

A hand holding a brush over a line drawing of a man in traditional Chinese attire. The background is a light greenish-yellow color. The text is in white, bold, sans-serif font.

# PEOPLE WHO SHAPED CHINA

STORIES FROM  
THE HISTORY OF THE  
MIDDLE KINGDOM

BOOK

ONE

NEW EPOCH WEEKLY

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# Table of Contents

[0 Pan Gu—Creation of the universe](#)

[00 Nü Wa—Birth of mankind](#)

[1 The Yellow Emperor—Civilization begins](#)

[2 Emperor Yao—Ruled with selflessness and virtue](#)

[3 Emperor Shun—Filial and humane](#)

[4 Yu the Great—Controls the Flood](#)

[5 King Wen of Zhou—The Mandate of Heaven](#)

[6 Jiang Ziya—Fishing for a king](#)

[7 King You of Zhou—The laughter of a beauty brings a kingdom to ruin](#)

[8 Lao Zi—The Old Master of Taoism](#)

[9 Confucius—China's greatest teacher](#)

[10 Guan Zhong and Duke Huan—Honor the king, expel the barbarians](#)

[11 Wu Zixu—Revenge and justice](#)

[12 King Goujian of Yue—The triumph of a defeated kingdom](#)

[13 Mo Zi—Strong defense, universal love](#)

[14 Sun Zi and Sun Bin—The Art of War](#)

[15 Qu Yuan—When wise words fell on deaf ears](#)

[16 Shang Yang—Equal before the law](#)

[17 Ying Zheng—King of Qin](#)

[18 Qin Shi Huang—The First Emperor](#)

[19 Liu Bang—Destined for greatness](#)

[20 Han Xin—Pillar of the Nation](#)

[21 Xiang Yu—The Hegemon King](#)

[22 Emperor Wu of Han—The Emperor of War](#)

[23 Su Wu and Zhang Qian—Explorers of the Great Han](#)

[24 Wang Zhaojun—The beauty who brought peace](#)

[25 Chen Tang—The Han Dynasty's Wild West](#)

[26 Wang Mang—A tongue that tricked the empire with sweet lies](#)

[27 Liu Xiu—The empire reborn](#)

[28 Zhang Daoling—The Heavenly Master](#)

[29 Lü Bu—The End of a Tyrant](#)

[30 Cao Cao—The mightiest warlord](#)

[31 Liu Bei—Heroes of the Three Kingdoms](#)

[32 Zhuge Liang—The Crouching Dragon](#)

[33 Sima Yi—The end of an era](#)

[34 Hua Tuo—A doctor before his time](#)

[35 Sima Zhong—China plunges into chaos](#)

[36 Fu Jian—The battle that split China](#)

[Timeline of Events](#)

# 0

## Pan Gu

### —Creation of the universe

**L**ike all other ancient cultures, as Chinese civilization grew, it sought to explain the beginnings of the universe and the origin of existence.

Before the creation of the universe, the cosmos was an enormous empty egg. There was no north or south, no east or west. It contained nothing but void matter and a sleeping giant named Pan Gu.

Finally, Pan Gu awoke from his eons of slumber. He was surrounded by stuffy blackness and could hardly move. Irritated, he split open the cosmic shell.

From the egg exploded layers and layers of existence, from the most microscopic energy particles to stars and galaxies. Light and clarity ascended to become the endless heavens, while heavy murkiness sank to form the vast earth.

Pan Gu looked around with wonder. Fearing that the heavens and the earth would become one again, he decided to do something about the unbearable confines that had trapped him for so many years. For another epoch lasting 18,000 years, Pan Gu stood like a pillar between heaven and earth, separating them forever.

Finally, Pan Gu had no more strength. As Pan Gu lay dying, his body transformed. His left eye became a scorching red sun and his right eye, a cool silver moon. His last gasp of breath became the invisible wind and the cloaking white clouds. His final voice became the thunder.

His hair and beard transformed into the stars and the Milky Way. His limbs became mountains standing in the four universal directions. The blood running through his veins transformed into rivers, his tendons

paved into roads, and his muscles disintegrated into fertile lands. His skin and sweat pores blossomed into flowers, trees, and plants; his teeth and bones shaped into metals, precious stones, jades, and splendid treasures. His sweat fell as raindrops on the earth that had now come into being.

