

- A Few Creation Stories -

🇨🇳 Chinese

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 lightning. 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.

🌿 Scandinavian

Odin is the All-Father. He is the oldest and most powerful of the Gods. Through the ages he has ruled all things. He created heaven and earth, and he made man and gave him a soul. But even the All-Father was not the very first.

In the beginning, there was no earth, no sea, no sky. Only the emptiness of Ginnungagap, waiting to be filled. In the south, the fiery realm of Muspell came into being, and in the north, the icy realm of Niflheim. Fire and ice played across the emptiness. And in the center of nothingness the air grew mild. Where the warm air from Muspell met the cold air from Niflheim, the ice began to thaw. As it dripped, it shaped itself into the form of a sleeping giant. His name was Ymir, and he was evil.

As Ymir slept, he began to sweat. There grew beneath his left arm a male and a female, and from his legs another male was created. These were the first frost giants, all of whom are descended from Ymir.

Then the ice-melt formed a cow, named Audhumla. Four rivers of milk flowed from her and fed Ymir. Audhumla nourished herself by licking the salty blocks of ice all around. By the end of her first day she had uncovered the hair of a head. By the end of her second day the whole head was exposed, and by the end of a third day there was a complete man, His name was Buri, and he was strong and handsome. Buri had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, the daughter of one of the frost giants. Bor and Bestla had three sons: Odin, Vili and Ve.

Odin and his brothers hated the brutal frost giant Ymir, and they slew him. So much blood flowed from the slaughtered giant that it drowned all the frost giants save Bergelmir and his wife, who escaped in a boat made from a hollowed tree trunk.

From Ymir's flesh, Odin and his brothers made the earth, and from his shattered bones and teeth, they made the rocks and stones. From Ymir's blood, they made the rivers and lakes, and they circled the earth with an ocean of blood.

Ymir's skull they made into the sky, secured at four points by four dwarfs named East, West, North and South. They flung sparks of fire from Muspell high into the sky to make the sun, the moon, and the stars. From Ymir's brains, they shaped the clouds.

The earth was made in the form of a circle and around the edge of it lay the great sea. Odin and his brothers gave one area, Jotunheim, to the giants. They also established the kingdom of Midgard, protecting it from the giants with fortifications made from Ymir's eyebrows.

One day, as they walked along the shore of the great sea, Odin and his brothers came across two logs. Odin gave them breath and life; Vili gave them brains and feelings; and Ve gave them hearing and sight. These were the first man, Ask, and the first woman, Embla, and Midgard was their home. From them, all the families of mankind are descended.

Below Midgard is the icy realm of death, Niflheim. Above it is the realm of the Gods, Asgard, where Odin sits on his throne and watches over all the worlds. Asgard and Midgard are linked by a rainbow bridge, Bifrost.

At the center of all the realms is a great ash tree, Yggdrasil, whose branches shade the world, and whose roots support it.

🌿 Choctaw

At the beginning there was a great mound. It was called Nanih Wiya. It was from this mound that the Creator fashioned the first of the people. These people crawled through a long, dark cave into daylight. They became the first Choctaw.

Comanche

One day the Great Spirit collected swirls of dust from the four directions in order to create the Comanche people. These people formed from the earth had the strength of mighty storms. Unfortunately, a shape-shifting demon was also created and began to torment the people. The Great Spirit cast the demon into a bottomless pit. To seek revenge the demon took refuge in the fangs and stingers of poisonous creatures and continues to harm people every chance it gets.

Digueno

When Tu-chai-pai made the world, the earth was the woman, the sky was the man. The sky came down upon the earth. The world in the beginning was a pure lake covered with tules. Tu-chai-pai and his younger brother, Yo-ko-mat-is, sat together, stooping far over, bowed down by the weight of the sky. The Maker said to his brother, "What am I going to do?"

"I do not know," said Yo-ko-mat-is.

"Let us go a little farther," said the Maker.

So they went a little farther and sat down to rest. "Now what am I going to do?" said Tu-chai-pai.

"I do not know, my brother."

All of this time the Maker knew what he was about to do, but he was asking his brother's help. Then he said, "We-hicht, we-hicht, we-hicht," three times. He took tobacco in his hand. and rubbed it fine and blew upon it three times. Every time he blew, the heavens rose higher above their heads.

