

# Chaos, Creation, and Divine Duality: A Comparative Study of Han Chinese and Heliopolitan Egyptian Cosmogony

Ivy Agyekum

Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China

This study presents a comparative analysis of Han Chinese creation myths and the Heliopolitan creation tradition of ancient Egypt. Both mythological systems share a foundational cosmogonic motif in which the universe emerges from a primordial state of chaos. In Han mythology, the giant Pangu separates heaven and earth, while in the Heliopolitan tradition the god Shu performs a similar role by dividing the sky goddess Nut from the earth god Geb. Despite these parallels, important differences remain. The story of Nuwa creating human beings represents a distinctive anthropogenic narrative within Han mythology. Additionally, both traditions emphasize cosmological duality: Chinese mythology frames this through the dynamic balance of Yin and Yang, whereas Egyptian mythology expresses duality through divine pairs within the Ennead. Another notable similarity is the presence of divine kinship relations that sometimes involve sibling unions. Finally, this study argues that cultural and historical contexts shape the transmission of mythological narratives. In the Chinese case, later patriarchal interpretations appear to have reshaped certain traditions, including narratives that once emphasized Nuwa as a primary creator deity.

*Keywords:* creation myth, cosmogony, Han Chinese mythology, Egyptian mythology, Heliopolis

## Introduction

Creation myths represent some of the earliest intellectual attempts by human societies to explain the origins of the universe, the emergence of humanity, and the structure of the natural world. These narratives do more than recount divine events; they function as conceptual frameworks through which cultures articulate relationships between chaos and order, humanity and the divine, and the processes through which the cosmos acquires structure. As such, creation myths are not merely descriptive accounts of origins but analytical systems that encode broader cosmological assumptions.

Among the world's ancient civilizations, both Han Chinese and Egyptian traditions developed complex cosmogonic narratives that address these fundamental questions. While these traditions emerged within distinct historical and cultural contexts, they share a common concern with explaining how an ordered cosmos arises from an initial state of undifferentiated chaos. At the same time, the mechanisms through which this transformation occurs differ significantly. Chinese cosmological narratives frequently emphasize process-oriented transformations driven by the interaction of *qi* and the dynamic balance of Yin and Yang, whereas Egyptian traditions, particularly the Heliopolitan system, foreground divine agency, genealogical succession, and the structuring role of creator deities such as Atum.

This study argues that although these traditions exhibit structural similarities, particularly in their depiction of a transition from chaos to order, such similarities do not necessarily indicate shared cosmological logic. Instead, they reflect distinct underlying assumptions about the nature of creation, the role of divine agency, and the organization of the universe. The central concern of this article is therefore not simply to identify parallels but to examine how similar narrative structures encode different conceptual models of cosmic formation.

To address this issue, the study asks the following research question: How do Han Chinese and Heliopolitan Egyptian cosmogonies conceptualize the transition from primordial chaos to cosmic order, and what does a comparative analysis reveal about the similarities and differences in their underlying cosmological structures?

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative comparative approach grounded in close textual analysis of primary sources from both traditions. The analysis draws directly on classical Chinese texts such as the *Tianwen* and *Huainanzi*, alongside Egyptian theological materials preserved in temple inscriptions, funerary texts, and religious writings. These sources are examined not merely as narrative accounts but as structured cosmological systems. Through close reading of their language, imagery, and narrative organization, the study identifies recurring thematic dimensions, including chaotic genesis, processes of differentiation, duality, divine agency, and the establishment of cosmic order.

By combining textual analysis with structural comparison, the study places these traditions within a shared analytical framework while remaining attentive to their internal conceptual logic. Rather than treating myths as isolated stories, it approaches them as symbolic systems that encode broader philosophical, cultural, and social assumptions.

The article advances three interrelated arguments. First, although both traditions share a structural motif in which order emerges from primordial chaos, Chinese cosmology tends to conceptualize this transition as an emergent, process-driven phenomenon grounded in the interaction of *qi* and the dynamic balance of Yin and Yang, whereas Egyptian cosmology frames it as the result of intentional divine action expressed through genealogical succession. Second, it demonstrates that similar cosmological structures, including duality and separation, operate within fundamentally different symbolic and metaphysical frameworks, indicating that structural parallels do not necessarily imply shared meanings. Third, it argues that comparative mythology must move beyond surface-level comparison and instead engage with the internal logic of each tradition in order to produce more analytically grounded interpretations.

While these observations build upon existing scholarship, the contribution of this study lies in extending them through a more integrated comparative perspective and by foregrounding connections that have received limited attention. In particular, the analysis shows that Chinese creation narratives do not only describe the formation of the cosmos but also encode social structure.

In addition, the study highlights a significant transformation in the representation of female creative authority within Chinese mythology. Early sources present Nüwa as a female autonomous creator and restorer of cosmic order, yet later narratives increasingly reposition her within relational and secondary roles alongside figures such as Fuxi and Pangu. This shift suggests a broader reconfiguration of cosmological authority in relation to evolving social and ideological structures.

Taken together, this approach not only clarifies how structurally similar cosmogonic narratives encode different underlying logics, but also demonstrates how cosmology intersects with social hierarchy and gendered authority. In doing so, the study contributes to comparative mythology by offering a more nuanced framework for understanding both the similarities and the divergences between culturally distinct systems of thought

### Literature Review

Existing scholarship on mythology has approached creation narratives from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, religious studies, philosophy, and literary analysis. Rather than treating myths merely as narrative accounts, scholars have emphasized their role as symbolic systems through which societies articulate cosmological order, divine agency, and the relationship between humans and the universe (Black, 2012). Within this broader field, however, the study of Chinese and Egyptian mythological traditions has largely developed along separate trajectories.

