

The Rhinoceros Totem and Pangu Myth: An Exploration of the Archetype of Pangu

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Region and Ethnicity of the Pangu Myth

There are theories that the Chinese Pangu myth originated either in Western India, the Central Plains, or the South. As for the ethnicity of the Pangu myth, since it is found in almost every group in China many different peoples believe that the Pangu myth belongs to them. However, only the Miao and Yao language families reflect a seamless connection between the regional and ethnic diversities. This is because the Miao and Yao language families migrated from the Central Plains to the South.

Many scholars—notably Lu Simian, Yang Kuan, and He Xin—believe that the Pangu myth has an Indian origin. In *The Origin of the Gods* the scholar He analyzes all works before the Qin Dynasty¹ that have no trace of the myth in which Pangu opens heaven and breaks the earth (1996:235). Nor is this myth documented in such compendia of surreal phenomena as *Shanhaijing*, *Tianwen*, and *Diwang Jishi*. It first appears in Xu Zheng's *Sanwu Liji* and *Wuyun Linian Ji*² at the time of the Three Kingdoms (222-280 CE), as well as Ren Fang's *Shuyi Ji* of the Liang Dynasty (440-589 CE).³ During this period, China experienced the

¹ During the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE) Chinese scholars first began documenting and annotating their culture in the unified Chinese Writing System established by Emperor Qin shi huang.

² The original copies of *Sanwu Liji* and *Wuyun Linian Ji* were lost. *Sanwu Liji* was first cited in *Yi Wen Lei Ju* from 557-641 CE (Ou et al., Tang Dynasty) and *Wuyun Linian Ji* in *Yi Shi* (Ma Xiao 1670).

³ Some scholars argue that Pangu myth was passed down orally among southern ethnic groups and barely recorded in early Chinese books. As a result, the Chinese (Han) literati were hardly aware of this storytelling tradition until it emerged in Xu Zheng's books. Xu Zheng lived in the Wu Kingdom in southeast China, where he collected the

encroachment of Indian Buddhism and culture. Due to this influence, He inferred that the Pangu myth had a Western Asian/Indian origin and that it later spread to the Central Plains via Southwest China sometime after the mid-Eastern Han Dynasty.

Though the “Western Indian Origin Theory” is very influential in the study of the Pangu myth, the inferences upon which it is based are not reliable. Further discoveries and new research are causing it to give way. First, at the site of an ancient temple on a Pangu mountain⁴ where the locals hold a grand worship ceremony on March 3 (Chinese lunar calendar) each year,⁵ scholars from Beijing and Henan discovered fragments of earthenware and broken bricks. According to an assessment given by the archeological team in Nanyang district, the earthenware fragments came from the rim of a well dating from the Han Dynasty; the broken bricks date back to the same period. There are also remnants from the Song, the Ming, and the Qing Dynasties.⁶ Here, then, is proof that people built a brick and tile Pangu temple even in the Han Dynasty. In theory, this fact indicates that people at that time devotedly worshipped Pangu, and supports the idea that the Pangu myth was popular even earlier, back at least to the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties. This discovery fully proves that the Pangu myth did not first enter China with the advent of Indian Buddhism and culture.

Second, that there is no record of the Pangu myth in the literature of the Han Dynasty before the Three Kingdoms period does not mean that there were no oral versions among the minority groups at that time. Though the Pangu myth appears only in the literature of the Three Kingdoms period, there remains the possibility of its dissemination among the folk. Whether the stories focus on Pangu’s opening up heaven and breaking up the earth or on his reincarnation, all are common to minority groups in the south. The description of those events in the *Ancient Miao Song* is quite similar to parallels in the Han Dynasty literature, but more detailed (Yan 1993:24):

Ghet paif Gux dail lul,
Nenx diub diot nangl lol,

Pangu stories from local ethnic groups and recorded them in Chinese. See further Geng 1993:67-68 and Liu 1997:177-86.

