

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Chinese Mythology 神话传说

Chinese mythology began in 12th century B.C. (close to the time of the Trojan War). The myths and legends were passed down in oral format for over a thousand years, before being written down in early books such as Shui Jing Zhu 《水经注》 and Shan Hai Jing 《山海经》. Other myths continued to be passed down through oral traditions such as theatre and song, before being recorded in the form of novels such as Fengshen Yanyi 《封神演义》. A unique characteristic of Chinese culture is the relatively late appearance in Chinese literature of creation myths. The stories exist in several versions, with the creation of the first human being variously ascribed to Nüwa 女娲, and the universe to Pangu 盘古.

The Chinese dragon is one of the most important mythical creatures in Chinese mythology, considered to be the most powerful and divine creature symbolizing great power. Chinese people sometimes use the term "Descendants of the Dragon" as a sign of their ethnic identity.

Reading

Dingmin Wu, A Panoramic View of Chinese Culture, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2010

Lang Ye & Zhu Liangzhi, Insights into Chinese Culture, Foreign Language Teaching and Research press, Beijing, 2008

Ebrey Patricia Buckley, Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook, 2nd Ed, 1993

Questions

1. In Chinese mythology how did Pangu create the heaven, earth, mountains, rivers and human beings?
2. What are the differences between the dragon in Chinese culture and that in western culture?
3. What is Bruce Lee's Chinese name? Does it have something to do with Chinese myths?