

# BAO CHU'S SEARCH FOR THE SUN

## VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Below is a list of words that appear in the story. Read the list and get to know the words before you read the story.

**brandished**—displayed; waved  
**braving**—facing; confronting  
**cowered**—crouched in fear  
**demons**—devils; evil spirits  
**forked**—split; divided  
**frantic**—wild; out-of-control  
**ghastly**—frightful; hideous  
**gratitude**—thankfulness; appreciation  
**heaved**—lifted; carried up  
**prospered**—grew well; increased  
**protested**—objected; argued  
**quest**—look; search  
**slinging**—throwing, usually with a swinging motion  
**sturdy**—solidly built; strong  
**thicket**—thick growth of shrubs or small trees  
**torment**—trouble; torture  
**transform**—change; alter  
**traversing**—traveling over; crossing  
**(in) vain**—for nothing  
**withered**—shriveled; dried out

### Main Characters

**Bao Chu**—son of Hui Niang and Liu Chun  
**Hui Niang**—wife of Liu Chun; mother of Bao Chu  
**Liu Chun**—simple farmer; husband of Hui Niang; father of Bao Chu

# BAO CHU'S SEARCH FOR THE SUN

## A myth from China

*What are the people of Gemstone Mountain to do?  
The sun has mysteriously disappeared, leaving  
crops to die. And in the shadows, fearful demons  
now stalk. The people's only hope rests with a  
courageous son and his strong-hearted mother.*

The people who lived in the small village at the foot of Gemstone Mountain were peaceful and happy. Their village was on the shore of West Lake, which provided them with fish to eat. The villagers also grew lovely gardens of food and flowers, and their chickens and cows were fat and healthy. Every day the sun warmed their gardens, and rain fell when it was needed.

The people of the village admired those who worked hard, used good common sense, and took care of their families. The villagers honored their elders because they knew great wisdom came with age. Everything went well in the village.

Then one day, just after the sun rose in the east, a terrible disaster struck. The most violent rainstorm anyone had ever seen blew across the village. Black clouds hid the sun from view. Through the mist and clouds, the villagers could see the light of day growing dim. It looked as though the sun had gone down again, exactly where it had just come up.

When the clouds cleared, the villagers gathered together and looked toward the east. But there was no sun to be seen. Anxiously they waited, but the sun didn't reappear. They spoke to each other in whispers.



"Surely the sun will come up again in just a few moments," said a **sturdy** farmer.

"What could have happened?" asked a young man. "Where is the sun?"

"The sun has come up every day for as long as anyone can remember," said an old woman.

The villagers watched and waited. But there was no sign of the sun. After a while, everybody went home. Days and days went by—or what *should* have been days. In fact, there was only night.

As this cold night grew longer, plants **withered**. The crops in the fields began to die, and trees lost their leaves.

To make matters worse, **demons** and ghosts—evil creatures who hated the light and loved the dark—roamed the land at will.

Again the people gathered in order to decide what to do.

"All of our crops are dying. And it will do no good to plant more," one farmer said.

"The chickens are laying no eggs," said an old woman.

"The animals can find nothing to eat," said a young man. "They are growing thin and will soon die."

"The fish are not biting," said a fisherman. "Even if they did, we could not go out on the water. The world is now filled with demons who capture and **torment** our people."

In this unfortunate village lived a farmer named Liu Chun.<sup>1</sup> His wife, Hui Niang,<sup>2</sup> was a weaver. This young couple was much admired because they worked hard and were very sensible.

Liu Chun decided he had to do something about the terrible situation. He went to see the oldest person in the village—a man of 180 years.

"Can you tell me what's wrong?" Liu Chun asked. "What could have become of our sun?"

"I believe that I know what happened," the elder answered. "Someone who hates the sun has taken it away."

<sup>1</sup> (lè' u chung)

<sup>2</sup> (hoo' ē nē ang')

"But honored sir, who could hate the sun?" Liu Chun **protested** gently. "Humans and animals all suffer terribly from this constant darkness."

"Think for a moment, young farmer," said the old man. "Who benefits from this long night?"

Liu Chun thought for a moment. He answered, "The demons now roam the world at will and do as they please. Only they are happy for the sun to be gone."