⁴ Fifty kilometers north of the Taibai peak of the Tongbai Mountains in Henan province.

⁵ May 29, 1987.

⁶ Ma H. 1993:14.

Dad lol diongb dot bil,
 Lol pab ob liul niangl,
 Wangt zeit mongl ob dangl,
 Fangx waix dot ib liul,
 Fangb dab dot ib liul,
 Paif Gux dail vut hxut,
 Denl laib waix al zeit,
 Dad laib hfud mongl diut,
 Dliangx jil bil mongl hniangt.

Old grandpa Pangu,
 He walked down from the East,
 Brought a big axe with him,
 Cutting two pieces of thin plank.
 The two pieces broke up into two;
 Heaven got one,
 The earth also got one.
 Old man Pangu is kindhearted,
 Raising heaven upward with all his might,
 Using his head as support,
 Reaching out his hand to back up.

The splitting up of heaven and earth is described thus in the *Ancient Miao Song* (Ma Xueliang and Jin 1983:9):

Once two pieces were cast:
 The white one floated upward,
 The black one sank down.
 In this way we have a wide expanse of heaven,
 And now we have a broad span of earth.

Here, the description that “the white one floated upward, / the black one sank down” is probably derived from the opacity and purity of the white and yolk of the egg. This is similar to a claim found in the *Sanwu Liji*, that “the yang-opacity is the heaven and the yin-purity is the earth.” There are traces of egg-birth conception in the *Ancient Miao Song*. At the beginning of *Sanwu Liji*, we find that “the Heaven and the Earth were mixed like an egg, and Pangu was born into it.” The *Ancient Miao Song*, for its part, gives more detailed descriptions of the “egg,” or Shen Niu’s egg. But Xu’s “the Heaven rises by one *zhang*⁷ a day while the Earth thickens by one *zhang* daily, and Punban grows by one *zhang* each day, and Pangu is very tall” has come to be imaged in the *Ancient Miao Song* as simply a long-legged baby.

⁷ One *zhang* is equivalent to 10 Chinese feet (1 Chinese foot = 33 cm.).

The reincarnation of Pangu also exists in the mythology of southern minority groups. The *Ancient Miao Song* represents Pangu's transfiguration at the moment of death; this episode is similarly described in Xu's poem. The *Ancient Miao Song* also discloses the cause of Pangu's near-death—his fatigue in holding up heaven (Yan 1993:31):

Paif Gux daib lul,
 Vud hseid jangx hob nul,
 Hseik mais jangx hob dul,
 Xangt bongt jent nangl,
 Eb mais jangx eb seil,
 dliub hfud jangx ghaib dul,
 Tiangt lax lax tiant dol,
 Ghut jox diub bel dlel.

Grandpa Pangu is a hero,
 He speaks like thunder,
 He winks like lightning,
 His breath became the wind from the east,
 His tears converged into a stream,
 His hair turned to firewood and grass,
 He held up heaven for too long,
 His body fell into pieces,
 Pangu died and became the hillside.

Such a transfiguration may be totemic and indeed seems close to other myths about totemic reincarnation. The Yi people regard the tiger as their totem, and their epic *Meige*⁸ describes the reincarnation of the totemic tiger in this way (CIFY 1959:12-14):

The tiger's head became the heavenly head,
 The tiger's tail became the heavenly tail,
 Its left eye became the sun,
 Its right eye became the moon.
 . . .
 The tiger's belly became the sea.

The Miao people have the maple for their totem, and their *Song of the Maple* includes a similar description (Yan 1993:476-78):

⁸ “*Meige*, a well-known Yi creation epic in Yao'an, Yunan describes how the universe and all plants and things on the earth were gradually generated from the tiger's body” (CIFY 1959).

The tree roots became carp,
 The tree's base became a bronze drum,
 The tree's leaves became swallows,
 The tree trunk became a butterfly.