Younger brother did the same thing because the Maker asked him to do it. The heavens went higher and higher and so did the sky. Then they did it both together, "We-hicht, we-hicht, we-hicht," and both took tobacco, rubbed it, and puffed hard upon it, sending the sky so high it formed a concave arch.

Then they placed North, South, East, and West. Tu-chai-pai made a line upon the ground. "Why do you make that line?" asked younger brother. "I am making the line from East to West and name them so. Now you make a line from North to South."

Yo-ko-mat-is thought very hard. How would he arrange it? Then he drew a crossline from top to bottom. He named the top line North, and the bottom line South. Then he asked, "Why are we doing this?" The Maker said, "I will tell you. Three or four men are coming from the East, and from the West three or four Indians are coming."

The brother asked, "Do four men come from the North, and two or three men come from the South?"

Tu-chai-pai said, "Yes. Now I am going to make hills and valleys and little hollows of water."

"Why are you making all of these things?"

The Maker explained, "After a while when men come and are walking back and forth in the world, they will need to drink water or they will die." He had already made the ocean, but he needed little water places for the people.

Then he made the forests and said, "After a while men will die of cold unless I make wood for them to burn. What are we going to do now?" "I do not know," replied younger brother.

"We are going to dig in the ground and find mud to make the first people, the Indians." So he dug in the ground and took mud to make the first men and the first women. He made the men easily, but he had much trouble making women. It took him a long time. After the Indians, he made the Mexicans and finished all his making. He then called out very loudly, "People, you can never die and you can never get tired, so you can walk all the time." But then he made them sleep at night, to keep

them from walking in the darkness. At last he told them that they must travel toward the East, where the sun's light was coming out for the first time.

The Indians then came out and searched for the light, and at last they found light and were exceedingly glad to see the Sun. The Maker called out to his brother, "It's time to make the Moon. You call out and make the Moon to shine, as I have made the Sun. Sometime the Moon will die. When it grows smaller and smaller, men will know it is going to die, and they must run races to try and keep up with the dying moon."

The villagers talked about the matter and they understood their part and that Tu-chai-pai would be watching to see that they did what he wanted them to do. When the Maker completed all of this, he created nothing more. But he was always thinking how to make Earth and Sky better for all the Indians.

🌀 The Birth of Hawaii

For many months Pele followed a star from the northeast, which shown brighter than the rest, and migrated toward it. One morning, Pele awoke to the smell of something familiar in the air. In the distance could be seen a high mountain with a smoky haze hiding its peak. Pele knew she had found her new home. She named the island Hawai'i.

Pele, carrying her magic stick Pa'oa, went up to the mountain where a part of the earth collapsed into the ground. She placed the stick into the ground. Pele called this place Kilauea. Inside the Kilauea Crater was a large pit. She named it Halema'uma'u, maumau being the fern jungle surround the volcano. Halema'uma'u would be her new home.

There was a fire God living on Kilauea named 'Ailaau (forest-eater). He and Pele both wanted Kilauea for their home. They started throwing fire balls at each other, causing considerable damage. 'Ailaau fled and still hides in the caverns under the earth. Pele alone would rule the Island of Hawai'i. The people of the island loved and respected the Goddess Pele. The egg her mother gave Pele hatched into a beautiful girl. Pele named her new sister, Hi'iaka'i-ka-poli-o-Pele (Hi'iaka of the bosom of Pele). Kamohoali'i, the shark God taught Hi'iaka the art of surfing.

Pele fell in love with a man she saw in a dream. His name was Lohi'au, a chief of the island of Kaua'i. Pele sent her sister Hi'iaka to fetch Lohi'au on Kaua'i to bring him back to Hawai'i to live with Pele. Hi'iaka would have forty days to bring Lohi'au back or Pele would punish the girl by hurting Hi'iaka's girl friend Hopoe. Upon reaching Kaua'i, Hi'iaka found Lohi'au dead. She quickly rubbed his body with herbs and chanted to the Gods for help; bringing the young chief of Kaua'i back to life. Grateful for Hi'iaka's help, Lohi'au agreed to return with her to the Big Island.

The forty days had passed. Pele suspected that Hi'iaka and Lohi'au had fallen in love and were not coming back. In her fury, Pele caused an eruption which turned Hopoe into stone. On her return to Hawai'i with Lohi'au, Hi'iaka found Hopoe, a statue in stone. Hi'iaka, filled with sadness and anger decided to take revenge. Leading Lohi'au to the edge of the Halema'uma'u crater where Pele could see them, Hi'iaka put her arms around Lohi'au and embraced him. Furious, Pele covered Lohi'au with lava and flames.