"Quite true," said the old man. "The ghosts and demons love the darkness because it hides their evil deeds. The sun is their enemy."

"I didn't know that those creatures had the power to destroy the sun," Liu Chun said.

"No, even they could not destroy it," explained the elder. "There is a demon king who rules over all evil creatures. I believe that he has stolen the sun and hidden it away. He is the only one who could do such a thing."

"Where is this demon king?" asked Liu Chun.

"He lives beneath the Eastern Sea," the elder replied.

Liu Chun thanked the elder for his help. Then he went home and told his wife that he was going to find the sun.

"I must do something," Liu Chun said. "The people are suffering and I cannot bear their pain. The elder has given me a clue where to look."

"I'll help you in any way that I can," answered Hui Niang.

So Hui Niang made her husband a warm new coat. She wove two strong layers and stitched thick cotton inside. She also took some of her own long hair and twisted it together with strands of hemp.<sup>3</sup> Hui Niang then worked the strands into a new pair of sandals for Liu Chun.

When Liu Chun was ready to leave, Hui Niang stood outside to wave good-bye to her husband. Suddenly a bright golden light shone in the sky. For a moment, the couple thought that the sun had returned.

But this light moved rapidly toward them. They could see

<sup>3</sup> Hemp is a plant used to make rope.

that it was small, and they could feel that it did not give off heat.

The bright light flew right up to Liu Chun. When it landed on his shoulder, they saw that it was a golden bird.

"A phoenix!"<sup>4</sup> exclaimed Hui Niang. "Surely this wonderful creature has come to help you."

Liu Chun asked the phoenix, "Will you join me on my journey?"

The phoenix bent its long, graceful neck and nodded its head.

"I will go now," Liu Chun said to his wife. "The golden phoenix will light my way in this endless night. I won't return until I've found the sun."

"If I should be killed," continued Liu Chun, "I will turn myself into a bright star in the sky. From there I will guide others who **quest** for the sun."

With the golden phoenix glowing on his shoulder, Liu Chun set off into the dark.

Meanwhile, Hui Niang stayed behind and waited, **braving** demons and ghosts with the rest of the villagers. Every day she climbed to the top of Gemstone Mountain and peered into the East. She waited patiently for signs of the sun.

One day Hui Niang thought she saw a light in the east. But it was not the sun. Instead she saw a bright new star rising into the sky. Then she saw a smaller light moving toward her. As the light grew larger, she saw it was the phoenix.

"Why isn't my husband with you?" asked Hui Niang after the golden bird landed at her feet. "Where is Liu Chun?"

The phoenix hung its little head as if in sorrow.

Hui Niang now knew the terrible truth. Her husband was dead. Grief flooded over her, and she fainted away on the mountaintop.

At that moment, Hui Niang might have been carried away by the demons. But the phoenix stood near her. The bird's golden glow protected the grief-stricken widow.

<sup>4</sup> (fē' nix) The phoenix is a mythical bird. It is known for its ability to live for hundreds of years and for its magical powers of rebirth.

Finally Hui Niang awoke. She discovered with surprise that she had given birth to a son.

Hui Niang looked with **gratitude** at the phoenix, who still stood nearby. "You have kept my son safe for me," she said to the bird. "Thank you."

Then she looked back at the child. "Bao Chu<sup>5</sup> shall be your name," she said. "I only wish your father could have lived to see you."

Then Hui Niang gathered up her child and prepared to climb back down the mountain. As they descended, a strong wind began to blow.

The wind did a remarkable thing. As the first gust blew across the baby's face, he began to speak. After the second gust, the child stood up and began to walk.

The third gust of wind spun the mother and child around. Hui Niang lost sight of her son and in fear called out to him.

"Bao Chu, where are you?"

"I am here," came a voice from above her head.

Hui Niang was surprised to see that her son had magically grown to be eighteen feet tall.

All the while, the phoenix had been watching from the branch of a nearby tree. As if in approval, the bird nodded. With a flutter of its wings, it flew away into the darkness.

When the light of the phoenix had disappeared, Hui Niang began the climb back down Gemstone Mountain. But before she'd gone four steps, her tall, strong son picked her up. Gently he carried his mother over the difficult places. So Hui Niang returned with Bao Chu to their little farmhouse.

