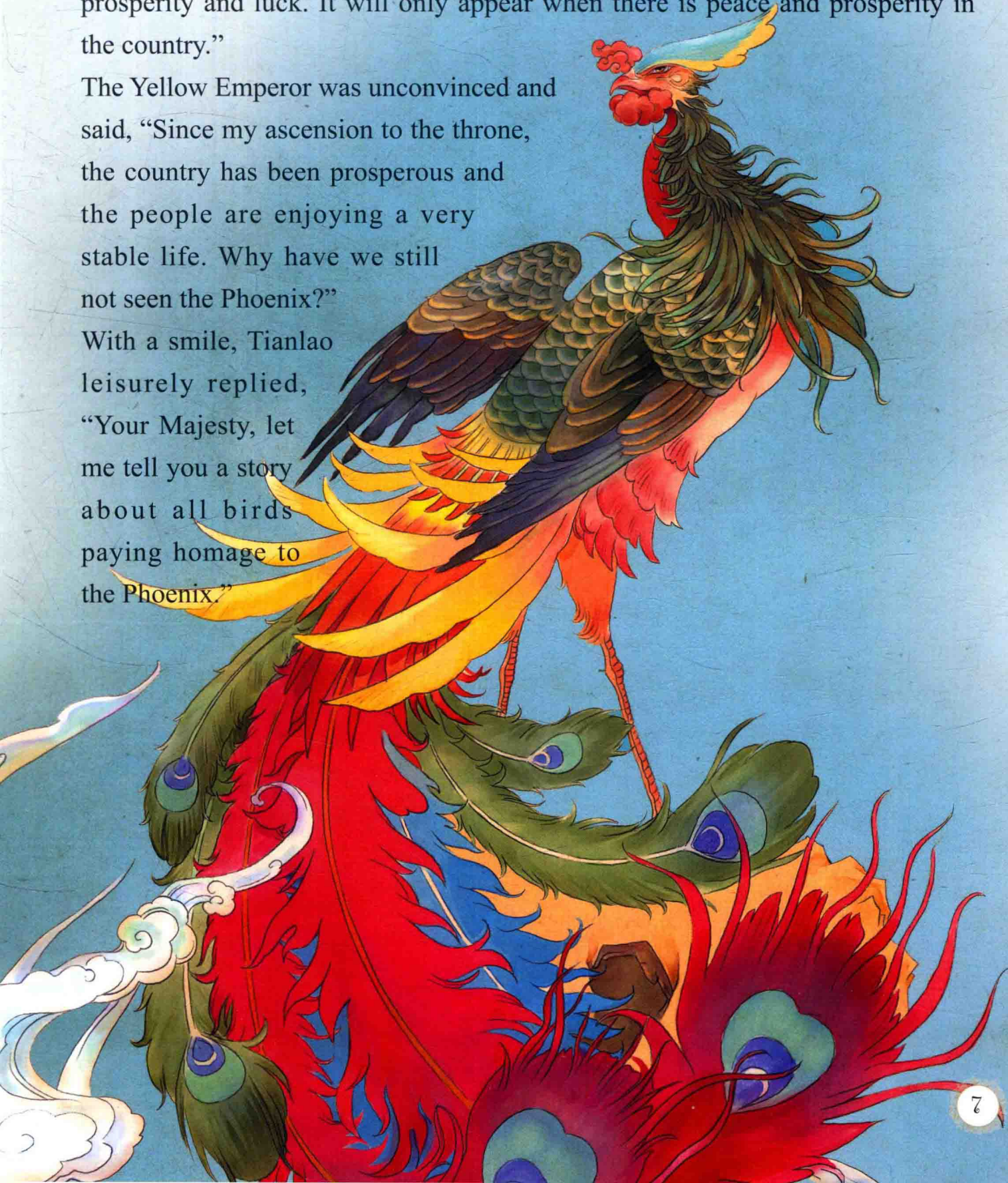


After hearing the story, the Yellow Emperor was mesmerized by the Phoenix. He eagerly asked Tianlao, "What a legendary bird! How can one have the chance to see it?"

Tianlao contemplated this for a while and said, "The Phoenix is a sign of prosperity and luck. It will only appear when there is peace and prosperity in the country."

The Yellow Emperor was unconvinced and said, "Since my ascension to the throne, the country has been prosperous and the people are enjoying a very stable life. Why have we still not seen the Phoenix?"

With a smile, Tianlao leisurely replied, "Your Majesty, let me tell you a story about all birds paying homage to the Phoenix."






“According to legend, during the ancient times in the East, there were two powerful, almighty birds; one was called the Phoenix and the other one was called the Bifang.

The Phoenix was majestically charming, clever and beautiful. All the birds loved to gather around the Phoenix as it was also kind and tender.

The Bifang looked like a red-crowned crane with only one leg. Its beak was white and its body covered with red stripes. It swallowed flames and was very cruel. The Bifang was the sign of evil and all the birds stayed away from it.

During the peaceful period when there were great harvests from the land with beautiful weather, all the birds were flying and playing happily in the forests and around the mountains. The Phoenix reminded everyone, ‘We have peaceful and carefree lives now. However, we should stay alert and watch out for trouble. As the saying goes, hardships and trials lead to survival; comforts and pleasure end up in death.’