The two sisters, anger subsided, were remorseful. One lost a friend, the other a lover. Pele decided to bring Lohi'au back to life to let him choose which sister he would love. Pele was sure Lohi'au would choose her. Lohi'au chose Hi'iaka. Pele, with aloha, gave the two lovers her blessing and Hi'iaka and Lohi'au sailed back to Kaua'i.

Pele still lives on Hawai'i where she rules as the fire Goddess of the volcanoes. The smell of sulphur reminds the natives that she is still there in her home, Halema'uma'u, her fiery lava building a new island to the south, still submerged, named Loahi.

🌀 Hindu

This universe existed in the shape of darkness, unperceived, destitute of distinctive marks, unattainable by reasoning, unknowable, wholly immersed, as it were, in deep sleep.

Then the Divine Self-existent, himself indiscernible but making all this, the great elements and the rest, discernible, appeared with irresistible power, dispelling the darkness.

He who can be perceived by the internal organ alone, who is subtle, indiscernible, and eternal, who contains all created beings and is inconceivable, shone forth of his own will.

He, desiring to produce beings of many kinds from his own body, first with a thought created the waters, and placed his seed in them.

That seed became a golden egg, in brilliancy equal to the sun; in that egg he himself was born as Brahma, the progenitor of the whole world....

The Divine One resided in that egg during a whole year, then he himself by his thought divided it into two halves;

And out of those two halves he formed heaven and earth, between them the middle sphere, the eight points of the horizon, and the eternal abode of the waters.

From himself he also drew forth the mind, which is both real and unreal, likewise from the mind ego, which possesses the function of self-consciousness and is lordly.

Moreover, the great one, the soul, and all products affected by the three qualities, and, in their order, the five organs which perceive the objects of sensation.

But, joining minute particles even of those six, which possess measureless power, with particles of himself, he created all beings.

ꜛ Ainu

In the beginning, the world was nothing but a quagmire. Nothing could live there. But in the six skies above and in the six worlds below dwelled Gods, demons, and animals.

In the foggy and hanging skies of the lower heavens, demons lived. In the star-bearing and high skies of the clouds lived the lesser Gods. In the skies of the most high lived Kamui, the creator God, and his servants. His realm was surrounded by a mighty metal wall and the only entrance was through a great iron gate.

Kamui made this world as a vast round ocean resting on the backbone of an enormous trout. This fish sucks in the ocean and spits it out again to make the tides; when it moves it causes earthquakes.

One day Kamui looked down on the watery world and decided to make something of it. He sent down a water wagtail to do the work. When the poor bird arrived and saw what a mess everything was in, it was at its wit's end to know what to do. However, by fluttering over the waters with its wings and by trampling the sand with its feet and beating it with its tail, the wagtail at last created patches of dry land. In this way islands were raised to float upon the ocean in this, the floating world. Even today, the faithful wagtail is still carrying on its work, still beating the ground with its tail.

When Kamui created the world, the devil tried to thwart him. One morning, the devil got up and lay in wait with his mouth gaping wide to swallow the sun. But Kamui sent a crow to fly down the devil's throat and make him choke and cough. That is why the crow is such a bold bird. Because a crow once saved the world, all crows think they can act as they like, even stealing people's food.

When the animals who lived up in the heavens saw how beautiful the world was, they begged Kamui to let them go and live on it, and he did. But Kamui also made many other creatures especially for the world. The first people, the Ainu, had bodies of earth, hair of chickweed, and spines made from sticks of willow. That is why when we grow old, our backs become bent.

Kamui sent Aioina, the divine man, down from heaven to teach the Ainu how to hunt and to cook. When Aioina returned to heaven after living among the people and teaching them many things, the Gods all held their noses, crying, "What a terrible smell of human being there is!"

They sniffed and sniffed to find out where the stink was coming from. At last they traced the smell to Aioina's clothes. The Gods sent him back to earth and refused to let him back into heaven until he left all his clothes behind. Down in the floating world, Aioina's cast-off sandals turned into the first squirrels.