Hui Niang was delighted with her new son. Even though Bao Chu was a bit large for the house and furniture, he was quiet and gentle. All the people of the village came to admire the giant boy who had been born to Hui Niang.

One day Bao Chu found his mother crying.

"Mother, why are you crying?" the boy asked. "Have I angered you in some way?"

"Oh no, Bao Chu," Hui Niang answered tearfully. "You

<sup>5</sup> (bow choo)

are a wonderful son. It's only that I wish you could have known your father. Liu Chun was a fine man, and I miss him very much."

"Where is my father?" Bao Chu asked.

"He was killed before you were born," Hui Niang said. She told him about the journey Liu Chun had made to try to find the sun. Then she pointed to the brightest star in the sky.

"You see, there is your father," Hui Niang said. "He told me that he would **transform** himself into a bright star. Your father shines in the sky to mark the way for anyone else who journeys to rescue the sun. But no other villager has been brave enough to follow him into the dark."

"So my father's mission goes unfinished," Bao Chu said. "With your permission, Mother, I will complete the task he started. I will follow the path my father marks with his starlight. I will find the sun."

Hui Niang didn't know what to do. Bao Chu would greatly honor his father by completing the quest. But Hui Niang also knew that she might lose Bao Chu. The demons in the darkness were truly ferocious. The demon king had to be even more terrible.

On the other hand, the villagers were suffering terribly from the cold and dark. They would all surely die if someone didn't find the sun and return it to the sky.

"My heart will ache if you leave," Hui Niang told her son. "But you are our only hope. Go, then, and may you find success."

Hui Niang made a warm coat and sandals for Bao Chu. The sandals and the coat were just like those she had made for Liu Chun. Of course, they had to be made much larger to fit Bao Chu.

Finally Bao Chu was ready to leave. As he was saying farewell, the phoenix appeared through the darkness and landed on his shoulder. The boy laughed with delight at the beauty of the glowing bird.

"The phoenix is your friend," said Hui Niang. "He joined your father on his quest. He will join you on your own journey, if you wish."

Suddenly a wind swept across the river—the coldest wind the world had ever felt. Water snapped and cracked. Within a few minutes, the entire river was frozen solid. Bao Chu and the phoenix couldn't move.

Luckily, the Hundred Family Coat protected the boy from the freezing ice. The coat's warmth came from more than its fabric. It came from the caring and concern of the people in the village. Little by little, the coat's warmth began to melt some of the ice from around Bao Chu's body.

Bao Chu tucked the phoenix inside the coat. He felt the bird stir slightly, so he knew it was not dead. With one arm, Bao Chu held the bird tightly against him. Then with the other, he smashed his fist down against the ice. Again and again Bao Chu pounded the frozen stream.

Suddenly there came a loud cracking noise. The sound repeated and echoed all around Bao Chu in the dark night. He raised his arm and struck the ice again. With a mighty groan, the ice split into large chunks. The river started to move again.

Still holding onto the phoenix, Bao Chu scrambled to get up onto one of the ice floes.<sup>7</sup> Bao Chu then leapt from one ice floe to the next until he reached the far shore of the river.

Bao Chu immediately took the phoenix out from under his coat. The bird's golden feathers drooped, and its glow was very dim.

"Will the bird survive?" wondered Bao Chu. "I would soon be lost without the phoenix's light."

Bao Chu put the phoenix inside his coat and continued on his way. After a time, he reached another village.

Again, Bao Chu waited politely to speak until one of the village elders asked his name.

"My name is Bao Chu," he said. "I am seeking to find the sun and return it to the sky. But I nearly froze to death in a great river, and I'm very cold and tired."

These villagers, like the others, took Bao Chu in and warned him. They gave the phoenix a dry place by a fire, and

<sup>7</sup> Floes are sheets of floating ice.

the bird soon began to glow brightly again.

These people had even less to eat than the people in the first village. But they shared what they had.

When Bao Chu had eaten, he said, "Thank you very much for your wonderful food. Now it's time for me to continue on my journey."