From such similarities we can assert that the pre-death transfiguration of Pangu also evolved from totemic reincarnation. Its origin should be early, at least before the Qin and Han Dynasties. The transformation of Pangu recorded in Chinese literature is closer to this kind of pre-death reincarnation than it is to the stories of Brahma's changes recorded in the Indian *Veda*. Brahma's reincarnation is one of the senses, e.g., "that man has mouth and then language, has language and then fire, has nose and then breath, has breath and then wind" (Lemowanna 1984:50). On the basis of this evidence we cannot simply assume that such myths among the national minorities were imported.

The "Southern Origin Theory" is represented by Mao Dun (1981). According to this perspective, the earliest appearance of the Pangu myth is in *Sanwu Liji*. Since its author, Xu, was from the southern Wu Kingdom of the Three Kingdoms period, the Pangu myth he recorded might well have originated from his research tour in the south. In addition, related artifacts are also concentrated in the south. For that reason Xia Zengyou remarks that "it is doubtful that [the Pangu myth] is not a traditional Han Chinese tale; or else Pangu is homophonic to Panhu. That is why the Pangu Tomb is found only in the South Sea [the Dongting Lake] and Guilin has a Pangu Temple. If not, our ancestor-kings should live in the North. Why did only Pangu live in the South?" (Ma H. and Zhu 1992:5).

Ma Huixin and Zhu Gelin represent the "Central Plains Origin Theory." Because Dong Sizhang of the Ming Dynasty was Xu Zheng's countryman, they believe that the Pangu myth was based on data gathered from around the Tongbai Mountains. In his *Guangbo Wuzhi*, Dong, quoting Xu, observes that "the master of Pungu has a dragon's head and a snake's body. His bones became mountains and forests after his death, his body became the sea and the river, his blood became the Huai and Du Rivers, and his hair became grass and wood" (Ma H. and Zhu 1992:8).⁹

Actually, if we combine the factor of ethnicity with that of territoriality, the difference between the Southern Origin Theory and the Central Plains Origin Theory can easily be resolved. I believe that the Pangu myth originated in the Central Plains. The reason why there are many Pangu remnants in the South is that the Pangu Tribe of the Sanmiao, who

⁹ The Huai and Du Rivers originate in the Tongbai Mountains.

first lived at the foot of the Tongbai Mountains of the Central Plains, later migrated to the South and brought Pangu culture with them.

As for the ethnicity of the Pangu myth, Ma Huixin is the recognized authority on the subject. He spent nine months in the field searching for the Pangu myth, covering a distance of 15,000 kilometers, and collecting myths and legends in different regions; the sheer weight of his collected material amounted to 90 kilos. He also made recordings on 27 cassettes and brought back more than 40 photographs. Ma H. learned much about the origin and spread of the Pangu myths in over twenty ethnic groups across more than twenty provinces and Autonomous Regions (1993:50). His data is rich and comprehensive. In his book *The Pangu God*, Ma H. compares the Pangu myths among such various ethnic groups as the Yi, the Bai, the Lisu, the Gelao, the Buyei, the Dong, the Maonan, the Zhuang, the Miao, the Yao, the Tujia, and the Tu, as well as among the Han Chinese in the regions of Hainan, the Chengdu Plains, and the Wu-Yue areas. He finally comes to this conclusion (1993:51):

By surveying the Yao areas in Hunan and remote areas of Guangxi and Lingnan, my general impression is that the areas where the Pan Yao live are closely connected to ancient Pangu tribes. Wherever the Pan Yao go they build Pangu shrines and temples, and they seek help from Pangu and are grateful to him for good fortune. They make offerings to Pangu at festivals. Because of changes in ethnic elements in the Yao-populated areas, the Dog-Head Yao who worship Panhu were influenced by the Pangu Yao and added on their Dog-Head tablet, above the dog head itself, characters for King Pangu who opened up heaven and broke up the earth.