According to this ancient Chinese legend, spirit and substance came into existence at the same time. There was the egg, and with it came Pan Gu's will to crack it open and release all life from within.









# Nü Wa

—Birth of mankind

All great civilizations have stories about how gods created man. For thousands of years, the Chinese people have passed down the legend of Nü Wa, the goddess who crafted people from clay.

When the world was still new and empty, Nü Wa descended to the earth and strode along the Yellow River. She peered into the water and marveled at her own beautiful reflection, but she felt lonely. Reaching into the river, she picked up a handful of yellow clay and molded a small miniature figure of herself. She then took two glistening black pebbles from the water, and turned them into her figure's eyes. Nü Wa set her figure on the ground, and it came to life and called her "mama."

Delighted, Nü Wa happily kneaded and molded more and more people from the yellow clay, with their eyes crafted from the glistening black pebbles. Yet as she kneaded, her fingers blistered, and she realized how few of her children there were to cover the vast land.

She dipped a reed stalk into the wet clay of the river and flung it in the air, sending droplets flying all around. Wherever a drop hit the ground, life was created, and out sprouted a human being. Nü Wa traveled the land, dipping her stalk into the clay and creating men and women to fill the beautiful empty world with life.

Nü Wa loved and protected her children. With heavenly tools, she and her husband, Fu Xi, set the laws of nature and put the universe in order. Day and night and the two forces of yin and yang were formed.

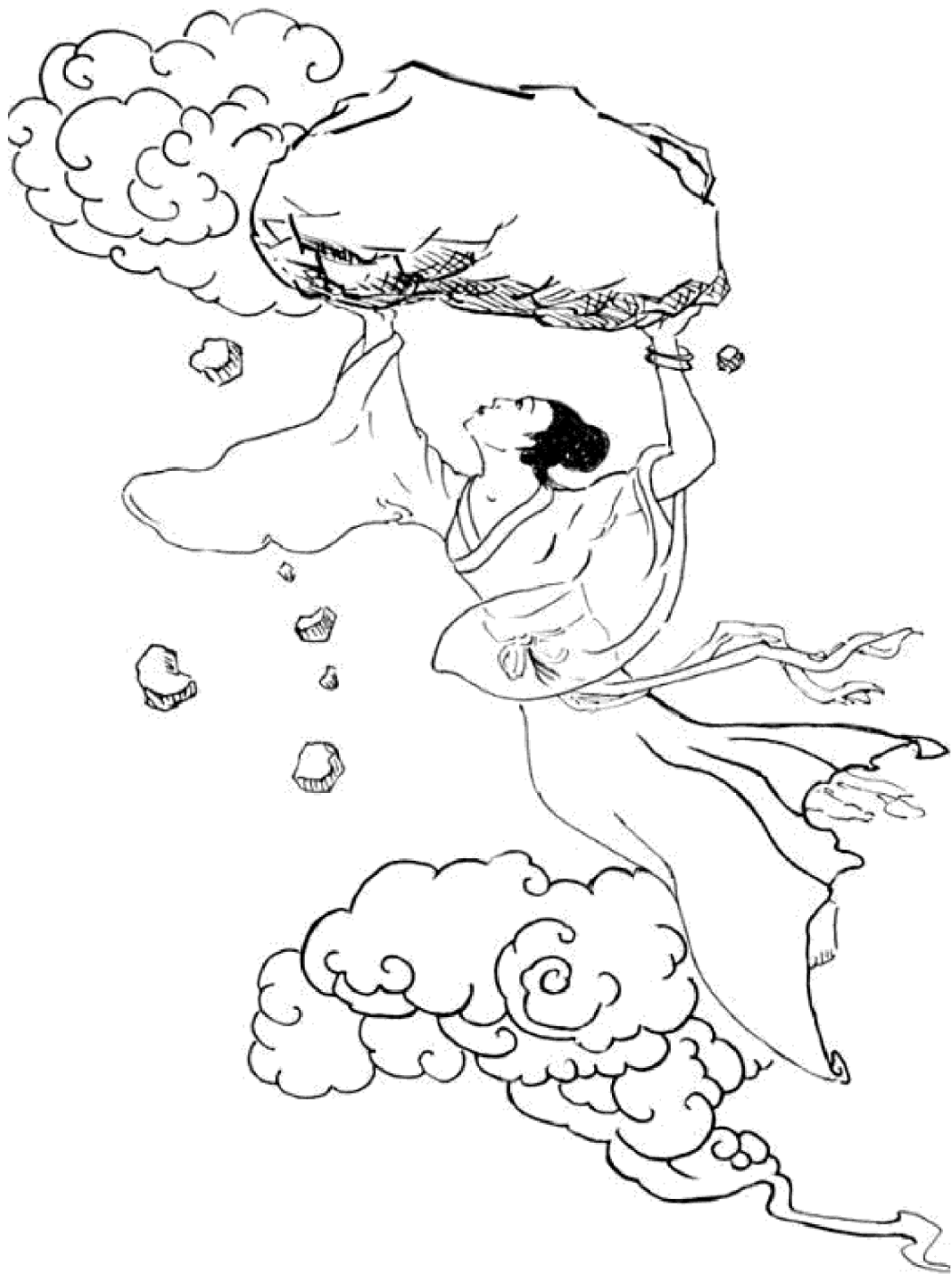
The humanity that Nü Wa created prospered. However, she would soon have to save them.