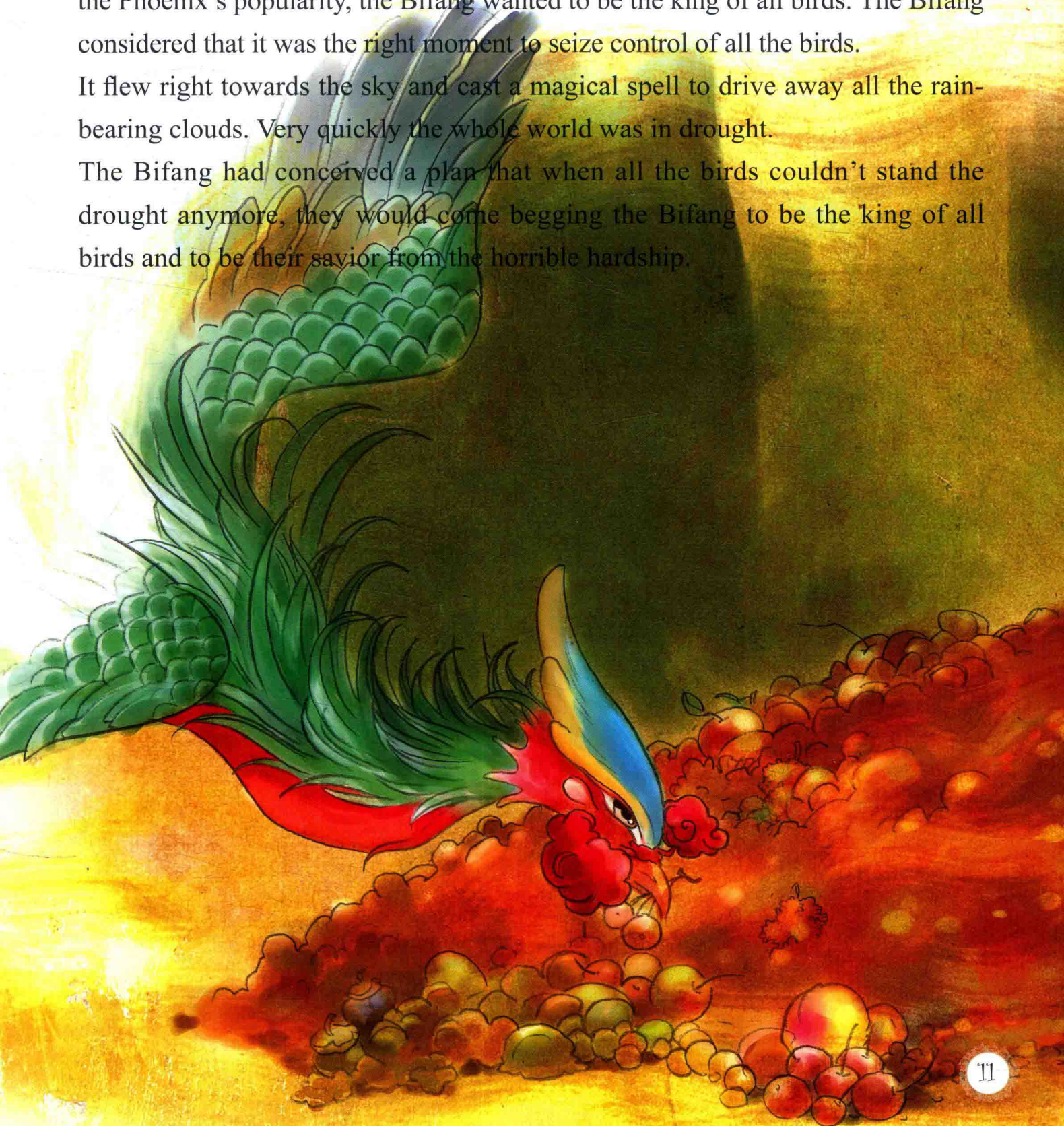
All the birds ignored
the advice and felt
that the Phoenix
was seeking to
burden them with
unnecessary worries.