Nowadays, the Miao, the Yao, and the She in Hunan and Guangxi still put the tablet for Pangu in the first place where they worship their ancestors, consigning the tablet for Panhu to the second place. We can see from this sequencing that the origins of Pangu are very old. At that time both the Yao and She belonged to the Sanmiao. They solved their territorial issues with the help of Pangu's ethnicity: speakers of the Miao language family clearly occupied the Central Plains very long ago. More precisely, their habitat included the Tongbai Mountains, because the Miao-Man have spread out south to Huanan, Hubei, Jiangxi, and north to Xionger, Waifang (the Songshan Mountains), and Funiu.

“Pangu”

A linguistic analysis of the term “Pangu” proves that the Pangu myth belongs to the Miao-Yao language family. In the early stages of Pangu studies, scholars believed that Pangu was the same figure as Panhu, since the pronunciation of the two names differs by only one phoneme. However, further research has shown that these two names were not the same. Wu Shunze holds that “Pangu” is derived from “Fuxi” (1991:26):

Based on their pronunciation, Pangu and Fuxi are related by phonetic law, and Pangu is the phonetic transformation of Fuxi. Both “pan” and “fu” belong to the ancient “bing” sound. “Gu” belongs to the “jian” sound under section “yu,” and “xi” belongs to the “xiao” sound under section “ge.” “Yu” and “ge” are closest in transformation. Since there was no difference between guttural and palatal sounds, “gu” and “xi” can be the same anterior sound. For example, the anterior sound “hu” belongs to the sound “gu,” which was pronounced with a guttural sound in ancient times, the same way as “hu” is pronounced as “he” (the interrogative pronoun); therefore “he” and “xi” were the same in ancient times.

However, this kind of far-fetched and confusing manner of textual interpretation can make almost any two sounds seem similar or related.

With regard to grammar, the word “Pangu” does not conform to Chinese grammar: *gu* (“old”) is an adjective, and *pan* (“dish”) is a noun, and it is clear that “gu” modifies “pan” from a posterior position. Of course in the remote past it was possible for the modifier to follow the modified core word. However, if we say that “Pangu” is a survival from ancient Chinese, then we cannot explain why there was no record of the Pangu myth before the Three Kingdoms period. Then again, if we say that the Pangu myth emerged in the Three Kingdoms period or in the Qin and Han Dynasties, then why does the word “Pangu” not conform to Chinese grammar? Since at least the time of the Qin and Han Dynasties, the core word has followed the modifier.

If we analyze the two characters “Pan/gu” according to the present Xiangxi dialect of the Miao language, the results are clearer. In this dialect, “old grandpa” is still called *pangu* (written in Miao as “poub ghuot”); *pan* means “grandpa,” and *gu* means “old.” According to Miao grammar, the modifier should follow the modified core, and it can be translated as “grandpa.” What attracts our attention is that since *gu* in Chinese also means “old,” is it the case that the Miao language borrowed this morpheme from the Chinese language? It is hard to say so, because the anterior sound for *gu* in Miao is a uvular sound, while there is no such sound in Chinese

anymore. We can say therefore that this sound is relatively old, and it is possible that the word might come from the same root language from which both Miao and Chinese derived.

To explain *pangu* as “old grandpa” according to Miao is in perfect agreement with the Pangu myth. Pangu is an ancestor of creation and it is therefore only proper to call him “old grandpa.” Generally, time and characters in the myth are represented ambiguously: with respect to time we often find such imprecise phrases as “one day” or “long, long ago.” Characters are often introduced with “there is one man” or “there is an old man,” and so on. In a word, it is never precise. Now in what we have been referring to as the Pangu myth, “pangu” is used as a personal name, a usage that does not agree with the account of the creation myth. When the myth came into being, people would absolutely not give a particular name to the hero of the myth. Therefore, if we explain “pangu” as “old grandpa” according to the Miao language, then it accords well with the ambiguity demanded by history.