The God of Water rebelled against heaven, and the heavens sent the

God of Fire to conquer him. The God of Water was defeated, but he fell to earth and crushed Mount Buzhou, a mountain pillar propping up the heavens. The sky cracked, and the earth broke. Nü Wa could only watch as her people were drowned and burned.

Nü Wa was desperate. She searched everywhere for all the precious stones and metals she could find and melted them into a sacred boulder of five brilliant hues.

Despite the scalding heat, Goddess Nü Wa hauled the molten boulder and flew toward the huge hole in the sky to mend it. She held it there until the boulder cooled and the floods stopped. The people Nü Wa had created survived to play out the 5,000 years of Chinese history.



# 1

## The Yellow Emperor

—Civilization begins

According to Chinese legends, civilization began when gods taught their secrets to mankind. Sui Ren taught man how to use fire to cook. You Chao showed man how to build houses and forts for protection against storms and beasts. The Dragon Master Fu Xi passed on the knowledge of yin and yang and created the rites of marriage between husband and wife.

As people learned the ways of the gods, their numbers increased. Shen Nong, the Divine Farmer, studied hundreds of plants and herbs and discovered their nutritional and medical values. Mankind invented agriculture, and civilization was born.

One of Shen Nong's descendants was named Yan. His tribe resided in the Yellow River Valley, a fertile land where the early Chinese grew their crops. Because of Shen Nong's famous deeds, this tribe became the most respected in the region.

Another large tribe, the Nine Li, lived to the south. They were a powerful and war-oriented race. They were friendly with Yan's people, but that changed when Chi You took over as their leader.

Chi You led the Nine Li to attack and seize land belonging to Yan. Chi You had many brothers, and it was said that all of them had heads and arms made of bronze, making them immune to the blows of swords and spears. Yan's farming folk were no match for them.

It was then that the Yellow Emperor, Huang Di, appeared. He and his tribe accepted the Yan refugees as their own people, but Chi You was offended and sent his army to attack the Yellow Emperor.

The Nine Li were deadly soldiers, skilled not just in direct combat but

also in their use of fire and smoke on the battlefield. They even had the power to command mighty floods. The Yellow Emperor's men faced water and flames whichever way they went, and they lost 71 battles. But the Yellow Emperor had the gods on his side.

Heaven gave uniforms to the Yellow Emperor's army and books to the Yellow Emperor to teach him to organize his soldiers for battle. He invented a war chariot that could quickly transport troops anywhere they were needed, and drums to give commands to his soldiers at long range. A tribe that lived on the steppe pledged loyalty to the Yellow Emperor and provided tamed horses to support his army. He also prayed to the gods of wind and drought to come to his aid.

In the final battle with Chi You, the Yellow Emperor's tribe crushed the Nine Li. Chi You was killed, and his followers escaped to the south. They became the Miao and other ethnic minorities living in southern China and Southeast Asia, and some worship Chi You to this day.