Before Bao Chu left, the oldest man of the village spoke to him. "We don't have much to offer you," the elder said. "Our plants and our animals have died. The most valuable thing we have is our soil. We have worked it all our lives, as our ancestors did before us. Perhaps it will be useful to you."

Each of the villagers put a handful of soil from their garden into a large bag. Bao Chu put the bag of soil on one shoulder and thanked the villagers. Then with the golden phoenix on his other shoulder, he walked into the darkness and continued his quest.

After climbing more mountains and crossing more rivers, Bao Chu came to a road that **forked**. One road appeared to go slightly to the left of the bright star that marked his way. The other road appeared to go slightly to its right. In between the roads, the country was too rough and thorny for anyone to pass.

Bao Chu stopped at the crossroads. As he stood and wondered which way to go, he heard footsteps behind him. He turned around and saw a small dark figure approaching him. When the figure came closer, he could see that it was an old woman.

Suddenly the phoenix rose up on Bao Chu's shoulder and flapped its wings angrily. Embarrassed at the bird's behavior, Bao Chu pushed it away from his shoulder. Of course, he waited politely to be greeted.

"Who are you, young man?" the old woman asked. "Where are you going out here in the endless night?"

"My name is Bao Chu," he said. "I've come to complete the quest of my father, Liu Chun. I want to find the sun and return it to the sky. But I have climbed many mountains and crossed many rivers, and I am growing very tired."

While they talked, the phoenix flew in **frantic** circles just

above their heads. Both Bao Chu and the old woman tried to ignore the bird.

"It's much too long a journey," said the old woman. "You must return to your home. I'm sure your mother weeps for you."

"My mother has promised not to weep for me," Bao Chu answered. "And I will not return home until I have found the sun and returned it to the sky."

"Young people will never listen to those who are wiser," the old woman said with a sigh. "Well, if you must go on, take the road on the right."

As soon as the old woman said these words, the phoenix began to dive at her. The bird clawed at her face and struck her with its beak and its wide wings.

Bao Chu was furious. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled at the phoenix. "This woman is trying to help me!"

Bao Chu chased the golden bird away. Then he picked up a rock to throw if the phoenix attacked again.

The old woman continued giving Bao Chu advice. "If you go down the road to the right, you'll find the sun," she said. "But you'll come to a village before that, and I suggest that you rest there."

"Thank you for your kind advice," Bao Chu said. "I will follow it."

"Why don't you leave that bag of dirt here on the side of the road?" the old woman suggested. "It's silly to carry such a useless burden. It must be growing heavy."

Bao Chu smiled and said, "You're right. It's a heavy and useless bag of dirt. But it was a gift to me from many kind people. I can't leave it by the side of the road."

The old woman merely grumbled and frowned. Bao Chu put the bag of soil on his shoulder and started down the road to the right. After a few steps, he thought perhaps he should say good-bye to the old woman, more politely. He turned around to speak to her, but she was gone.

Bao Chu shrugged and continued down the road. As he walked along, the phoenix flew in front of him and tried to block his way. Bao Chu had to threaten the bird with the rock

before it would leave him alone.

"I wonder what's troubling the phoenix?" thought Bao Chu to himself. "I've never seen the bird attack anyone before, much less an elder."

The bird circled over Bao Chu's head, but it no longer tried to stop him.

Bao Chu had no difficulty **traversing** the road, even without the phoenix's light. The way was so smooth that he reached the village quite easily.

As Bao Chu walked into the village, the townspeople came out to greet him. They seemed already to know about his mission. And they praised his bravery and called him a hero. The people even began to arrange a feast to celebrate his arrival.

Although the sky was as dark here as everywhere else, this village seemed to be doing very well. The houses were well lit and the people well fed. The villagers were all dressed in fine clothing. Bao Chu watched them as they scurried around, cheerfully preparing his feast.

"How can these people be so rich and prosperous?" he wondered. "Everyone else I've seen has suffered terribly from the cold and the dark. Here the food is plentiful, and the people are healthy and happy."

As Bao Chu asked himself these questions, the village elder handed him a large wooden cup of wine. All the villagers raised their cups for a toast in his honor.

As Bao Chu raised his cup, something fell into it. Wine splashed into Bao Chu's face. Looking up, he saw the phoenix circling above him. Apparently the bird had dropped something into the cup.