🐿 Apache

In the beginning nothing existed -- no earth, no sky, no sun, no moon, only darkness was everywhere. Suddenly from the darkness emerged a thin disc, one side yellow and the other side white, appearing suspended in midair. Within the disc sat a small bearded man, Creator, the One Who Lives Above. As if waking from a long nap, he rubbed his eyes and face with both hands.

When he looked into the endless darkness, light appeared above. He looked down and it became a sea of light. To the east, he created yellow streaks of dawn. To the west, tints of many colors appeared everywhere. There were also clouds of different colors.

Creator wiped his sweating face and rubbed his hands together, thrusting them downward. Behold! A shining cloud upon which sat a little girl. "Stand up and tell me where are you going," said Creator. But she did not reply. He rubbed his eyes again and offered his right hand to the Girl-Without-Parents.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, grasping his hand.

"From the east where it is now light," he replied, stepping upon her cloud.

"Where is the earth?" she asked.

"Where is the sky?" he asked, and sang, "I am thinking, thinking, thinking what I shall create next." He sang four times, which was the magic number.

Creator brushed his face with his hands, rubbed them together, then flung them wide open! Before them stood Sun-God. Again Creator rubbed his sweaty brow and from his hands dropped Small-Boy.

All four gods sat in deep thought upon the small cloud. "What shall we make next?" asked Creator. "This cloud is much too small for us to live upon." Then he created Tarantula, Big Dipper, Wind, Lightning-Maker, and some western clouds in which to house Lightning-Rumbler, which he just finished.

Creator sang, "Let us make earth. I am thinking of the earth, earth, earth; I am thinking of the earth," he sang four times.

All four gods shook hands. In doing so, their sweat mixed together and Creator rubbed his palms, from which fell a small round, brown ball, not much larger than a bean. Creator kicked it, and it expanded. Girl-Without-Parents kicked the ball, and it enlarged more. Sun-God and Small-Boy took turns giving it hard kicks, and each time the ball expanded. Creator told Wind to go inside the ball and to blow it up.

Tarantula spun a black cord and, attaching it to the ball, crawled away fast to the east, pulling on the cord with all his strength. Tarantula repeated with a blue cord to the south, a yellow cord to the west, and a white cord to the north. With mighty pulls in each direction, the brown ball stretched to immeasurable size -- it became the earth!

Creator scratched his chest and rubbed his fingers together and there appeared Hummingbird. "Fly north, south, east, and west and tell us what you see," said Creator. "All is well," reported Hummingbird upon his return. "The earth is most beautiful, with water on the west side."

But the earth kept rolling and dancing up and down. So Creator made four giant posts -- black, blue, yellow, and white to support the earth. Wind carried the four posts, placing them beneath the four cardinal points of the earth. The earth sat still. Creator sang, "World is now made and now sits still," which he repeated four times. Then he began a song about the sky. None existed, but he thought there should be one. After singing about it four times, twenty-eight people appeared to help make a sky above the earth. Creator chanted about making chiefs for the earth and sky.

He sent Lightning-Maker to encircle the world, and he returned with three uncouth creatures, two girls and a boy found in a turquoise shell. They had no eyes, ears, hair, mouths, noses, or teeth. They had arms and legs, but no fingers or toes. Sun-God sent for Fly to come and build a sweathouse. Girl-Without-Parents covered it with four heavy clouds. In front of the east doorway she placed a soft, red cloud for a foot-blanket to be used after the sweat. Four stones were heated by the fire inside the sweathouse. The three uncouth creatures were placed inside. The others sang songs of healing on the outside, until it was time for the sweat to be finished. Out came the three strangers who stood upon the magic red cloud-blanket. Creator then shook his hands toward them, giving each one fingers, toes, mouths, eyes, ears, noses and hair.

Creator named the boy, Sky-Boy, to be chief of the Sky-People. One girl he named Earth-Daughter, to take charge of the earth and its crops. The other girl he named Pollen-Girl, and gave her charge of health care for all Earth-People.

Since the earth was flat and barren, Creator thought it fun to create animals, birds, trees, and a hill. He sent Pigeon to see how the world looked. Four days later, he returned and reported, "All is beautiful around the world. But four days from now, the water on the other side of the earth will rise and cause a mighty flood." Creator made a very tall pinon tree. Girl-Without-Parents covered the tree framework with pinon gum, creating a large, tight ball. In four days, the flood occurred. Creator went up on a cloud, taking his twenty-eight helpers with him. Girl-Without-Parents put the others into the large, hollow ball, closing it tight at the top.

