

Chinese Creation Myths

There are five major views of creation in China:

The first, and most consistent historically, is that no myth exists. This is not to say there were none existing at all, only that there is no evidence showing an attempt to explain the world's origin.

The second view is very indirect. It is merely based on a question of a dialog in an earlier reference. The idea in the question implies that the heavens and the earth separated from one another.

The third view is the one perpetuated by Taoism by the nature of its philosophy. It appears "relatively" late in Chinese history. In it, Tao is described as the ultimate force behind the creation. With tao, nothingness gave rise to existence, existence gave rise to yin and yang, and yin and yang gave rise to everything. Due to the ambiguous nature of this myth, it could be compatible with the first myth (and therefore say nothing). But it could, like its antithesis, be explained in a way to better fit the modern scientific view of the creation of universe.

The fourth view is the relatively late myth of Pangu. This was an explanation offered by Taoist monks hundreds of years after Laozi; probably around 200 CE. In this story, the universe begins as a cosmic egg. A god named Pangu, born inside the egg, broke it into two halves: The upper half became the sky, the lower half became the earth. As the god grew taller, the sky and the earth grew thicker and were separated further. Finally the god died and his body parts became different parts of the earth.

The fifth view would be tribal accounts that vary widely and not necessarily connect to a system of belief.

Phan Ku - P'an Ku



Of various creation stories which evolve in China, the most striking is that of P'an Ku. He is hatched from a cosmic egg. Half the shell is above him as the sky, the other half below him as the earth. He grows taller each

day for 18,000 years, gradually pushing them apart until they reach their appointed places. After all this effort P'an Ku falls to pieces. His limbs become the mountains, his blood the rivers, his breath the wind and his voice the thunder. His two eyes are the sun and the moon. The parasites on his body are mankind.

Another version ... In the beginning was a huge egg containing chaos and a mixture of yin-yang (female-male, cold-heat, dark-light, wet-dry, etc). Also within this yin-yang was Phan Ku who broke forth from the egg as a giant who separated the yin-yang into many opposites, including earth and sky. With a great chisel and a huge hammer, Phan Ku carved out the mountains, rivers, valleys, and oceans. He also made the sun, moon, and stars. When he died, after 18,000 years, it is said that the fleas in his hair became human beings. In summation, the Chinese say that everything that is - is Phan Ku and everything that Phan Ku is yin-yang.

Pan Gu

In the beginning , the heavens and earth were still one and all was chaos. The universe was like a big black egg, carrying Pan Gu inside itself. After 18 thousand years Pan Gu woke from a long sleep. He felt suffocated, so he took up a broadax and wielded it with all his might to crack open the egg. The light, clear part of it floated up and formed the heavens, the cold, turbid matter stayed below to form earth. Pan Gu stood in the middle, his head touching the sky, his feet planted on the earth. The heavens and the earth began to grow at a rate of ten feet per day, and Pan Gu grew along with them. After another 18 thousand years, the sky was higher, the earth thicker, and Pan Gu stood between them like a pillar 9 million li in height so that they would never join again.

When Pan Gu died, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice the rolling thunder. One eye became the sun and on the moon. His body and limbs turned to five big mountains and his blood formed the roaring water. His veins became far-stretching roads and his muscles fertile land. The innumerable stars in the sky came from his hair and beard, and flowers and trees from his skin and the fine hairs on his body. His marrow turned to jade and pearls. His sweat flowed like the good rain and sweet dew that nurtured all things on earth. According to some versions of the Pan Gu legend, his tears flowed to make rivers and radiance of his eyes turned into thunder and lighting. When he was happy the sun shone, but when he was angry black clouds gathered in the sky. One version of the legend has it that the fleas and lice on his body became the ancestors of mankind.

The Pan Gu story has become firmly fixed in Chinese tradition. There is even an idiom relating to it: "Since Pan Gu created earth and the heavens," meaning "for a very long time." Nevertheless, it is rather a latecomer to the catalog of Chinese legends. First mention of it is in a book on Chinese myths written by Xu Zheng in the Three Kingdoms period (CE 220-265). Some opinions hold that it originated in south China or southeast Asia.

There are several versions of the Pan Gu story.

