



How the Five Ancients Became Men

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

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Before the earth was separated from the heavens, all there was was a great ball of watery vapor called chaos. And at that time the spirits of the five elemental powers took shape, and became the five Ancients. The first was called the Yellow Ancient, and he was the ruler of the earth. The second was called the Red Lord, and he was the ruler of the fire. The third was called the Dark Lord, and he was the ruler of the water. The fourth was known as the Wood Prince, and he was the ruler of the wood. The fifth was called the Mother of Metals, and ruled over them. These five Ancients set all their primal spirit into motion, so that water and earth sank down.

The heavens floated upward, and the earth grew firm in the depths. Then they allowed the waters to gather into rivers and seas, and hills and plains made their appearance. So the heavens opened and the earth was divided. And there were sun, moon and all the stars, wind, clouds, rain, and dew. The Yellow Ancient set earth's purest power spinning in a circle, and added the effect of fire and water thereto. Then there came forth grasses and trees, birds and beasts, and the tribes of the serpents and insects, fishes and turtles. The Wood Prince and the Mother of Metals combined light and darkness, and thus created the human race as men and women. And thus the world gradually came to be.

At that time there was one who was known as the True Prince of the Jasper Castle. He had acquired the art of sorcery through the cultivation of magic. The five Ancients begged him to rule as the supreme god. He dwelt

above the three and thirty heavens, and the Jasper Castle, of white jade with golden gates, was his. Before him stood the stewards of the eight-and-twenty houses of the moon, and the gods of the thunders and the Great Bear, and in addition a class of baneful gods whose influence was evil and deadly. They all aided the True Prince of the Jasper Castle to rule over the thousand tribes under the heavens, and to deal out life and death, fortune and misfortune. The Lord of the Jasper Castle is now known as the Great God, the White Jade Ruler.

The five Ancients withdrew after they had done their work, and thereafter lived in quiet purity. The Red Lord dwells in the South as the god of fire. The Dark Lord dwells in the North, as the mighty master of the somber polar skies. He lived in a castle of liquid crystal. In later ages he sent Confucius down upon earth as a saint. Hence this saint is known as the Son of Crystal. The Wood Prince dwells in the East. He is honored as the Green Lord, and watches over the coming into being of all creatures. In him lives the power of spring and he is the god of love.

The Mother of Metals dwells in the West, by the sea of Jasper, and is also known as the Queen-Mother of the West. She leads the rounds of the fairies, and watches over change and growth. The Yellow Ancient dwells in the middle. He is always going about in the world, in order to save and to help those in any distress. The first time he came to earth he was the Yellow Lord, who taught mankind all sorts of arts. In his later years he fathomed the meaning of the world on the Ethereal Mount, and flew up to the radiant sun. Under the rule of the Dschou dynasty he was born again as Li Oerl, and when he was born his hair and beard were white, for which reason he was called Laotsze, "Old Child."

He wrote the book of "Meaning and Life" and spread his teachings through the world. He is honored as the head of Taoism. At the beginning of the reign of the Han dynasty, he again appeared as the Old Man of the River, (Ho Schang Gung). He spread the teachings of Tao abroad mightily, so that from that time on Taoism flourished greatly. These doctrines are known to this day as the teachings of the Yellow Ancient. There is also a saying: "First Laotsze was, then the heavens were." And that must mean that Laotsze was that very same Yellow Ancient of primal days.

Note: "How the Five Ancients Became Men." This fairy-tale, the first of the legends of the gods, is given in the version current among the people. In it the five elemental spirits of earth, fire, water, wood and metal are brought into connection with a creation myth. "Prince of the Jasper Castle" or "The White Jade Ruler," Yu Huang Di, is the popular Chinese synonym for "the good lord." The phrase "White Jade" serves merely to express his dignity. All in all, there are 32 other Yu Huangs, among whom he is the highest. He may be

compared to Indra, who dwells in a heaven that also comprises 33 halls. The astronomic relationship between the two is very evident.

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