In the *Ancient Miao Song* this ambiguity remains. The ancestor-creators of the heaven and the earth are called “grandpa” and “grandma,” terms close in meaning to *pangu* (Ma H. and Jin 1983:9):

Look how the heaven and the earth are created.
 Who will steel the heaven and the earth?
 The grandpa of the remote olden times who created the heaven,
 The grandma of the primitive past who made the earth.
 They made a big crucible,
 To be used for steeling the earth.

The word “Pangu” also appears in Yan Bao’s annotation of the *Ancient Miao Song*. There it coexists with such divine names as Popa, Kedi, Xiuchou, and others. The poem proceeds as follows (Yan 1993:11):

Kot dit bil hsat denx,
 nenx diub dai yut niox.
 Dail xid dail hvib fangx,
 Dail xid lol hsat denx?
 Paif Gux dail hvib fangx,
 Paif Gux lol hsat denx.

Not that Kot dit [a god] is the earliest comer,
 He is still too young.
 Who is cleverest,
 Who is the first born?
 That Pangu is the cleverest,

Pangu is the earliest comer.

When Yan translated and edited this passage, he added this note (*idem*): “Pangu, man of divinity; he appears directly in the *Ancient Miao Song* and is not from a transcription.” In Yan’s annotation of the the *Ancient Miao Song* Pangu is written as “paifgux” in the Miao script of East Guizhou, and its meaning is beyond comprehension. We can surmise that the word *pangu* has probably undergone a shift from a general name to a proper name. In other words, at first *pangu* was strictly a term of address, and later became a personal name.

Characterization of Pangu and the Rhinoceros

What is the archetype of Pangu? Is he a real man? An imagined man? A totem? We have demonstrated that the Pangu myth belongs to the Miao, and thus we may start with the mythology of the Miao language family in answering such questions. Pangu’s transformation before death is recorded in Xu’s *Sanwu Linian Ji*. The Pangu myth contains two parts. The first describes the opening of heaven and the breaking of earth, while the second tells of Pangu’s pre-death reincarnation. The latter part reveals traces of the belief in totemic reincarnation, which came into being and developed as a result of totemism. According to such convictions, totems are men and the two can transform into each other. It is this adherence to pre-death transformation that is responsible for the belief in totems’ reincarnation into various objects after death. The Yi people hold the tiger to be such a totem, believing that all beings descended from transformations of the tiger before its death. The Miao people consider the maple a totem, and in the *Ancient Song* the maple transfigures into all sorts of beings. Since Pangu also had the ability to transfigure before his death, his archetype might well be a totem, and therefore a totem for the Miao and Yao language families.

As for Pangu’s reincarnation before death, the earliest description comes from *Sanwu Liji* and *Wuyun Linian Ji*, both of which date from the Three Kingdoms period. Unfortunately, both texts are lost. We can, however, learn something about them from a later generation of ancient texts that contain excerpts, such as *Yiwen Leiju*, *Taiping Yulan*, *Guangbo Wuzhi*, and *Yi Shi*. Volume 9 of *Guangbo Wuzhi*, for example, quotes *Wuyun Linian Ji* (Yuan 1985:358):

King Pangu has a dragon's head and a snake's body; his sigh became the wind and rain, and his breath became the thunder and lightning; when he opened his eyes it became day, and when he closed them it became night. After he died, his bones turned into mountains and forests, his body became the river and sea, and his hair became the grass and wood.

At first glance Pangu's archetype seems to be something with "a dragon's head and a snake's body," and for this reason Yuan Ke inferred that "it is possible that the Candle Dragon was Pangu in the old legend and Pangu was the outcome of a changed Candle Dragon" (1993:71).