Among the Miao, Yao, Li and other nationalities of south China, a legend concerns Pan Gu the ancestor of all mankind, with a man's body and a dog's head. It runs like this: Up in Heaven the God in charge of the earth, King Gao Xin, owned a beautiful spotted dog. He reared him on a plate (pan in Chinese) inside a gourd (hu, which is close to the sound gu), so the dog was known as Pan Gu . Among the Gods there was great enmity between King Gao Xin and his rival King Fang. "Whoever can bring me the head of King Fang may marry my daughter, " he proclaimed, but nobody was willing to try because they were afraid of King Fang's strong soldiers and sturdy horses.

The dog Pan Gu overheard what was said, and when Gao Xin was sleeping, slipped out of the palace and ran to King Fang. The latter was glad to see him standing there wagging his tail. "You see, King Gao Xin is near his end. Even his dog has left him," Fang said, and held a banquet for the occasion with the dog at his side.

At midnight when all was quiet and Fang was overcome with drink, Pan Gu jumped onto the king's bed, bit off his head and ran back to his master with it. King Gao Xin was overjoyed to see the head of his rival, and gave orders to bring Pan Gu some fresh meat. But Pan Gu left the meat untouched and curled himself up in a corner to sleep. For three days he ate nothing and did not stir.

The king was puzzled and asked, "Why don't you eat? Is it because I failed to keep my promise of marrying a dog?" To his surprise Pan Gu began to speak. "Don't worry, my King. Just cover me with your golden bell and in seven days and seven nights I'll become a man." The King did as he said, but on the sixth day, fearing he would starve to death, out of solicitude the princess peeped under the bell. Pan Gu's body had already changed into that of a man, but his head was still that of a dog. However, once the bell was raised, the magic change stopped, and he had to remain a man with a dog's head.

He married the princess, but she didn't want to be seen with such a man so they moved to the earth and settled in the remote mountains of south China. There they lived happily and had four children, three boys and a girl, who became the ancestors of mankind.

The Legend of Tan'gun

The Wei Shu tells us that two thousand years ago, at the time of emperor Yao, Tangun Wanggom chose Asadal as his capital and founded the state of Chos'circon. The Old Record notes that in ancient times Hwanin's son, Hwanung, wished to descend from heaven and live in the world of human beings. Knowing his son's desire, Hwanin surveyed the three highest mountains and found Mount T'aebaek the most suitable place for his son to settle and help human beings. Therefore he gave Hwanung three heavenly seals and dispatched him to rule over the people.

Hwanung descended with three thousand followers to a spot under a tree by the Holy Altar atop Mount T'aebaek, and he called this place the City of God. He was the Heavenly King Hwanung. Leading the Earl of Wind, the Master of Rain, and the Master of Clouds, he took charge of some three hundred and sixty areas of responsibility, including agriculture, allotted lifespans, illness, punishment, and good and evil, and brought culture to his people.

At that time a bear and a tiger living in the same cave prayed to Holy Hwanung to transform them into human beings. The king gave them a bundle of sacred mugworts and twenty cloves of garlic and said, "If you eat these and shun the sunlight for one hundred days, you will assume human form." Both animals ate the spices and avoided the sun. After twenty-one days the bear became a woman, but the tiger, unable to observe the taboo, remained a tiger. Unable to find a husband, the bear-woman prayed under the alter tree for a child. Hwanung metamorphosed himself, lay with her, and begot a son called Tangun Wanggom.

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Emperor Yao, Tangun made the walled city of P'yongyang the capital and called his country Choson. He then moved his capital to Asadal on Mount Paegak, a lso named Mount Kunghol, whence he ruled for fifteen hundred years. When, in the year kimyo [1122 BC], King Wu of Chou enfeoffed Chi Tzu to Choson, Tangun moved to Changdangyong, but later he returned and hid in Asadal as a mountain god at the age of one thousand nine hundred and eight.

The Lay of King Tongmyong

In the third year of Shen-ch'ueh of Han, in early summer, when the Great Bear Stood in the Serpent, Haemosu came to Korea, a true Son of Heaven. He came down through the air in a five-dragon chariot, with a retinue of hundreds, robes streaming, riding on swans. The atmosphere echoed loudly with chiming music, and banners floated on the tinted clouds. From ancient times men ordained to rule have come down from Heaven, but in daylight he came from the heart of the sky - a thing never before seen.

In the mornings he dwelt among men, in the evenings he returned to his heavenly palace. The ancients have told us that between heaven and earth the distance is two thousand billion and eighteen thousand seven hundred and eighty ri. A scaling-ladder could not reach so far, flying pinions could not bear the strain, yet morning and evening he went and returned at will. By what power could he do it?

