China

中国神话



Pangu, the giant whose body became the world

Nüwa patches the sky with five-coloured stones

Houyi, the ten suns and Chang'e on the moon

The dragon, the qilin and the Four Symbols

20 FIGURES TO FIND IN THE LAND

CHINA AND THE YELLOW AND YANGTZE RIVER BASINS

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Fenghuang, the phoenix of harmony and virtuous rule

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Mythology Field Guide

Names, attributes, and narratives from China's creation myths, its gods and culture heroes, its creatures and guardians, and its stranger tales — organised so each entry can be used as a search target in deliberate pareidolia practice.

Chinese tradition already reads the body of a giant into the land itself: mountains as bones, rivers as blood. Few traditions offer a more natural starting point for seeking story in the face of the Earth.

Few traditions offer a more natural starting point for seeking story in the face of the Earth.

CONTEXT

How China Holds Its Myths

Chinese mythology was never gathered into a single sacred book. It survives in fragments scattered across philosophy, geography, history and poetry, and was later woven together with Daoist, Buddhist and folk religion. Many figures were reinterpreted over time as historical sage-kings, so the same name may appear as a god in one text and an ancient ruler in another.

Mountains as bones, rivers as blood.

SOURCES

The Shanhaijing (Classic of Mountains and Seas, compiled c. 4th–1st century BCE) is the great bestiary and mythic geography. The Huainanzi (2nd century BCE) preserves Nüwa's repair of the sky and Houyi's ten suns. The Chuci (Songs of Chu) holds the questioning poem Tianwen. The Pangu story first appears in writings of the 3rd century CE. Later works such as Journey to the West (16th century) gave many figures their popular form.



The qilin, which walks without crushing grass

A CHINESE PRECEDENT

In the Pangu myth, the first giant's body becomes the world: his breath the wind, his voice thunder, his eyes the sun and moon, his limbs the four quarters and the Five Sacred Mountains, his blood the rivers. Chinese geomancy (fengshui) also reads ridgelines as dragon veins (longmai). Seeing figures in terrain is woven into the tradition.



Long, the dragon — ruler of water and rain, chasing a flaming pearl

THE FEATURE

Long (Dragon)

龙

Benevolent ruler of water and rain.

Dragons live in rivers, lakes and seas, bring rain, and were the emblem of the emperor. Often shown chasing a flaming pearl.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A long winding body along a river or ridge; a pearl.

Nüwa 女娲

Creator goddess; human upper body, serpent tail.

She shapes the first people from yellow earth. When a pillar of heaven breaks and the sky cracks, she melts five-coloured stones to patch it and props the sky on the legs of a great turtle.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A serpent-tailed woman; a turtle bearing a load.



Nüwa melts five-coloured stones to patch the sky

THE TWO BEST FIRST TARGETS

1. The Dragon (long) — the most recognisable Chinese figure; long winding rivers and ridgelines suit its form. 2. Nüwa — a goddess with a human upper body and a serpent's tail, repairing the sky. Strong alternates: the Black Tortoise entwined with a snake, the qilin, and Houyi drawing his bow at the suns.



I · CREATION & FOUNDING

I The Shaping of the World

Giants, sibling creators and the sage-kings who taught humanity to live.

Above: Pangu pushes the sky up and the earth down

Pangu

盘古

Primordial giant who separated heaven and earth.

Born inside a cosmic egg, Pangu pushes the sky up and the earth down, growing taller each day for 18,000 years. When he dies, his body becomes the world — mountains, rivers, soil, stars and weather.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A giant figure lying across a range; a split egg shape.*



Fuxi and Nüwa, serpent tails entwined, holding a carpenter's square

Fuxi

伏羲

Nüwa's brother and consort; culture hero.

Credited with teaching hunting, fishing with nets and the eight trigrams (bagua). Often shown entwined with Nüwa by their serpent tails, holding a carpenter's square.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *Two serpent tails twisted together; a net.*

Shennong

神农

The Divine Farmer; agriculture and herbal medicine.

He tastes hundreds of plants to learn which heal and which poison, and teaches people to plough and sow.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A figure bent over plants; an ox-headed man.*



Yu the Great cuts channels to lead the waters to the sea

Yu the Great

大禹

Tamer of the Great Flood; founder of the Xia.