Actually we can see from the contradictions in this description that Pangu does not in fact possess "a dragon's head and a snake's body." A dragon, after all, cannot have hair. That Pangu is described as having "a dragon's head and a snake's body" is probably the result of a false analogy. The first volume of *Yi Shi* quotes *Wuyun Linian Ji* as reporting nothing of these features (Yuan 1985:358):

Pangu came into being first and then he transfigured before death: his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice became the thunder, his left eye became the sun, his right eye became the moon, his five bodies and limbs became the four directions and five mountains, his blood became the rivers, his tendon became the contours of the earth, his muscles became the fields, his hair and beard became the constellations, his skin and body hair became the grass and wood, his teeth and bones became gold and stones, his marrow became pearls and jade, his sweat became the rain and lakes, and the worms on his body turned into the earth's inhabitants after touching the wind.

In the Han people's epic *A Record of Darkness*, which was unearthed in the Shennongjia area of Hubei, there are also descriptions of Pangu's transfiguration before death (Ma H. 1993:104):

Pangu the great hero,
 His speaking turned to thunder,
 His winking turned to stars,
 His breathing turned to wind,
 His tears became the rain,
 And he died because he held up heaven for too long.
 His hair became grass and wood,
 His skin and flesh became the soil,
 His bones and flesh became hillsides,
 The twelve mountains in the southeast.

Here again there is no mention of Pangu having “a dragon’s head and a snake’s body.”

Based on the quotations above we can suggest the following about Pangu:

- 1) He has four limbs, and seems to be a kind of animal.
- 2) He is an animal with fur.
- 3) He has parasites on his body.
- 4) He has horns on his head.

We can judge from the four points above that the archetype of Pangu seems to be something similar to an ox. Though the dragon also has four legs and horns, it has neither fur nor parasites.

As for the legend that the worms on Pangu’s body became the denizens of the earth after touching the wind, there are other derivations of this detail as well. A legendary myth about the worm as the ancestor of humanity was discovered in the Dinghai County of Zhejiang province (Chen 1986:4): “It is said that after Pangu divided heaven and earth, at first there were no human beings; it was from heaven that many worms fell and became human beings.” This mythologem is probably derived from the statement that “the worms on his body turned into the inhabitants of the earth after touching the wind”—“inhabitants” here referring to humankind. There are not many places where such legends persist nowadays. Cheng Junjian believed that “the story of ‘the worms’ becoming human beings was given up by people later on because they spurned as ‘irrational,’ according to aesthetics of their own time, the primitive conception that was contained in ancient mythology” (1997:15).

The image of a horned Pangu is still found among the folk in the Central Plains. As noted above, there is a Pangu Temple on a Pangu mountain in the Tongbai Range, in which people worship a clay figure: “Grandpa Pangu has a pair of horns on his head, with a square face and big ears, tree leaves and animal fur, and sits barefooted on the altar” (*ibid.*:21). Rock picture no. 378 in the exhibition hall of pictures from the Han Dynasty in Nanyang shows a naked horned man holding an axe in his right hand, with the left hand raised in front holding an unnamed bifurcated object. Ma H. has proposed (1993:75) that this was a picture of the Pangu who cut the mountain open and defeated the monster.

There is also a legend among the folk around the Tongbai Mountains that explains why Pangu has grown a pair of horns (Ma H. 1993:16, 75-76):

The picture of Pangu has been passed down from generation to generation; all the people around the mountain can tell how Grandpa

Pangu looks. Grandpa Pangu is tall, as tall as one *zhang*, with a square face, big round eyes, a pair of horns on his head, kudzu vines interwoven with tree leaves, and bare feet.

At the time of Pangu, human horns had two functions: as a weapon used by men against beasts and as a harbinger of death. Usually people were busy in search of food and game. However, as soon as their horns became soft, they would give up working and wait for death. Soon the number of people who had soft horns increased, and fewer people were working. The Heavenly Grandpa sent down heavenly generals with his arm and took back all the horns. At that time, there were fewer people on the earth. Overnight all the horns were taken back.