North of the capital was the Green River, where the River Earl's three beautiful daughters rose from the drake-neck's green waves to play in the Bear's Heart Pool. Their jade ornaments tinkled, their flowerlike beauty was modest -- they might have been fairies of the Han River banks, or goddesses of the Lo River islets. The King, out hunting, espied them, was fascinated and lost his heart, not from lust for girls, but from eager desire for an heir. The three sisters saw him coming and plunged into the water to flee, so the King prepared a palace to hide in till they came back:

He traced foundations with a riding whip: A bronze palace suddenly towered, silk cushions were spread, bright and elegant, golden goblets waited with fragrant wine. Soon the three maidens came in, and toasted each other until they were drunk. Then the king emerged from hiding; The startled girls ran, tripped, and tumbled on to the floor. The oldest was Willow Flower, and it was she whom the king caught.

The Earl of the River raged in anger, and sent a speedy messenger to demand, "What rogue are you who dares behave so presumptuously?" "Son of the Heavenly Emperor," replied Haemosu, "I'm asking for your noble daughter's hand." He beckoned to heaven: the dragon car came down, and straightaway he moved unto the Ocean Palace where the River Earl admonished him: "Marriage is a weighty matter, needing go-betweens and gifts. Why have you done these things? If you are God's own heir, prove your powers of transfiguration!" Through the rippling, flowing green waters the River Earl leapt, transforming into a carp; the king turned at once into an otter that seized the carp before it could flee.

The earl then sprouted wings, flying upward, transformed into a pheasant; but the king was a golden eagle and struck like a great bird of prey; the Earl sped away as a stag, the king pursued as wolf. The Earl then confessed that the king was divine, poured wine, and they drank to the contract. When the king was drunk, he was put in a leather bag, set beside the girl in his chariot, and set off with her to rise to Heaven together. But the car had not left the water before Haemosu woke from his stupor and, seizing the girl's golden hairpin, pierced the leather and slid out through the hole, alone to mount the car beyond the crimson clouds. All was quiet; he did not return.

The River Earl punished his daughter by stretching her lips three feet long, and throwing her into the Ubal stream with only two maidservants. A fisherman saw them in the eddies, creatures disporting themselves strangely, and reported the fact to King Komwa. An iron net was set in the torrent, and the woman was trapped on a rock, a monster of shocking appearance, whose long lips made her mute. Three times they were trimmed before she could speak. King Komwa recognized Haemosu's wife, and gave unto her a palace where she might live. The sun shone in her breast and she bore Chumong in the fourth year of Shen-ch'ueh.

His form was wonderful, his voice of mighty power. He was born from a pottle-sized egg that frightened all who saw it. The king thought it inauspicious, monstrous and inhuman, and put it into the horse corral, but the horses took care not to trample it; it was thrown down steep hills, but the wild beasts all protected it; its mother retrieved it and nurtured it, till the boy hatched. His first words were: "The flies are nibbling my eyes, I cannot lie and sleep in peace." His mother made him a bow and arrows, And he never missed a shot.

Years passed, he grew up, getting cleverer every day, and the crown prince of the Puyo began to grow jealous, saying, "This fellow Chumong is a redoubtable warrior. If we do not act soon, he will become trouble later." So the king sent Chumong to tend horses, to test his intentions. Chumong meditated, "For heaven's grandson to be a mere herdsman is an unendurable shame." Searching his heart, he sought the right way: "I had rather die than

live like this. I would go southward, found a nation, build a city -- but for my mother, whom it is hard to leave." His mother heard his words and wept; but wiped her glistening tears:

"Never mind about me. Rather I fear for your safety. A knight setting out on a journey needs a trusty stallion." Together they went to the corral and thrashed the horses with long whips. The terrified animals milled about, but one horse, a beautiful bay, leapt over the two-fathom wall, and proved itself best of the herd. They fixed a needle in his tongue that stung him so he could not eat; in a day or two he wasted away and looked like a worn out jade.

When the king came around to inspect, he gave this horse to Chumong, who took it, removed the needle, and fed the horse well, day and night. Then he made a compact with three friends, friends who were men of wisdom; they set off south till they reached the Om, but could find no ferry to cross. Chumong raised his whip to the sky, and uttered a long sad complaint: "Grandson of Heaven, Grandson of the River, I have come here in flight from danger. Look on my pitiful orphaned heart: Heaven and Earth, have you cast me off?"

Gripping his bow, he struck the water: Fish and turtles hurried, heads and tails together, to form a great bridge, which the friends at once traversed. Suddenly, pursuing troops appeared and mounted the bridge; but it melted away.

