

NATURE DEITIES IN CHINESE MYTHOLOGY



By Lichen

This zine provides an overview of figures in Chinese mythology related to the natural world. This is not to say that Chinese myth is heavily focused on nature. That's an important part, sure, mostly due to agriculture. But one should know that many Chinese deities are associated with wealth and the household.

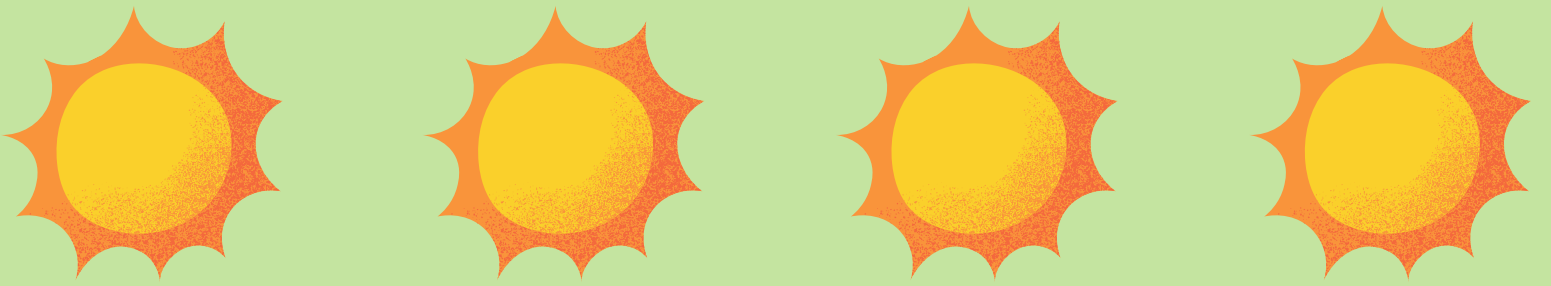
Another note - the creatures on the cover come from the Classic of Mountains and Seas (山海经). More info on Chinese mythology can also be found there.

Thanks for reading :-)

THE SUNS



Based on a legendary early emperor of China, Di Jun (帝俊) is linked with innovations in agriculture. He was the father of the ten suns, and Xi He (羲和) was their mother. The ten suns were flaming birds, and they were supposed to come out one at a time to light up the world. However, they decided to fly over the sky all at once, causing the world to burn. Di Jun decided to give the famed archer Hou Yi (后羿) arrows to shoot them down. Hou Yi left only one sun alive, so the world received just enough warmth.



THE MOON

In return for saving the world, the gods gave Hou Yi medicine that would grant him immortality. However, a greedy man who desired immortality raided his house to steal it. Panicking and trying to save the medicine, his wife Chang E (嫦娥) consumed it. It made her float up to heaven, but she chose to stay on the moon to remain close to Earth.



This is one interpretation of a story that has been retold with many different variations. Overall, Chang E's story is remembered during the Mid-Autumn festival.

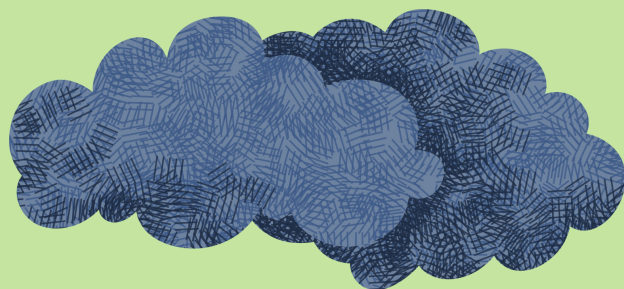
The Moon Hare, or Jade Hare (月兔), is said to live on the moon alongside Chang E. It pounds herbs with its mortar and pestle, including an elixir of immortality for Chang E. That is why the image of a rabbit can be seen on the full moon's surface.



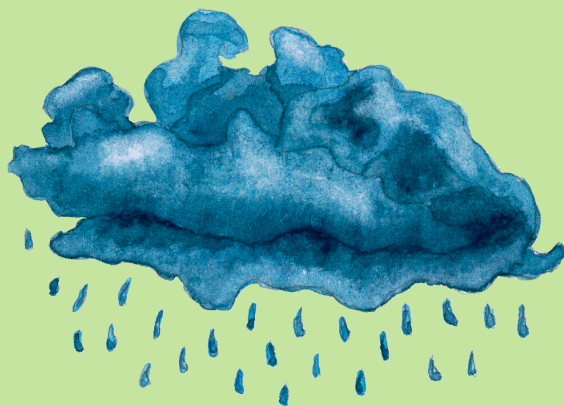
Another myth associated with the moon is that of Wu Gang (吴刚). Wu Gang was punished with the task of chopping down a tree because of his wrongdoing. However, the tree heals after each cut and will never fall. Like Sisyphus and his boulder, Wu Gang is performing an eternal, impossible action.

DRAGON KING

龙王



The dragon king controls the oceans and the weather. He resides in a beautiful palace under the sea. He is fierce and powerful. During the fifth and sixth months, he is honored to make sure there is a favorable amount of rain. In times of drought, he is asked to bring rain for the good of the harvest.



Examples of dragons in Chinese art and pop culture -
they represent good fortune & imperial power



From the Qing
Dynasty flag



From a Yuan
Dynasty textile



From a Ming
Dynasty plate



From a Journey to
the West TV show

LEI GONG

雷公

Lei Gong is the god of thunder. He carries a drum to make booming noises and a hammer to strike down wrongdoers.