The widespread dispersal of this legend shows that the archetype of Pangu does not have a dragon's head and a snake's body, but is an animal with horns and a square human face accustomed to fighting animals and beasts. The dragon also has horns, but they are different from what is described above.

What, then, is this beast with four legs, a pair of horns, fur, and worms in its hair? It could be a deer, an ox, a buffalo, or a rhinoceros, but certainly not a dragon or its archetype, the snake. I believe that it is highly possible that the archetype of Pangu is the rhinoceros, since the Pangu myth came originally from the Miao and Yao language family, in which there is a buffalo-like animal totem called *hxub niux*.

Hxub niux Gave Birth to Pangu

In the *Ancient Miao Song*, Pangu was not the most archaic ancestor. A sacred animal called Hxub niux (as pronounced in Miao) gave birth to Pangu (Yan 1993:15-16):

Dliel denx hxib khangd niul,
 Hxub niux daib bad lul,
 Hliad niux hxangb tid nongl,
 Tid nenx laib zaid dlenl,
 Ax was ghab diux yel,
 Laib zaid dliangt bongl liongl,
 Dlenx gib wib qut nangl,
 Jangx ghob hmob ax fal,
 Niangb lax lax niangb dol,
 Hfaid jangx git Hsenb Niul,
 Git Hsenb Niux hnaib niul.

...

Git dangt daib hvib ngangl,
 Daib hlieb bongt hieb dliangl,
 Ghab ait Paif Gux dail,
 Paif Gux daib bad lul.

In the remotest ancient times,
 There was a hero called Hxub niux.
 He vomited threads to build a storehouse with,
 He built a house for himself,
 With no door nor window;
 The whole house is smooth,
 Round in shape in the east.
 He turned himself into a chrysalis and slept in it,
 He was soundly asleep and could not wake up,
 He sat and lay and slumbered there for a long time,
 He then changed into an egg of Shen niux [another name for Hxub niux],
 The egg of Shen niux from long, long ago.

...
 The egg of Shen niux gave birth to a long-legged son,
 The long-legged son was strong,
 He was given the name Pangu,
 Pangu was a hero.

We may observe the relationship between Pangu and Hxub niux: Hxub niux became the egg of Shen niux, and the egg of Shen niux gave birth to Pangu. This implies that Hxub niux and Pangu are one. We might expect the archetype of Pangu to be the image of Hxub niux.

Then what kind of animal was Hxub niux? In the *Ancient Miao Song*, the giant god Hxub niux is an animal with two horns, very close in appearance to the buffalo. Most scholars believe that this archetype might be the rhinoceros because the two animals share several similarities in the Miao epic. First, Hxub niux has horns. The ancient song “Opening Heaven and Breaking up Earth,” collected by Tang Chunfang, mentions this detail (Pan, Yang, and Zhang 1997:7):

Hxub niux is powerful,
 With a pair of horns on its head;
 First he pried and broke the mountain,
 Second he pried and let the earth sink.

Elsewhere Hxub niux is a kind of ox. In the story “Creating Heaven and Earth” in the *Miao Epic*, collected and translated by Ma Xueliang and Jin, we find the following (1983:20):

Oh, Hxub niux, who broke up the mountain and opened the river,

. . .

Had a body very much like a buffalo,
 His head looked like that of a lion,
 His tail was similar to a palm leaf,
 His four legs looked like an iron-toothed rake.
 If it was the bull we offered as sacrifice for our ancestors,
 It would leave us with the horns even if it went away,
 Leaving them with our parents' family,
 Hanging them on the core-pillar,
 Showing them to our ancestors.
 But Hxub niux had gone,
 Where had it left its horns?
 They were hung in the temple,
 In the court.
 The Miao and the Han were watching.