A pair of doves brought barley in their bills, messengers sent by his mysterious mother. He chose a site for his capital amid mountains and streams and thick-wooded hills. Seating himself on the royal mat as King Tongmyong, he ordered the ranks of his subjects. Alas for Songyang, king of Piryu, why was he so undiscerning? Was he a son of the immortal gods, who could not recognize a scion of Heaven?

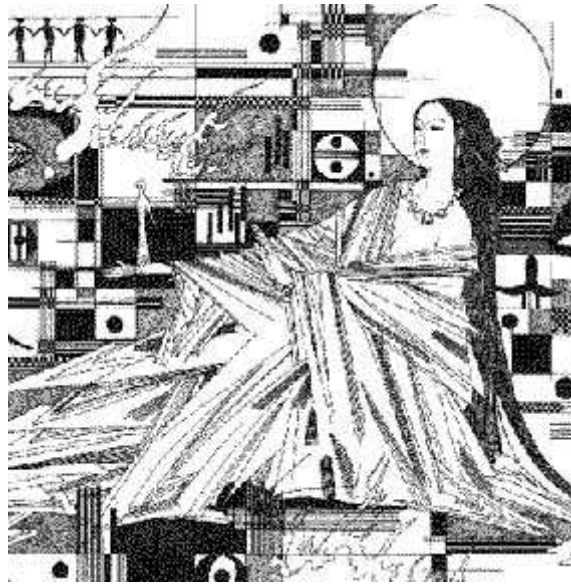
He asked Tongmyong to be his vassal, uttering rash demands, but could not hit the painted deer's navel, and was amazed when Tongmyong split the jade ring; he found his drum and bugle changed and dared not call them his; he saw Tongmyong's ancient pillars, then returned home biting his tongue.

Tongmyong went hunting in the west, caught a tall snow-white deer, strung it up by the hind feet at Haewon, and produced a great malediction: "Let Heaven pour torrents on Piryu, and wash away his capital. I will not let you go till you help me vent my wrath."

The deer cried with great sounds so piteous they reached the ears of Heaven. And from the horrible music of the deer, a great rain fell for seven days, floods came like Huai joined with Ssu; Songyang was frightened and anxious. He had thick ropes stretched by the water, knights and peasants struggled to clutch them, sweating and gaping in fear.

Then Tongmyong took his whip and drew a line at which the waters stopped. Songyang submitted and thereafter there was no argument. A dark cloud covered Falcon Pass, the crests of ridges were hidden, and thousands upon thousands of carpenters were heard hammering there. The king said, "Music from Heaven is for me preparing a great fortress up yonder." Suddenly the mist dispersed and a palace stood out high and splendid, where Tongmyong ruled for nineteen years, till he rose to heaven and forsook his throne.

Nuwa Makes Men



Nuwa is the goddess who separated the heaven from the Earth, creating the Divine Land (China). She is the original ancestor of the Chinese nation. According to legend, Nuwa was also the younger sister of Emperor Fuxi (said to have lived during the third millennium BC) and she herself was an empress.

The historical records say:

Nuwa had the surname Feng; she had the body of a snake, a human head and the virtue of a divine being. She is also known as Mixi.

The name Nuwa first appears in one of the Elegies of Chu entitled Tian Wen:

Nuwa loved peace and delighted in making things. She moulded figures from the yellow earth and gave them life and the ability to bear children: this is how humanity was created. When demons fought a terrible war, they broke the pillars which held the heavens up. The firmament cracked open and the human world was put in mortal peril.

To save the lives of those she had created, Nuwa worked unceasingly, melting down the five-coloured stones to mend the breach. When the firmament was whole again, Nuwa, exhausted by her toil, lay down on the earth and was transformed into a vast mountain range. In this way, she nurtured the growth of the Chinese nation by providing a rich and fertile land. This well-known tale is known as 'Nuwa Mends The Firmament.'

Amongst China's ethnic minorities, another story has survived concerning how Emperor Fuxi came to take his sister Nuwa as his bride. This tale is known as A Brother And Sister Marry.

The ferocious God of Thunder was captured by Fuxi's father and imprisoned deep within a mountain cave. No one was allowed to visit him. Fuxi and Nüwa could no longer bear to hear the Thunder God's pitiable entreaties for water, but they dared not bring him any water. Eventually, the two of them shed tears which the god drank out of their cupped hands. The Thunder God was so strengthened by the tears that he burst out of his mountain prison. To repay Fuxi and Nuwa for their part in the rescue, the Thunder God pulled a long canine tooth from his mouth and gave it to them saying:

"In three days, mankind will suffer a terrible calamity. You may use this tooth to keep yourselves safe from harm."