Suddenly the object in Bao Chu's cup burst into flames. But before it turned to ashes, Bao Chu got a good look at it. It was a sandal made of hemp and hair twisted together—just like the ones he wore, only smaller.

"This looks like one of the sandals my mother made!" Bao Chu whispered to himself.

Then he shouted at the villagers, "This must be the place where my father died! Evil people! I knew something was

wrong from the moment I arrived."

At the sound of Bao Chu's fury, all the houses of the village disappeared. The people vanished as well. In the surrounding darkness, only demons and ghosts **cowered** before Bao Chu. One by one the evil creatures slithered away into the darkness.

Bao Chu looked up and saw the phoenix still circling overhead. He felt ashamed of the way he had treated the loyal bird.

"You saved me from the demon village," Bao Chu called. "Please forgive me and become my companion once again."

To Bao Chu's relief, the golden phoenix circled downward and landed on his shoulder again. **Slinging** the bag of soil over his other shoulder, Bao Chu went back to the crossroads. This time, he took the road to the left.

The demons and ghosts now followed Bao Chu through the hills, moaning and muttering in anger. They hadn't been able to tear Bao Chu apart with their thorn bushes. They hadn't been able to freeze him with their cold wind. And they had failed to kill him in their village.

Now the mighty demons threw high mountains in Bao Chu's path. But Bao Chu had climbed many other mountains, so he made his way over these too. Then the ghosts placed swift rivers in his path. But Bao Chu had crossed many other rivers, and he swam across these too. In spite of everything the evil spirits did, the young hero continued in the direction of the brightest star.

As if in despair, the demons began to moan. The moan grew louder until it became an evil wind that wailed over the land.

The wind blew all the way back to Bao Chu's village at the foot of Gemstone Mountain. It blew through the village until it found the farmhouse of Bao Chu's mother. Then the demon wind moaned and whispered into Hui Niang's ear.

"Bao Chu slipped and fell from a steep cliff," the demons said to Hui Niang. "Bao Chu fell into the rocky river below. He was crushed to death in the fall. Your son, Bao Chu, is dead."

Over and over again the ghosts hissed, "Your son is dead, Hui Niang. Bao Chu is dead."

The demons and ghosts hoped that Hui Niang would be stricken with grief and weep for Bao Chu. They hoped that her tears would weaken the hero as he pursued his quest.

But Hui Niang remembered what Bao Chu had said: "If you shed tears for me, it will break my heart. With a broken heart, I will weaken and will not be able to complete my father's quest."

So Hui Niang fought back her tears and held her head high. "I don't believe you!" she yelled to the wind. "I refuse to listen to your whispering lies. I refuse to cry for Bao Chu."

The demons and ghosts had failed again. In fact, instead of discouraging Hui Niang, the demon wind brought her new hope. "The demons wouldn't try to trick me if Bao Chu were already dead," she said to herself.

Hui Niang and the villagers continued to keep watch faithfully. Every morning when it should have been dawn, they gathered large flat rocks and carried them up Gemstone Mountain. At the top, they put their rocks down and stood on them. They looked to the east in hope of seeing the sun.

Every day, each person piled a new rock on top of an older one. The rock wall on top of the mountain grew higher and higher. But the villagers who stood on the rocks still saw no sign of the sun.

Meanwhile, Bao Chu made his way in the direction of the brightest star in the sky. However, he was beginning to believe that his journey was as endless as the dark night. One mountain led to another mountain, and one river was replaced by another river.

Then, from the top of a high peak, Bao Chu heard an unfamiliar sound. A low repeated roar echoed in the distance.

"I believe I hear the sea," Bao Chu said to the phoenix.

The bird rose into the air and sped in the direction of the roar. After a short time, Bao Chu saw the golden light returning. The phoenix landed on his shoulder and nodded its graceful head.

Bao Chu went down the mountain and went on until he

found the shore of the Eastern Sea. The brightest star was straight ahead of him, reflected many times in the waves.

"Where can I go now?" Bao Chu wondered, looking at the broad, deep water. "The sea is much too wide for me to swim across."