These descriptions show that Hxub niux resembled the buffalo. Furthermore, the story "Plowing the Land" in the *Miao Epic* contains the following (*ibid.*:135):

You said that Xiangliang's ox looked like a frog.
 This is wrong;
 His ox looked like a barn,
 His plowing ox was Hxub niux.
 Xiangla drove it plowing the field,
 Harrowing and making it flat to grow the maple in.

It should be carefully pointed out that Hxub niux is an ox and not a buffalo. But why do scholars use the analogy of the buffalo? In "Creating Heaven and Earth," Ma Xueliang and Jin explain this tendency thus (1983:5): "Hxub niux . . . according to the correspondence law between the Miao and Chinese languages, it seems to be cognate with 'rhinoceros' in Chinese." Yan Bao notes that Hxub niux was a kind of semi-god and semi-beast animal, with the appearance of a rhinoceros. I agree with him: Hxub niux is a rhinoceros. This identification explains why in *The Ancient Miao Song* Xiangliang employed Hxub niux to plow a field. If we affirm that Hxub niux gave birth to Pangu and had the appearance of a rhinoceros, then Pangu might well look like the rhinoceros. The rhinoceros is the archetype for Pangu.

Hxub Niux and the Pangu Myth

Not only is Hxub niux Pangu's ancestor, but it, like Pangu, also possessed the ability to break up mountains and rivers, and can be counted as a great creative god. "Creating Heaven and Earth" attests to this reality (Ma X. and Jin 1983:19):

In the remotest ancient times,
 Heaven stuck to the earth,
 The earth stuck to heaven,
 The riverbed was only as thick as the human leg,
 The river ran quietly eastward.
 Hxub niux opened up a water route,
 Buba opened up a mountain road,
 Broadening the riverbed by three arm lengths.
 It was old man Hxub niux
 Who cut open the gorge to the barn,
 So not only the river could run freely,
 But so could the boat.

These words potentially unfold before us a picture of the Pangu who opened up heaven and broke up the earth in primitive times.

The depiction of Pangu's reincarnation before death has also undergone a process of change. When totemic culture prospered, the totemic figure itself transformed into the aspects of the universe. When this culture became relatively depressed, the totemic image became half-man and half-beast, and even separated into a human accompanied by a beast. The transfiguration process became relatively esoteric, and when the totemic image was completely personified, the reincarnation often became the "ancestral creature." In the Xiangxi Miao epic *Opening up Heaven and Breaking up the Earth*, Pangu's transformation was in transition from the second stage to the third. The origin of all creatures resulted from Pangu's killing a beast called Penggou; its body was used to create them (Shi 1991:4-5):

[He] came to kill King Penggou,
 Brought death to this gigantic sacred beast,
 Tore open its skin to make the blue heaven,
 To make the earth,
 Using its eyes to make the stars,
 Using its hair to make the bamboo, wood, and all creatures,
 Using its flesh juice to make salt wells and oil wells,
 Using its blood to make springs and water sources.

Clearly, this story was derived from that about Pangu's pre-death transfiguration. In the text the name Penggou could be a modified pronunciation for Pangu; the two are quite close. Since Pangu's archetype is a kind of animal, and its pre-death incarnation has caused the origin of all creatures, then we may suppose that during the depression of the totemic culture the mythological plot changed into one in which Pangu killed some sort of beast and used it to make all creatures. The trace of this change remains crystal clear: the beast killed by Pangu is called Penggou, suggesting that what Pangu killed was himself. From this we can see clearly that the reincarnation of Pangu before death has totemic origins.

We can come, after all this discussion, to some conclusions. The Pangu myth originated from the Sanmiao in the Central Plains. Put more concretely, it came from the rhinoceros tribe or clan in the Sanmiao, and the archetype for Pangu is the rhinoceros. The story of Pangu's opening up heaven and breaking up the earth dovetails with the power of the rhinoceros over nature, and the story of Pangu's pre-death reincarnation comes from an early belief and legend about the incarnation of the totemic rhinoceros.

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