Having said this, the Thunder God leaped into the sky and disappeared.

Three days later, the sky was filled with thunder and lightning. A tremendous storm broke out. Rain fell incessantly and the flood waters rose; huge waves swept across the earth and the entire human race was

destroyed. As the flood began, the Thunder God's tooth transformed itself into a boat. Safe aboard this vessel, Fuxi and his sister rode the waves and drifted with the tides. Only when the waters had subsided did Fuxi and Nuwa realise that they alone had survived the desolation. When they had grown into adults, Fuxi and Nuwa became husband and wife in order to bear descendants and establish a new human race.

This second story reflects the custom of intermarriage between blood relations in ancient China. It also shows why Nuwa is known as the mother of the Chinese nation.

It is said that there were no men when the sky and the earth were separated. It was Nuwa who made men by moulding yellow clay. The work was so taxing that her strength was not equal to it. So she dipped a rope into the mud and then lifted it. The mud that dripped from the rope also became men. Those made by moulding yellow clay were rich and noble, while those made by lifting the rope were poor and low. - from Tai ping yu lan

(Taiping Anthologies for the Emperor)

Nuwa Mends the Sky

In ancient times, the four corners of the sky collapsed and the world with its nine regions split open. The sky could not cover all the things under it, nor could the Earth carry all the things on it.

A great fire raged and would not die out; a fierce flood raced about and could not be checked. Savage beasts devoured innocent people; vicious birds preyed on the weak and old.

Then Nuwa melted rocks of five colours and used them 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. She killed the black dragon to save the people of Jizhou, and blocked the flood with the ashes of reeds.

Thus the sky was mended, its four corners lifted, the flood tamed, Jizhou pacified, and harmful birds and beasts killed, and the innocent people were able to live on the square Earth under the dome of the sky. It was a time when birds, beasts, insects and snakes no longer used their claws or teeth or poisonous stings, for they did not want to catch or eat weaker things.

Nuwa's deeds benefited the heavens above and the Earth below. Her name was remembered by later generations and her light shone on every creation.



Now she was traveling on a thunder-chariot drawn by a two-winged dragon and two green hornless dragons, with auspicious objects in her hands and a special mattress underneath, surrounded by golden clouds, a white

dragon leading the way and a flying snake following behind.

Floating freely over the clouds, she took ghosts and gods to the ninth heaven and had an audience with the Heavenly Emperor at Lin Men, where she rested in peace and dignity under the emperor. She never boasted of her achievements, nor did she try to win any renown; she wanted to conceal her virtues, in line with the ways of the universe.

Jiang Taigong Meets King Wen

When King Wen decided to go hunting, Bian, his official historian, burnt a tortoise shell to forecast the result. After reading the cracks he said, "Hunting on the north side of the Wei River is bound to bring a great gain. It will not be a dragon or a Chi, nor will it be a tiger or a bear. It will be a wise man sent by Heaven to be your minister and mentor." King Wen got on his carriage, started the horses, and set out for the place. There he saw Jiang taigong sitting on the grass and fishing. - From Liu tao (*Six Tactics*)

Zhou Xibo went hunting and on the north bank of the wei River he met Jiang Taigong. After talking with him, Xibo was very pleased, saying, "Before he died, my father had anticipated that Zhou would become prosperous when a sage came to us. Are you the sage? My father had long expected your arrival!" So he called him Taigong Wang (Father's Expectation). He returned with Taigong, sharing his carriage with him, and was to treat him as his mentor. - From Shi ji (*Records of the Grand Historian*)

King wen made Taigong the magistrate of Guantan. During the year Taigong was there, there was never a wind that was strong enough to disturb the leaves of the trees. Once in his dream, King Wen saw a beautiful woman weeping before his carriage.

When asked the reason, she replied, "I am the daughter of the god of Mount Taishan and married to the god of the East sea. Now I want to go home, but the virtuous magistrate of Guantan makes the trip difficult. For my movements are always accompanied by a violent storm, which damage his good name." After waking up, the king summoned Taigong to ask what had happened. He was told that a violent storm with pouring rain had swept areas outside Guantan that day. King Wen then promoted Taigong to the position of Chief General. - From Sou shen ji (*Stories of Immortals*)

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