In time immemorial the whole world was filled with thick mist that seethed silently for ages until finally transforming into a vast ocean. In that ocean generated a fish so huge that neither its head nor its caudal fin could be seen. Feeling so sad at the cold and lifeless world, the fish threw its right ventral fin upwards to make the heaven, and then flung its left ventral fin to create the earth. After that it swung its back from which seven pairs of deities and a human couple came out. Since then there have been heaven, earth, deities and man in the world.

Since heaven and earth were not even at all, those deities decided to mend them smooth, some of them pulling golden ploughs, and others, silver rakes. They worked on the heaven with soaring enthusiasm and great care, so that it became as smooth as jade; but when it came to the earth, they did the job slackly with little drive. As a result, some places were ploughed deep, and others shallow; some got raked, and others not. Places that had been raked over became plain dams, and those left out changed into mountains, both high and low. Furrows turned into valleys of different depths, some of which were submerged by water, thus forming various lakes and rivers.

As for the human pair, the man was called Zhi Ta, and the woman, Ta Po. Ta Po became pregnant all over the body shortly after coming out of the fish’s back, and soon gave birth to twenty-one children, among whom the eldest one was a tiger, the second a hawk, the third a dragon, and the others human beings. When growing up, the dragon became King of the ocean, so it repaid its mother three thick bamboo tubes of gifts for her loving care. Ta Po opened the first tube and saw gold, silver, copper, iron, pearls and jewels, so she let them go underground. The second one was filled with grains, corn, buckwheat, cotton, trees and grass, which were all planted in the ground. The third tube was full of cattle, pigs, chickens, birds and beasts, which were all

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1 Narrator: Zhu Xiaohhe (Hani); Collector: Lu Chaogui, Yang Di, Zhi Xin.
set free into the mountains except a cow presented to the deities for their contributions to creation.

The gods were quite delighted at the cow, but instead of taking it for food, they transformed its eye into lightning, its fur into thunders, its tears into dewdrops, its snivel into rainwater, its breath into clouds, its blood into rosy clouds, its left eye into the sun, its right eye into the moon, two teeth into the Venus and the Plough, and its four legs into pillars standing between heaven and earth in four directions. From then on, there have been living creatures, light, as well as day and night in the world. People began to live and work in peace and contentment and gradually thrived.

Unfortunately, however, the gods quarreled in a towering rage over the leadership of the world, and nobody would give up. Then in an outburst of anger two deities, Yan Sha and Sha La, set up a heavenly stove and collected huge stones, trying to make fireballs to destroy heaven and earth. Forty-nine days later they made nine fireballs that not only burnt heaven glowing red but also melted rocks on the earth like candles.

Panic-stricken by that miserable scene, deity Mi Lu shouted out: “Oh hell! That’s too bad!” He called upon the other deities for floods to extinguish the fire. They set three streams of water during daytime and three streams of water at night, which finally extinguished the fire. However, the earth was engulfed, and nobody escaped except Zuo Luo and his sister Zuo Bei, who saved themselves in a gourd and floated about for six years until they arrived at the confluence of ten rivers. When the waters sank down they got out of the gourd and settled down in a cave to protect themselves from wind and rain.

Then Zuo Luo suggested: “Let’s depart here to search for our dear ones separately!” Zuo Bei agreed: “Ok, let’s part at once and see if we can find our companions.”

Zuo Luo left whistling, and Zuo Bei went away blowing the bugle made of a leaf. The sister tramped over nineteen mountains and heard nothing except echoes of her brother on top of the mountain; the brother waded ninety-nine rivers and saw nothing but his sister’s shadowy silhouette on the river bank.

Having failed in their efforts to find any traces of human beings, they were greatly frustrated and worried about the extinction of man. They thought over again and again, and started making human beings out of mud by themselves, but none of those figures came into life. Then a deity named A Zhi came and said: “Hey, how can you fashion