



Zhaojun

Chapter 1, Section 5: Zhaojun, the Peace Ambassador



Flooding of the Jinshan Temple

Chapter 1, Section 9: The White Lady

Foreword

Xian zuo ting songfeng (閑坐聽松風).

“*Shun, shun*” describes a whistling sound that can only be heard in extremely quiet environments. The sound is also known as *songfeng* (meaning: the wind soughing through pine trees), and it is very similar to the sound when the water in the tea kettle boils. Since the sound is very soft, it is generally believed that only people with calm and peaceful mind would be able to hear that. “*Xian zuo ting songfeng*” (meaning: sitting peacefully to listen to the wind soughing through pine trees) thus implies the manner when having tea as part of the Chinese tea culture.

Whether or not one has heard of the above, tea culture should not be anything strange to Chinese people or anyone who had ever dined in traditional Chinese restaurants. Similarly, you may have heard of “brotherhood of Liu-Guan-Zhang”, “Qin Terracotta Warriors”, “filial piety”, “the immortal poet, Li Bai” ..., but the stories behind these topics may not be something we can easily tell in details, not to mention others that we may not even know, such as, how the Hanshi festival is related to the Qingming festival, why pig is the last member of the 12 zodiac animals, why chopsticks got its name changed, why the Chinese counterpart of Cupid is known as *Yue Lao* (Literal meaning: the Old Man under the Moon) and so on.

Professor SI Chung Mou, currently a professor in the Department of Chinese Language Studies of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) and previously served as the Director of Chinese Language Centre and the Head of School of Chinese at The University of Hong Kong (HKU), is a renowned expert in Chinese linguistics, Chinese education and Chinese culture. With his passion in research of these aspects, Professor SI has published books regarding a wide range of topics including the Chinese language, comparative studies of the Chinese dialects, the Chinese classics, and the Chinese culture.

In this book, Professor SI summarizes different aspects of the Chinese culture, from the fascinating stories behind the myths, legends, and festivals; introduction of the famous historic sites popular among worldwide tourists; the culture of food, sports, and arts; to the language and thoughts of the Chinese people, where the book ends with descriptions about how China connects to the world.

Today, Chinese language is the language with the most native speakers in the world and becomes one of the most popular languages to be learnt as a second language worldwide. This book will be an enjoyable piece for language learners to better understand the culture behind and for native speakers to discover more about their own *Huaxia* culture.

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Chapter 1

Myths and Legends



1

How the World Was Created

Where do our ancestors come from? How was nature formed? These questions were raised centuries ago. Different religions and all sorts of myths from various cultures attempted to provide explanations and answers to these questions, so as to satisfy human curiosity.

In the West, many people believe that God created the world, as well as every creature and things. However in China, people believe that it was a man called Pangu who created the world, and then transformed himself into different creatures and things. Nowadays temples can be found in numerous cities in China where he is worshipped.

Now you may ask, what was the story? A long time ago, the Chinese believed that the universe was simply a mixture of gas, with absolutely nothing in it. There was a person whose name was Pangu. He was sad to see the world in such a state and felt that he should do something about it. He grabbed a hammer in one hand and an axe in the other, and then by using some mysterious power, he managed to separate the gas, forming the sky and the land.

Unfortunately, Pangu overworked himself and became really weak. Suddenly, something amazing happened. His breath

became wind and clouds, his voice became thunder; his left eye transformed into the sun while his right eye transformed into the moon; his limbs became huge mountains, his blood became rivers, his blood vessels became land patterns, his muscles became fields and land; his hair turned into stars, his body hair turned into grass and trees, his teeth and bones turned into various minerals, his bone marrow turned into precious stones and gems, his sweat turned into rain and dew, and the little worms all over his body turned into millions of people.

Westerners believe that God created human and Gods are superior to us. However this is not the case for the Chinese. The Chinese think that they all have Pangu's power in their bodies. They regard themselves as the brightest among all living creatures, who have the power to overcome challenges and unfortunate circumstances. It is this belief in their power that has driven them forward for so many years. Many apparatus were invented to observe, calculate and read climate changes from nature, so as to avoid catastrophes.

You might be thinking that after the world was created, everything would settle down and start growing. Not so. It happened that one day, the God of Water and the God of Fire had a huge fight ending in a victory for the God of Fire. The God of Water, being the loser, was extremely frustrated and ashamed of himself. He was so angry that he bumped against the Buzhou Mountain which served to support the sky and separate it from the land. The result of this impetuous act was that, half the sky crumbled, opening up an enormous gaping hole. Through this hole, water from the river up in the sky ran down and flooded the land below. The whole world was in a complete mess.

The creator-goddess, Nüwa, felt upset at the sight of such a

disaster, and she decided to fix it. From the river, she collected 36,501 multi-coloured stones, burning them with a fierce fire for seven whole days, turning them into lava. Then she took a big spoon, and began splashing spoonfuls of lava against the hole in the sky. Soon, the lava condensed and the hole was filled. After taking care of the sky, Nüwa then turned her attention to the submerged land. She burned huge amounts of weeds into ashes, which she used to fill up the flooded areas, and eventually the land reappeared. Everything went back to normal. From then on, the colours in the sky were explained by Nüwa's use of those multi-coloured stones.

To prevent such disasters from happening again, Nüwa started to look for suitable materials to use as pillars to hold up the sky. A sea turtle came to her and offered to help. She thought that was perfect, so she agreed to let the four legs of the turtle become the pillars of the sky. However, the world had become slightly different after the fight. The leg of the turtle that was holding up the north-western side of the sky was shorter than the others, which is why the sun, the moon and the stars all travel towards



| Filling the Hole in the Sky |

that direction. On the other hand, when the land crumbled, the south-eastern side crumbled most significantly. As a result, rivers in China all flow to the south-east.

You may recall that Nüwa collected 36,501 pieces of multi-coloured stones. After she finished her repair work, she realised that a piece of stone was left unused. She decided to keep the stone for herself, but she accidentally dropped the stone as she travelled back to heaven. The final destination of this stone has become a mystery for people to ponder. Some say, it became the Yellow Mountain (also known as Huang Shan). Some say, it became the Pearl of the Orient—Hong Kong.