The Yellow Emperor's people formed the earliest Chinese society. Modern Chinese people regard themselves as the descendants of the Yellow Emperor and the Yan tribe.

The emperor's wife, Lei Zu, discovered how to make silk from the cocoons of worms and passed this art among the tribes. As a result, silk was a special symbol of China for thousands of years.

Cang Jie, one of the Yellow Emperor's officials, gathered the footprints of birds and beasts and used them to create writing—the first Chinese characters.

At the end of his rule, the Yellow Emperor held a ceremony to offer his respects to the gods. Legend has it that as the incense burned, a yellow dragon came down from the sky, carried the Yellow Emperor on its back, and ascended with him to heaven.



## 2

# Emperor Yao

—Ruled with selflessness and virtue

*"If there is but a single man who goes hungry,  
it is I who am responsible."*

One famous Chinese myth tells of how in the ancient days, there were ten suns in the heavens. Every day they took turns riding their divine chariots out across the sky, warming the earth below them.

One day, the suns decided to come out all at once. People shriveled and perished as the water in the rivers dried up, the trees in the forests turned to ashes, and the earth burned.

Emperor Yao dispatched his most talented warrior, a godlike archer, to shoot down the suns. But the demon suns escaped unscathed.

Desperate, the emperor consulted his wisest minister. The minister gave the following advice: "Hou Yi may have his divine arrows, but the matter rests with the piety of the sovereign."

Upon hearing these words, Emperor Yao made a trip to Mount Kunlun, the mountain where Heaven touches Earth. He bathed himself in the mountain streams. He abstained from wine and meat. He prayed to the gods and his ancestors.

Sure enough, good news reached the court soon afterwards. Archer Hou Yi shot down nine suns, leaving one to warm the world.





Emperor Yao was an Emperor devoted to his citizens. He attended ceaselessly to the people's needs and stood by them in their suffering. He lived in a grass hut held together by craggy timber felled from the foot of a mountain. His diet consisted of broth of wild herbs and brown rice. His clothing was made of kudzu hemp. In cold weather he wore a deerskin cape. His dishes were made of earthen clay.

None of this bothered Emperor Yao, since he was constantly only thinking of the people's well-being. His philosophy: "If there is but a single man who goes hungry, it is I who am responsible." Even when someone committed a crime, the emperor blamed his own rule for not being able to prevent the act.



In governance, he had the aid of virtuous ministers such as Qi, who was in charge of war; Lord Millet, the minister of agriculture and ancestor of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC); and Shun, who had administration powers over education and would become the next emperor. Because Yao's reign was one of virtue and wisdom, the people were able to endure and overcome disasters such as the Great Flood.

The heavens blessed Yao with approval during his reign. Phoenixes, the noblest of birds, perched in the emperor's courtyard. Weeds transformed

into cereals, fit for humans to eat.

It is said that Emperor Yao invented the game of Weiqi, also known by its Japanese name of Go. This game has few rules but contains a nearly infinite number of possible scenarios. It has only recently been mastered by artificial intelligence.

Yao created Go hoping to improve the character of his son Dan Zhu, who he believed did not have the morality needed to take on the responsibilities of emperor. Unfortunately, Dan Zhu was arrogant, hot-headed, and unwilling to elevate his characters. Emperor Yao had no choice but to pass on the throne to his minister of education, the wise and honorable Shun.

# 3

## Emperor Shun

—Filial and humane

This is the story of Yu Chonghua, a pottery worker who eventually ascended to the imperial throne as the legendary Emperor Shun.

Shun had a terrible childhood. His mother died when he was at a tender age, and his father remarried. The new mother denied Shun any love or kindness and treated him horribly. She had a boy of her own, Xiang, a spoiled child who hated Shun just as much as his mother did.

When Shun was 10 years old, a religious master saw promise in the boy and wanted to teach him to read and write. But Shun's evil stepmother refused, and Shun spent his days working in the fields instead.

However, Shun was unlike other people. He did not bear a grudge against his wicked stepmother or show her disrespect. Instead, he did his best to make his parents' lives better. Heavens were touched by the filial piety\* of Shun. An elephant and birds were sent to help him plough and weed the fields respectively.



Shun worked as a potter when he grew up. His great virtues earned him great reputation, so much so that he was recommended to Emperor Yao, who was looking for someone to succeed him. This was during a time when the title of emperor was not hereditary.