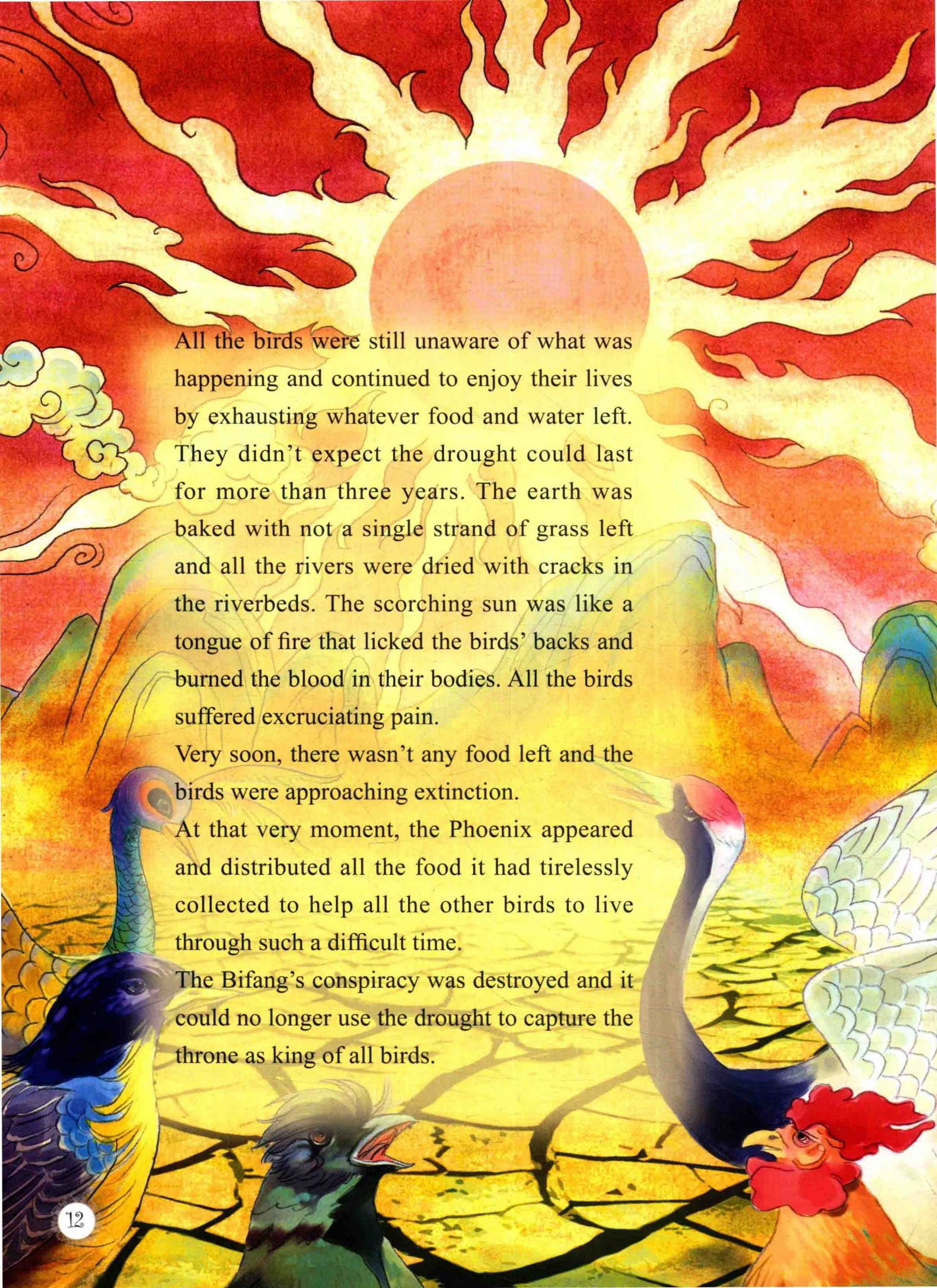
The Phoenix had not given up while the other birds were playing. It worked tirelessly all day long to gather foods, grains and the leftover fruits from other birds. With these actions, the Phoenix managed to accumulate and store food in preparation for any future unforeseen disasters.

Meanwhile, on the other side, the Bifang was conspiring on its own. Jealous about the Phoenix's popularity, the Bifang wanted to be the king of all birds. The Bifang considered that it was the right moment to seize control of all the birds.

It flew right towards the sky and cast a magical spell to drive away all the rain-bearing clouds. Very quickly the whole world was in drought.

The Bifang had conceived a plan that when all the birds couldn't stand the drought anymore, they would come begging the Bifang to be the king of all birds and to be their savior from the horrible hardship.





All the birds were still unaware of what was happening and continued to enjoy their lives by exhausting whatever food and water left. They didn't expect the drought could last for more than three years. The earth was baked with not a single strand of grass left and all the rivers were dried with cracks in the riverbeds. The scorching sun was like a tongue of fire that licked the birds' backs and burned the blood in their bodies. All the birds suffered excruciating pain.

Very soon, there wasn't any food left and the birds were approaching extinction.

At that very moment, the Phoenix appeared and distributed all the food it had tirelessly collected to help all the other birds to live through such a difficult time.

The Bifang's conspiracy was destroyed and it could no longer use the drought to capture the throne as king of all birds.

Thanking the Phoenix's generosity of distributing food to save their lives, the birds all agreed to nominate Phoenix to be the king. From then on, with every year of good harvest, on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, all the birds would gather together to pay respects to the Phoenix.



After the drought created by Bifang, the world had a fantastic year of good harvest. When the day of worship came, the Phoenix stood high up on the mountaintop, showing off its beautiful feathers. Under the brilliant sunshine, it looked as if the Phoenix's body were enveloped in a glittering, golden aurora. All the birds surrounded the Phoenix in the middle and danced together with great harmony and happiness.

The Bifang was standing at the far end of a cliff. With a bitter taste still lingering in his mind about his failed attempt, it coldly observed the gathering of the birds. Its jealousy grew by the day and it was concocting the next evil plan.