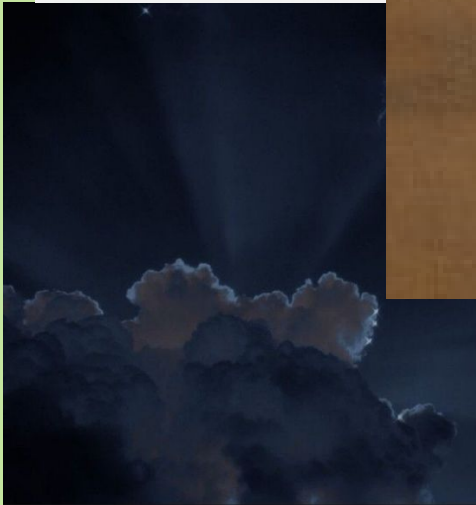


DIAN MU

電母

Lei Gong's wife is the goddess of lightning. She carries twin mirrors with which to create flashes of light.

Lei Gong & Dian Mu moodboard

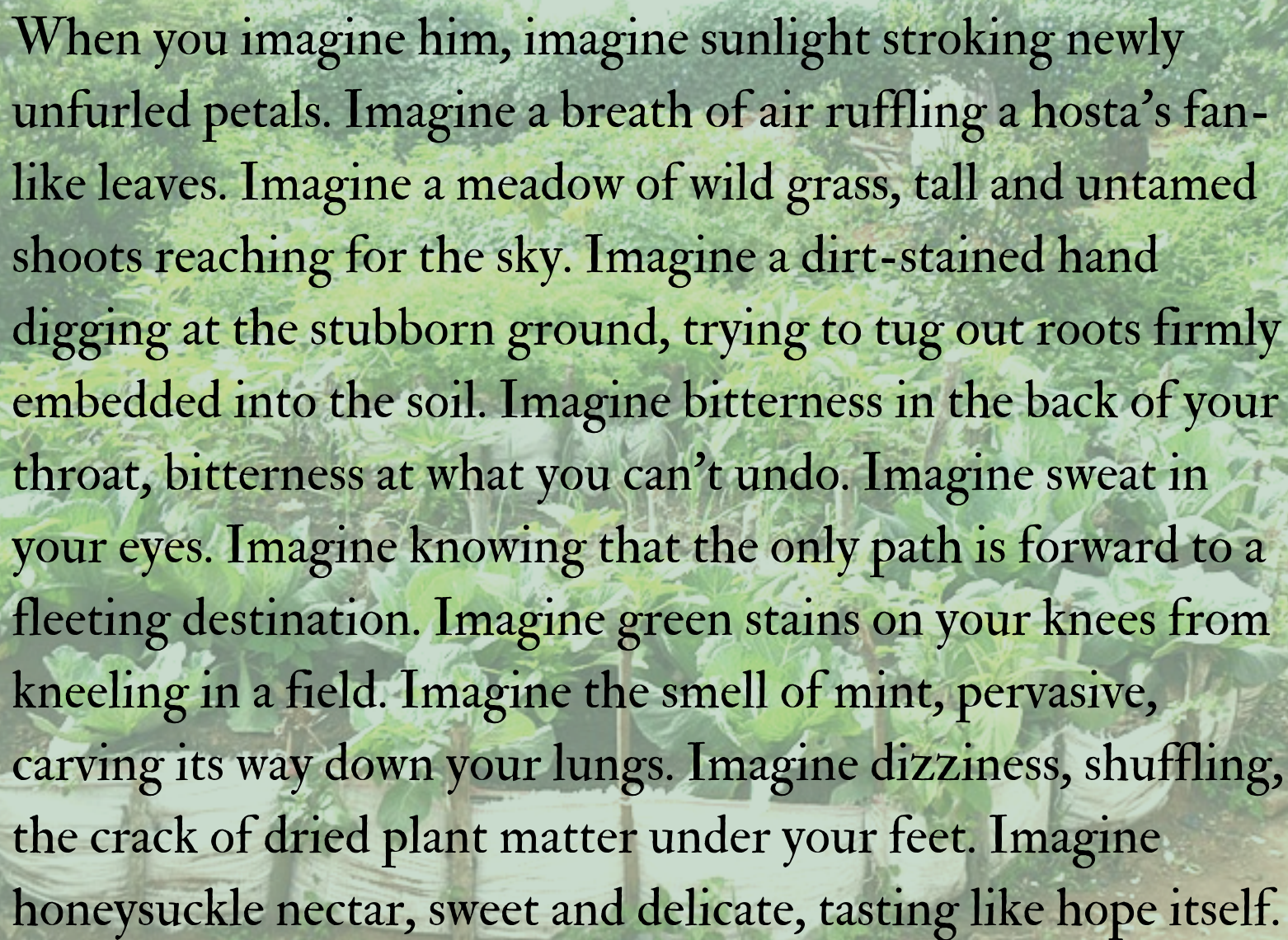


SHEN NONG

神農

Shen Nong is the founder of traditional medicine and agriculture. He risked his life to find edible and medicinal herbs by eating all the plants he could find. After testing many plants, he categorized them into food, medicine, and poison. Painstakingly, he suffered through eating over 70 types of poisonous herbs in one day so people would be safe from hunger. He is portrayed with bumps like bull horns on his head.





When you imagine him, imagine sunlight stroking newly unfurled petals. Imagine a breath of air ruffling a hosta's fan-like leaves. Imagine a meadow of wild grass, tall and untamed shoots reaching for the sky. Imagine a dirt-stained hand digging at the stubborn ground, trying to tug out roots firmly embedded into the soil. Imagine bitterness in the back of your throat, bitterness at what you can't undo. Imagine sweat in your eyes. Imagine knowing that the only path is forward to a fleeting destination. Imagine green stains on your knees from kneeling in a field. Imagine the smell of mint, pervasive, carving its way down your lungs. Imagine dizziness, shuffling, the crack of dried plant matter under your feet. Imagine honeysuckle nectar, sweet and delicate, tasting like hope itself.