Then Bao Chu remembered the bag of soil on his shoulder. It had been given to him by people who had nothing else to give.

"This soil must have been given to me for a reason," Bao Chu thought. "Maybe now is the time to try it out."

Bao Chu opened up the bag and poured all of the soil into the sea. For a moment, it just floated on the surface of the water.

Then as if by magic, a strong wind rose and blew across the waves. The wind scattered the soil over the water, pushing some of it together and pulling some of it apart. Soon the soil had been shaped into a series of islands which reached far out into the sea.

"What wonderful islands," Bao Chu said. "They're close enough together for me to swim from one to another."

And that is just what he did. With the phoenix still on his shoulder, Bao Chu swam to the first island. Then he rested for a few moments and swam to the next. He continued until he reached the last island.

There Bao Chu stood looking out to sea and wondering what to do next. But before he had time to form a plan, the island began to sink. Straight to the bottom of the sea went Bao Chu and the golden bird. To Bao Chu's amazement, he and the phoenix were easily able to breathe under the water.

By the light of the golden phoenix, Bao Chu saw an underwater cave yawning in front of him. Its opening was blocked with a huge boulder. But around the edges of the boulder, Bao Chu could see a glimmering light.

"That must be the light of the sun!" he cried. "The bright star has led us to exactly the right place. The demon king has trapped the sun in that cave!"

At that moment, an army of terrible monsters appeared in front of the cave. They all **brandished** sharp weapons and



solid shields.

But Bao Chu paid no attention to them. Instead he looked at the leader of the **ghastly** army. He was the most horrible monster of all, and he carried a huge sword. "That must be the demon king," Bao Chu thought.

"If I kill that one," Bao Chu said to the phoenix, "the others will disappear."

The phoenix left the young hero's shoulder and swam near him in the sea. Though Bao Chu had no weapon, he bravely charged toward the demon king.

The king let loose an unearthly scream and swung his blade. But Bao Chu was swift and strong. He took hold of the demon king's shield and tore it from his hands. Then Bao Chu swung the shield and knocked the king's sword away too.

Then the two began to wrestle. They spun and jumped and struck out with their feet and fists. They rolled across the ocean floor.

After a time, Bao Chu grew weak from his many wounds. But he wasn't ready to give up. He summoned his strength and spun around one more time. He landed a mighty blow in demon king's stomach.

The evil king stumbled and fell. A deep growl rose from the ranks of the watching army. Just as they were about to rush forward to defend their king, the swimming phoenix darted into the battle. The golden bird swiftly tore out the demon king's eyes with his beak.

The demon king thrashed around blindly. In his rage, he bumped into a mountain of boulders. The huge stones tumbled down on top of him, crushing out his life.

With the death of their king, the army of demons disappeared completely. Bao Chu fell to the ocean floor in exhaustion.

"But I haven't finished yet," Bao Chu reminded himself. Wearily, he got to his feet and went to the cave. He strained against the boulder that blocked the entrance. Little by little, Bao Chu moved the boulder aside. Finally, the light of the sun fell upon him.

With the last of his strength, Bao Chu took the huge sun in

his arms and swam toward the surface of the sea. The phoenix swam alongside him. Bao Chu kicked harder and harder, trying to reach the surface before weakness overcame him.

"I can't stop now," he told himself over and over. "I'm too close to fulfilling my mission to quit."

At last Bao Chu reached the top. Straining, he **heaved** the sun out of the water just before his strength gave out.

Bao Chu knew he could do no more. "You must finish this for me," he told the phoenix weakly. "You must return the sun to the sky so my father will not have died in **vain**." Then Bao Chu closed his eyes for the last time.

The golden phoenix dived beneath the sun. It spread its wings and lifted the globe until it was out of the water.

Freed now, the sun rose gloriously into the air. After so many days of darkness, it again spread its brightness over the earth.

A hideous moan began as demons and ghosts were caught in the sun's light. Those that failed to find shelter from the sun immediately turned to stone.

At that moment, Hui Niang and the villagers were on Gemstone Mountain looking toward the east. They were all standing on the high piles of stones they'd raised.

"Look! There's a purple glow on the eastern horizon," said one villager.

"I don't see anything," said another. "You've been watching so long that you're seeing things."