Emperor Yao was impressed by Shun after meeting him. He decided to

put Shun to the test. He married his two daughters E Huang and Nü Ying to Shun and had his nine sons spend time with Shun to learn more about this virtuous man. Despite being in Emperor Yao's good books, Shun continued to serve his duties to his stepmother and stepbrother.

However, the stepmother and stepbrother were consumed by jealousy when they saw Shun return home with two elegant princesses as his wives. They conspired against him. Knowing that Shun was an honorable man, they claimed they needed his help before trying to take his life. But Shun's loyal wives protected him with magical powers.

Emperor Yao favored Shun and observed him for 20 years before making him the new emperor. The emperor picked a blessed day to hold his abdication ceremony. He prayed to the heavens for divine approval together with Shun as a gesture that Shun was meant to become the next emperor of China.

They made sacrifices to the gods and sank a piece of fine jade into a river. As soon as this happened, colorful lights beamed from the water, and clouds gathered in the sky. A dragon and a giant tortoise appeared, carrying the heavenly scriptures known as the "River Chart" and the "Inscription of Luo."

Having witnessed these miracles, the emperor abdicated the throne, and Shun was made the new emperor.

Shun treated his people with unconditional compassion and patience, just as he treated his family. He abolished torture and decapitation, and did his best to teach his people about kindness and morality.

*\*Filial piety: The concept that people must be good and respectful to their parents and superiors.*

# 4

## Yu the Great

### —Controls the Flood

Chinese legends say that during the reign of Emperor Yao, much of the world was submerged by a Great Flood. As the flood began, the emperor searched for people to build walls and dams.

Xi Wang Mu, the Lady Queen Mother, informed the emperor that the Flood was ordered by heaven as a punishment for humanity, but the gods had sent a savior: Yu the Great. A title like "the Great" is unusual for a Chinese ruler. But history has made an exception for Yu, who tamed the mighty waters.

It is said that Yu was descended from the Yellow Emperor. His father was Gun (pronounced "gwuhn"), a skilled craftsman. But even his abilities were not good enough to stop the flood, so he took the risk to steal the xi rang, a magical expanding soil, from the gods.

The theft was discovered by the Emperor of Heaven. Enraged, the Emperor of Heaven punished the insolent mortal Gun by sending even stronger torrents. All of Gun's work was destroyed, and he was sentenced to death for stealing from the heavens.

The God of Fire came after him, and Gun died in battle. Emperor Yao had to find someone else to control the waters. He chose Gun's son, the man we now call Yu the Great.

Learning from the mistakes of his father Gun, Yu and his followers worked with the water, instead of against it, so that it would be redirected eastward in an orderly manner. The ancient records tell of how Yu and his men split open entire mountains to channel the floodwaters back to the ocean.



Yu had two wives, Nü Jiao and Nü You, but he rarely had any time for them. Even when his son was born, Nü Jiao had to bring her child to a boulder hanging over Yu's travel route. Holding the baby, she gazed for a long time as her husband disappeared into the distance.

One story tells how Yu the Great invented chopsticks. One time, the leader was stuck on an island with some of his men, and became extremely hungry. They found some meat, set up a campfire and



prepared their meal, but Yu could hardly wait. Picking up two long sticks, he picked up the meat from the blazing flames. After devouring his meal, he went back to work.

Yu had divine powers, which he sometimes used to work miracles. At the strategic pass of Huanyuan, Yu and his workers ran into some unusually tough stone. Yu the Great grabbed an axe and a drum, and bellowed a command to his men:

"While I am working on this mountain, no one shall disturb me until you hear the sound of the drum."

"Highness, your wives have arrived," an officer replied.

"Wait for me here, I shall come after finishing everything," Yu said. Then he went into the cave and began his task.

When the drum sounded, Nü Jiao and Nü You went up to see their husband. But instead of a man, there in the cave was a huge yellow dragon, slashing away with ease at the solid mountain rock. Yu had taken the form of this majestic beast and his tail hit the drum by accident.

Impressed but terrified, Yu's wives ran out of the cave and back down the mountain.

Yu the Great took over ten years to bring an end to the Great Flood. After this, the reigning Emperor Shun passed on the throne to him.