In twelve days, the water receded, leaving the float-ball high on a hilltop. Girl-Without-Parents led the gods out from the float-ball onto the new earth. She took them upon her cloud, drifting upward until they met Creator with his helpers, who had completed their work making the sky during the flood time on earth. Together the two clouds descended to a valley below. There, Girl-Without-Parents gathered everyone together to listen to Creator.

"I am planning to leave you," he said. "I wish each of you to do your best toward making a perfect, happy world.

"You, Lightning-Rumbler, shall have charge of clouds and water.

"You, Sky-Boy, look after all Sky-People.

"You, Earth-Daughter, take charge of all crops and Earth-People.

"You, Pollen-Girl, care for their health and guide them.

"You, Girl-Without-Parents, I leave you in charge over all."

Creator then turned toward Girl-Without-Parents and together they rubbed their legs with their hands and quickly cast them forcefully downward. Immediately between them arose a great pile of wood, over which Creator waved a hand, creating fire. Great clouds of smoke at once drifted skyward. Into this cloud, Creator disappeared. The other gods followed him in other clouds of smoke, leaving the twenty-eight workers to people the earth. Sun-God went east to live and travel with the Sun. Girl-Without-Parents departed westward to live on the far horizon. Small-Boy and Pollen-Girl made cloud homes in the south. Big Dipper can still be seen in the northern sky at night, a reliable guide to all.

🐼 Australian Aboriginal: The Dreamtime

In the beginning the earth was a bare plain. All was dark. There was no life, no death. The sun, the moon, and the stars slept beneath the earth. All the eternal ancestors slept there, too, until at last they woke themselves out of their own eternity and broke through to the surface.

When the eternal ancestors arose, in the Dreamtime, they wandered the earth, sometimes in animal form -- as kangaroos, or emus, or lizards -- sometimes in human shape, sometimes part animal and human, sometimes as part human and plant.

Two such beings, self-created out of nothing, were the Ungambikula. Wandering the world, they found half-made human beings. They were made of animals and plants, but were shapeless bundles, lying higgledy-piggledy, near where water holes and salt lakes could be created. The people were all doubled over into balls, vague and unfinished, without limbs or features.

With their great stone knives, the Ungambikula carved heads, bodies, legs, and arms out of the bundles. They made the faces, and the hands and feet. At last the human beings were finished.

Thus every man and woman was transformed from nature and owes allegiance to the totem of the animal or the plant that made the bundle they were created from -- such as the plum tree, the grass seed, the large and small lizards, the parakeet, or the rat.

This work done, the ancestors went back to sleep. Some of them returned to underground homes, others became rocks and trees. The trails the ancestors walked in the Dreamtime are holy trails. Everywhere the ancestors went, they left sacred traces of their presence -- a rock, a waterhole, a tree.

For the Dreamtime does not merely lie in the distant past, the Dreamtime is the eternal Now. Between heartbeat and heartbeat, the Dreamtime can come again.

🐼 Aztec

The mother of the Aztec creation story was called Coatlique (the Lady of the Skirt of Snakes). She was created in the image of the unknown, decorated with skulls, snakes, and lacerated hands. There are no cracks in her body and she is a perfect monolith (a totality of intensity and self-containment, yet her features were square and decapitated).

Coatlique was first impregnated by an obsidian knife and gave birth to Coyolxauhqui, goddess of the moon, and to a group of male offspring, who became the stars. Then one day Coatlique found a ball of feathers, which she tucked into her bosom. When she looked for it later, it was gone, at which time she realized that she was again pregnant. Her children, the moon and stars did not believe her story. Ashamed of their mother, they resolved to kill her. A goddess could only give birth once, to the original litter of divinity and no more. During the time that they were plotting her demise, Coatlique gave birth to the fiery god of war, Huitzilopochtli. With the help of a fire serpent, he destroyed his brothers and sister, murdering them in a rage. He beheaded Coyolxauhqui and threw her body into a deep gorge in a mountain, where it lies dismembered forever. The natural cosmos of the Indians was born of catastrophe. The heavens literally crumbled to pieces. The earth mother fell and was fertilized, while her children were torn apart by fratricide and then scattered and disjointed throughout the universe.