

## **The Story of Pan Gu**

*from Rutgers University, NJ*

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 (a li is 1,640 feet) 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 lighting. 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.