Before becoming emperor, Yu the Great first offered sacrificial rites to heaven, earth, and the gods. He then prayed to heaven to be granted the wisdom to rule the country.

Emperor Yu founded China's first dynasty, the Xia, and established the rules of early Chinese government. Instead of ruling the entire country, he gave power to families of nobles who each had their own land. After Yu, Chinese leaders were called kings. China would not have another emperor until Qin Shi Huang.

# King Wen of Zhou

## —The Mandate of Heaven

In early Chinese religion, the highest god was Shang Di, Lord of Heaven. Like the Greek god Zeus, he had the power to command lightning. Only royalty had the honor of offering sacrifice and prayer to him on behalf of their people.

Around 3,000 years ago, a Chinese prince was thinking about marriage. There was a woman he loved, but that was not enough. The prince, called Ji Chang, had to be sure that this woman was fit to be queen. Finally, after many rituals and ceremonies, Ji Chang got his answer. His wedding procession crossed a river on a bridge made of boats, and he married the woman he loved, a princess from another kingdom.

Ji Chang became king of Zhou, which was one state in the great feudal realm of the Shang Dynasty. Historians call him King Wen or Wen Wang, which means "king of culture." He ruled responsibly, earning him love and respect. His queen, Tai Si, gave birth to ten sons.



The Shang Dynasty, the second dynasty in Chinese history, had ruled China's states for hundreds of years. Before that had come the Xia, founded by Yu the Great after he stopped the floods.

The king at the time, Di Xin, was a skilled ruler who could hunt wild beasts with his bare hands and win arguments against even the wisest of his ministers. But as Di Xin grew older, he became a wasteful tyrant, enjoying fine food, entertainment, and women inside a grand palace. He punished those who dared speak out against him, and raised taxes to support his lifestyle.

Meanwhile, King Wen became more well-known. Nobles and commoners alike praised him for his moral virtue and excellent governance.



Di Xin became jealous. One year, he trapped King Wen by summoning him to the capital, and then throwing him in prison. The Shang tyrant had King Wen's firstborn son, Prince Yikao, put to death.

King Wen accepted his imprisonment. While in captivity, he thought of the Eight Trigrams of divination that the god Fu Xi had passed on to humanity. From these he developed the Sixty-Four Hexagrams, which are contained in the famous Book of Changes.

To save their king, the people of Zhou State sent treasure and beautiful women to Di Xin, hoping that he would have mercy.

After seven years, Di Xin finally released King Wen. By this time, much of China believed that the Shang Dynasty no longer possessed the Mandate of Heaven, or the right to rule the country.

Upon his return, King Wen hired the wise Jiang Ziya to be prime minister, and the Zhou State grew stronger. The king formed alliances with other states.

Time passed. In the year 1056 BC, King Wen passed away. His second son Ji Fa became King Wu or Wu Wang, the "king of war."

In the year 1048 BC, King Wu raised armies to attack Di Xin. Over 800 dukes from around the country offered to join him, but he called off the campaign. The timing wasn't right.

Two years later, Di Xin sent 100,000 elite troops to subjugate barbarian tribes living in the east. Then one day he received bad news. A massive army from Zhou and its allies was approaching the capital from the west.

The Shang army was large, but its best soldiers were too far away to protect the capital and Di Xin. The frightened king called every able-bodied man to war. Even slaves and criminals were given weapons and sent to fight. The Battle of Muye had begun.

Di Xin's new recruits had no training. They marched into battle, only to flee or surrender. Seeing that all was lost, Di Xin donned a suit of jade armor and retreated to his favorite pavilion. He set fire to his palace and burned himself to death.



In 1046 BC, King Wu united China under the Zhou Dynasty, third in Chinese history. Like the Shang Dynasty, it was a feudal empire composed of many independent states with their own leaders and armies. Most of the new rulers were from the Zhou kingdom or its allies, but some were from the old Shang regime.

King Wu treated the defeated Shang nobles with respect. Some of them did not submit to Zhou's rule and escaped northeast. Led by Ji Zi, they settled in Korea and helped build the Korean nation.

The Zhou Dynasty faced an uncertain future. King Wu died just two years after his victory. His son, King Cheng, was too young to assume leadership over the new empire.