"No, look!" cried Hui Niang. "Now the eastern sky is turning a rose color!"

And so it was. The horizon turned a brilliant rose. Then golden rays appeared. Soon the sun itself rose into view. The villagers laughed and cried, knowing their long night was over at last.

Then out of the east, the golden phoenix appeared. It flew to Hui Niang and bowed its head in sborrow.

"My son is dead," Hui Niang told the villagers in a broken voice. "He died bringing back the sun."

Bao Chu's mother was torn with grief. But she was also proud that her son had completed his father's quest. Bao Chu

would be a hero to his people forever.

To this day, the star of Liu Chun shines in the eastern sky just before dawn. Now it is called the Morning Star. And every day, the phoenix lifts the sun on its back. The wings of the phoenix turn the eastern sky purple, rose, and gold. And then the sun rises into the sky, warming the earth and all its people.

## INSIGHTS

**B**ao Chu had quite some difficulty rescuing the sun. But at least he only had one sun to deal with.

The Chinese used to believe that ten suns existed. One by one the suns took turns shining down from the sky.

There came a day when all ten suns took it upon themselves to appear together. The intense heat threatened to burn up the earth.

The Chinese emperor decided he had to take action. So he sent a talented archer named Yi to shoot nine of the suns down. Yi did as he was ordered, and all was well again.

The idea of the ten suns continued to haunt the Chinese, however. It was believed that if more than one sun appeared at the same time, it meant the Chinese government was about to fall.

In China the phoenix was a special bird. It was said that buried treasure could be found close to wherever a phoenix perched.

One story tells of a farmer who spotted a phoenix and starting digging near it. Finding some funny-looking earth, he decided it must somehow be valuable. So he took it to the emperor.

But the emperor was not pleased. The strange-looking clump of earth had an unpleasant smell and didn't seem to have any use. He decided to send it away.

However, some of the stuff accidentally fell onto the emperor's food. When he took a bite, he found it was the best food he'd ever had. He ordered that the substance be sprinkled on all of his meals to enhance the flavor.

People all over the world flavor their food with this substance even today. Its name? Salt.

*continued*

Many cultures are known for worshipping several gods—gods of the water, sky, fire, etc. The Chinese went one step further and worshipped household gods. In fact, sometimes more gods than people inhabited a house.

For example, there was the Lord and Lady of the Bed in the bedroom and a god who guarded each door. There was even a god of the bathroom.

The most important of these household deities was the kitchen god. Once a year he would ascend to heaven and report to the Supreme Being on the actions of everyone in the house.

For this reason, people offered the kitchen god many sticky treats. They hoped to seal the lips of this nosy deity and keep him quiet.

Many Chinese believe in reincarnation (being reborn in another body after death). But some believe there is also a hell where most of the dead go first.

According to some people, there are 18 hells, each governed by a god called a "Yama-king." Each hell is reserved for the punishment of different crimes.

The Chinese also believe that those punishments always fit the crime. For example, murderers may be flung on top of sharp swords. Or those who speak against the gods might have their tongues ripped out.

After punishment, the soul is placed before a Yama-king. He decides what form the soul will take at rebirth.

A book called the Register of Life and Death is kept in hell. It shows when a person is ready to die. At the right time a person's soul is plucked from its body and sent to hell for the proper punishment.

However, sometimes the wrong soul is taken by accident. When the error is discovered, the soul is allowed to return to earth, reenter its body, and continue living. For this reason even today many Chinese keep the bodies of the dead for several days before burial.

Not everyone goes to hell when they die, according to the Chinese. Souls of the good go to live with the gods on the K'un-lun Mountain. Or they go to the "Land of Extreme Felicity in the West," which is the Chinese paradise. After spending some time in paradise, they may return to earth to be reborn as a king, queen, or other powerful person.

Many ancient Chinese myths are lost forever, thanks to a man named Li Szu. In 213 B.C., Li Szu proposed to the emperor that all books—except technical books—be burned.

The law remained in effect until 191 B.C. At that time scholars were allowed to start rewriting lost texts. But some writers felt they had a free hand when it came to rewriting old myths. For this reason many of the ancient stories we know of today are probably not the true originals.