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UNIT 1

Early Literature

2. c. Chinese Original Myth

Pan Gu and the Creation of the World

In the beginning there was darkness everywhere, and Chaos ruled. Within the darkness there formed an egg, and inside the egg the giant Pan Gu came into being. For aeons, Pan Gu slept and grew safely inside the egg. When he had grown to gigantic size he stretched his huge limbs and in so doing broke the egg. The lighter parts of the egg floated upwards to form the heavens and the denser parts sank downwards, to become the earth. And so the earth and sky were formed, Yin and Yang.

Pan Gu saw what had happened and he was pleased. But he feared that heaven and earth might join together again, so he placed himself between them, his head holding up the sky and his feet firmly upon the earth. Pan Gu continued to grow at a rate of ten feet a day for 18,000 years, so increasing the distance between heaven and earth, until they seemed fixed and secure, 30,000 miles apart. Now exhausted, Pan Gu went back to sleep and never woke up.

Pan Gu died, and his body went to make the world and all its elements. The wind and clouds were formed from his breath, his voice was thunder and lightning, his eyes became the sun and moon, his arms and his legs became the four directions of the compass and his trunk became the mountains. His flesh turned into the soil and the trees that grow on it, his blood filled the rivers that flow and his veins became the paths men travel. His body hair became the grass and herbs, and his skin the same, while precious stones and minerals were formed from his bones and teeth. His sweat became the dew and the hair of his head became the stars that fill the heaven. As for the parasites on his body, these became the diverse races of humankind.

Although Pan Gu is dead, some say he is still responsible for the weather, which fluctuates according to his moods.

2. f. Pima Indian Origin Myth

The Creation of the World

In the beginning there was nothing at all except darkness and emptiness. For a long, long while, the darkness gathered until it became a great mass. Over this the spirit of Earth Doctor drifted to and fro like a fluffy bit of cotton in the breeze. Then Earth Doctor decided to make himself a place to live. So he thought within himself, “Come forth, some kind of plant,” and there appeared the creosote bush. He placed this before him and set it upright. But it fell over. He set it upright again and again it fell. So it fell until the fourth time it remained upright. Then Earth Doctor took from his breast a little dust and flattened it into a cake. When the dust cake was still, he danced upon it, singing a magic song.