King Wu's younger brother, the Duke of Zhou, decided to run the government in King Cheng's place. Other nobles suspected that he was trying to take power for himself and betray the king, but he withstood the criticism. When King Cheng came of age, the Duke of Zhou kept his promise and gave up control of the empire.

The Zhou Dynasty was the longest dynasty in Chinese history, lasting around 800 years.



*The Zhou Dynasty began about 3,000 years ago and lasted almost 800 years until 250 BC. It covered the northern and central parts of China's modern territory.*

# 6

## Jiang Ziya

—Fishing for a king

**L**ike the Trojan War of the ancient Greek world, our memory of early Chinese history is mixed with epic legends. The most well-known stories of how the kingdom of Zhou overthrew the Shang Dynasty come from an epic folk novel Fengshen Yanyi, the Investiture of the Gods.

In the beginning of the novel, Shang King Di Xin, goes to worship the goddess of creation, Nü Wa. Instead of offering his pious respects, Di Xin had lustful thoughts upon seeing Nü Wa's beauty and scribbled an indecent poem on the walls of her temple.

To punish Di Xin, Nü Wa summoned three evil spirits to lead him astray and bring an end to the Shang Dynasty. Meanwhile, other gods began to act. They arranged for kings, generals, and ministers to play different roles in the unfolding battle between the Shang Dynasty and the kingdom of Zhou.

On Mount Kunlun, in the land of the immortals, there was an aging religious cultivator called Jiang Ziya. His master was a powerful god, Yuanshi Tianzun, or the Respected Primeval Heavenly Elder. He gave Jiang Ziya two tasks. The first was to return to the mortal realm and find a man of righteous character who could help him overthrow Di Xin.

The second duty Jiang had was to invest the gods with titles and ranks according to their conduct in the coming war.

Jiang Ziya went to Zhaoge, capital of the Shang. Two years of searching ended in vain; there was simply no one worthy enough to be endowed with the task of ruling the land. Jiang Ziya decided his task was hopeless and retreated into the wilderness.





One of the spirits Nü Wa sent to entice Di Xin was a fox demon. She possessed the body of a beautiful princess and became the bewitching Da Ji. Once she was in the royal court, she quickly became Di Xin's main consort. The king became even more wasteful and indecent. Many of his ministers and subordinates tried to warn him of the possible dire consequences of his behavior, but he cared about nothing apart from how to satisfy Da Ji.

Da Ji was a perverse character who had an obsession for torturing other people. Under her influence, Di Xin invented cruel methods to torture those against him to death. He killed his queen and replaced her with Da Ji. He had his uncle, the loyal minister Bi Gan, put to death by

having his heart cut out.

Many of the princes and kings who served the Shang Dynasty worried about the future. Many of them looked to King Wen, the leader of the Zhou State. Then Di Xin had King Wen imprisoned for seven years, and his eldest son Yikao was killed.



When King Wen was finally released, he prepared to overthrow the Shang Dynasty. Once, he travelled out into the wild. Someone told him that he would find an ally there.

But instead, he ran into a strange old man muttering to himself while fishing by a river.

Moving closer, King Wen saw that instead of a hook, the old man had a straight nail on the end of his fishing line and was holding it a few feet above the water.



"How can you expect to catch anything?" the surprised king asked.

"Not a problem. The ones who are willing to be hooked will come," the old man said to himself.

King Wen thought the old man must be crazy, but he decided to keep talking to him. It was Jiang Ziya. As their conversation continued, King Wen discovered that Jiang Ziya was no madman, but the person who could help his country to defeat Di Xin and restore order to China.

As for Jiang Ziya, he had finally found the king he was waiting for—not by scouring the land, but by staying put and waiting for him to come.



Jiang Ziya was knowledgeable in military and political affairs, but he also learned formidable supernatural arts that he used to vanquish the gods and demons that went against the will of heaven and continued to

assist the Shang Dynasty. One of his great enemies was Shen Gongbao, who was also a student of the Yuanshi Tianzun.

Shen Gongbao was very capable and proud of his ability. He was virtually invincible in combat since he could restore his head even if it was cut off. But when he saw that his master sent Jiang Ziya and not him to fulfill the duty of investing the gods, he was filled with jealousy and acted against Jiang.