Where his father failed by building dams, Yu cuts channels to lead the waters to the sea. He works thirteen years and passes his own door three times without entering.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *Branching channels draining to a coast; a figure with a spade.*



II · GODS & IMMORTALS

II Heaven's Court and Its Heroes

A celestial bureaucracy, Daoist immortals and the archer who saved the world.

Above: Ten suns rise at once; Houyi shoots down nine

The Jade Emperor

玉皇大帝

Ruler of heaven in popular religion.

Presides over a heavenly court organised like an imperial government. In folk tradition he calls the race of animals that sets the order of the zodiac.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A seated, robed figure; a procession of animals.*

Xiwangmu

西王母

Queen Mother of the West; immortality.

Lives on Mount Kunlun and keeps the peaches of immortality, which ripen once every three thousand years.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A woman on a mountain; a peach shape.*

Houyi and Chang'e

后羿 · 嫦娥

The archer and the moon goddess.

Ten suns rise at once and scorch the earth; Houyi shoots down nine. Rewarded with an elixir of immortality, he keeps it — but Chang'e swallows it and floats to the moon, where she lives with the jade rabbit.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *An archer aiming skyward; a woman rising; a rabbit.*

Guanyin

观音

Bodhisattva of compassion.

Hears the cries of the world. Often shown holding a vase of pure water and a willow branch; in some forms she has a thousand arms.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A standing figure pouring from a vase.*



Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, with his staff

Sun Wukong

孙悟空

The Monkey King; born from a stone.

Defies heaven, is trapped beneath a mountain by the Buddha for five hundred years, then guards the monk Xuanzang on the pilgrimage to India in Journey to the West.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A monkey with a staff; a figure pinned beneath a mountain.*



III · CREATURES & GUARDIANS

III Beasts of Good Omen

Strong silhouettes — dragons, tortoises and auspicious beasts.

Above: A giant turtle carries an island of the immortals on its back



The Four Symbols: Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird and Black Tortoise

The Four Symbols

四象

Azure Dragon (east), White Tiger (west), Vermilion Bird (south), Black Tortoise (north).

Guardians of the four directions and the four quarters of the night sky.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A tortoise entwined by a snake; a bird with spread wings.*

Fenghuang

凤凰

Phoenix; harmony and virtuous rule.

Appears only in times of peace; paired with the dragon as empress to emperor.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A long-tailed bird in flight.*

Qilin

麒麟

Gentle hooved, horned beast; omen of a sage's birth.

Said to have appeared before the birth of Confucius. It walks without crushing grass.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A deer-like beast with a single horn.*

Ao (the Great Turtle)

鳌

Cosmic sea turtle.

Nüwa cuts its legs to prop up the sky. In another tale, giant turtles carry the islands of the immortals on their backs.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A turtle with an island or mountain on its back.*



IV · THE UNUSUAL AND ODD

IV Stranger Narratives

Persistence, longing and transformation.

Above: Lady White Snake beside West Lake, the Leifeng Pagoda beyond



The Foolish Old Man digs at the mountains; heaven has them carried away

The Foolish Old Man Moves the Mountains

愚公移山

A parable of persistence from the Liezi.

An old man sets out to dig away two mountains blocking his door, saying his descendants will finish the work. Moved by his resolve, heaven has the mountains carried away.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two mountains with a small figure digging between.*

Jingwei Fills the Sea

精卫填海

A drowned princess reborn as a bird.

Yandi's daughter drowns in the Eastern Sea and becomes the bird Jingwei, who carries twigs and pebbles to fill the sea for ever.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A small bird above open water.*

The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl

牛郎织女

The stars Altair and Vega.

Separated by the Milky Way, they meet once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month on a bridge of magpies.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two figures across water; a bridge of birds.*

Lady White Snake

白蛇传

A snake spirit who becomes a woman.

She marries a mortal, is exposed by the monk Fahai, floods Jinshan Temple to free her husband, and is imprisoned beneath the Leifeng Pagoda by West Lake.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A white serpent beside a lake; a tower.*

Kuafu Chases the Sun

夸父逐日

A giant who races the sun.

He drinks the Yellow River and the Wei dry in his thirst, dies before reaching the sun, and his staff becomes a forest of peach trees.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A striding giant; a staff with a forest at its end.*

A NOTE ON RESPECT

Names follow Hanyu Pinyin. Many stories exist in several literary and regional versions, and some figures are living objects of worship; confirm the version with a Chinese source before telling it publicly.

The plates in this issue are interpretive illustrations, not historical artefacts.



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Earth Heritage and Perceptual Resilience

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