The gods defending the Shang Dynasty were eventually defeated. When the evil fox spirit Da Ji was captured, no mortal man ordered to execute her could overcome her seductive magic, until Jiang Ziya himself revealed her true form and beheaded her.

As ordained, Jiang Ziya invested each of the gods who participated in the heavenly battles with ranks and titles, no matter which side they had fought for. What mattered was their individual courage and virtue.

In history, Jiang Ziya was a real person who served as the prime minister for kings Wen and Wu. His family was given rule over the eastern state of Qi, and it became an important nation during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.

*NOTE:*

*In traditional Chinese folklore, Di Xin, the last king of the Shang Dynasty, is remembered as a wicked and greedy tyrant. Most of the time he is called Zhou Wang, "king of brutality" The Chinese character zhou (紂) used for his name is different from the one used for the kingdom of Zhou (周).*

# King You of Zhou

—The laughter of a beauty brings a kingdom to ruin

The Chinese have a saying: a beautiful woman can bring about the downfall of a city or even a nation.

In 780 BC, the capital of the Zhou kingdom was Haojing, a city near present day Xi'an. One summer day, the beacon towers surrounding the capital were set ablaze, signalling that invaders were on the way. Black smoke spewed into the sky.

Rulers of vassal states from all over the kingdom saw the smoke and thought there was an emergency. They got into their armour and marched their men to the royal capital to defend it. But when they arrived at the capital, they saw no enemies, only the king singing and dancing with a gorgeous beauty at his side.

Seeing the soldiers and their generals panting and sweating, expecting a war when there was none, the beauty laughed and gave a bewitching smile.

"Nothing happened, you can go back," the king said.

This was King You of the Zhou, China's third dynasty. He was born in the 750s or 740s BC and made king when he was 13. He was the last king of what historians call the Western Zhou.

The beautiful woman was Bao Si, a stunning but strange woman. King You had a wife, Queen Shen, but he was infatuated with Bao Si's smiles, which were beautiful beyond compare.

But Bao Si had a problem. She would not smile except in the most extraordinary circumstances. King You found it extremely annoying and tried ways and means to make her beam. He demoted Queen Shen and declared that Bao Si's son would inherit the throne. But even that failed



When the rulers of the vassal states arrived to see not the enemy but King You drinking and making merry with Bao Si, no one dared voice their exasperation. They just returned home quietly.

As King You repeated the antic again and again, the rulers grew tired of the trick.

Finally, the barbarian hordes did arrive to attack Haojing and loot its riches. But this time, the flare of the beacon roused no reaction from the

wars are fought with pilotless aircraft and cyberattacks, Sun Zi's wisdom remains required reading for military officers around the world.

But the bamboo strips containing "The Art of War" that Sun Bin had was the only copy of the book left. The others had all been lost when soldiers from the state of Yue set fire to the capital of Wu, burning down its library and many other treasures.

In the beginning of "The Art of War", Sun Zi said: "Warfare is an important matter for a nation. It is a matter of life and death, the way to survival or to destruction. It must be studied."

Legend has it that Sun Bin was Sun Zi's grandson. But this was not the reason Guigu Zi passed down the valuable teachings to him.

The Art of War, Guigu Zi told his student, could be used for good or evil. It was because he thought Sun Bin was a man of moral character that he was worthy.

Sun Bin learned the book by heart. Then, sure enough, his friend Pang recommended him to the king of Wei. Sun Bin soon received a letter from the Wei government summoning him for military service.



When Sun Bin was packing his things for the journey, Guigu Zi asked him to pick a flower for him. Sun Bin reached for a chrysanthemum standing in a bronze vase on his desk and held it up.

"Teacher, please use this flower to tell my fortune," said Sun Bin, putting the flower back in the vase.

Guigu Zi said: "This flower's stem is broken, so that's a bad sign. But the chrysanthemum is a flower that can withstand the winter cold. Even in bad conditions, it does not fall."

"Also," he continued, "the flower came from a bronze vase, and you returned it to its vase. This means that you will not carve out a career for yourself in Wei, but in your home country."

Sun Bin was from the state of Qi. Still, he bade his teacher farewell and travelled to Wei to join Pang, who had by now risen to become the overall