Research on Chinese mythology has often been shaped by the fragmented nature of its textual sources. Unlike mythological systems that are preserved within a single canonical corpus, Chinese mythological material is dispersed across philosophical texts, historical writings, and later compilations. Foundational sources such as the *Tianwen* and the *Huainanzi* provide important cosmogonic accounts, yet they do so within broader intellectual frameworks rather than as standalone mythological narratives (Birrell, 1993; Yang & An, 2011). As a result, Chinese mythology has frequently been interpreted through the lenses of philosophy or intellectual history rather than as a coherent mythological system in its own right.

In addition, the diversity of ethnic traditions within China complicates attempts to define a unified cosmology. While figures such as Pangu and Nüwa are widely recognized within Han narratives, similar or related motifs also appear among minority traditions, suggesting processes of cultural interaction and narrative transmission rather than a single, stable origin (Wu, 2011). Recent discoveries, such as the Chu Silk Manuscript, along with renewed attention to texts like the *Shan Hai Jing*, further demonstrate that Chinese cosmological narratives are embedded within a wide range of textual and material contexts (Li & von Falkenhausen, 2020). These developments have expanded the available corpus but have also reinforced the interpretive challenge of reconstructing a systematic cosmology.

In contrast, Egyptian mythology has been more extensively systematized within Egyptological scholarship. Multiple cosmogonic traditions, including those of Heliopolis, Hermopolis, and Memphis, have been documented and analyzed in relation to their theological and ritual contexts (Cox, 2013; Hornung, 1991). The Heliopolitan tradition, centered on Atum and the Ennead, has received particular attention due to its structured account of divine genealogy and cosmic generation. Egyptian creation narratives are preserved across a wide range of sources, including temple inscriptions, funerary texts, and ritual literature, allowing scholars to reconstruct relatively coherent cosmological frameworks (Baines, 1991; Traunecker, 2001).

Despite these differences in textual preservation and scholarly treatment, both traditions have been primarily studied within their own cultural and disciplinary contexts. Research on Chinese cosmology has often emphasized philosophical concepts such as *qi*, Yin-Yang, and natural transformation, while studies of Egyptian mythology have focused on divine hierarchy, ritual practice, and theological structure. As a result, the two traditions are rarely brought into direct analytical comparison.

Where comparative work does exist, it has tended to prioritize broad archetypal similarities, often emphasizing shared motifs such as creation from chaos or the presence of creator figures. However, such approaches frequently overlook the internal conceptual logic of each tradition. Structural parallels are identified, but the underlying differences in metaphysical assumptions, particularly concerning the role of divine agency, the nature of transformation, and the organization of cosmic order, remain insufficiently examined.

This gap is especially evident in relation to the transition from primordial chaos to cosmic order. While both Chinese and Egyptian traditions clearly engage with this theme, existing scholarship has not systematically analyzed how each tradition conceptualizes this process or how similar narrative structures may reflect fundamentally different cosmological logics.

The present study addresses this limitation by placing Han Chinese and Heliopolitan Egyptian cosmogonies within a single comparative framework. Rather than assuming that shared motifs imply shared meanings, it examines how each tradition constructs the relationship between chaos and order through distinct symbolic, philosophical, and theological systems. In doing so, the study shifts the focus from descriptive comparison toward a more analytically grounded understanding of cosmological structure.

### Chaotic Genesis

One of the most significant cosmological themes shared by both Han Chinese and ancient Egyptian creation narratives is the idea that the universe originates from a primordial state of undifferentiated chaos. The transition from chaos to order represents the foundational moment through which the structure of the cosmos is established, making it a key point of comparative analysis. This section examines how each tradition conceptualizes this transition and what these differences reveal about their underlying cosmological assumptions.

Chinese creation myths have largely been categorized within the accretion or conjunction archetype (McClure & Scott, 2004). The *Tianwen* (Questions of Heaven) describes an initial state in which everything was murky and indistinct, with no differentiation between darkness and light and no clear form or structure (Wu, 2011; Birrell, 1993). The *Huainanzi* similarly portrays a primordial condition in which Heaven, Earth, and the underworld had not yet taken shape, and all things existed in an undifferentiated state. Notably, these early accounts do not emphasize a singular creator deity; instead, vapour or *qi* is associated with the earliest stage of existence.

This absence of a clearly defined creator figure suggests that Chinese cosmology conceptualizes the origin of the universe as an emergent process rather than an intentional act. Order arises through the gradual differentiation of an originally unified state, shifting the explanatory focus from divine agency to transformation.

One of the most significant myths describing the formation of the universe is the transformation of Pangu's body. According to the narrative preserved in traditional sources, when the first being, Pangu, approached death, his body transformed into elements of the natural world:

When the firstborn, P'an Ku, was approaching death, his body was transformed. His breath became the wind and the clouds; his voice became thunder. His left eye became the sun and his right eye became the moon. His four limbs and five extremities became the four cardinal directions and the five sacred mountains. His blood became rivers and waters; his muscles and veins became the earth's arteries; his flesh became fields and land. His hair and beard became the stars, and his bodily hair became plants and trees. His teeth and bones became metal and stone; his vital marrow became pearls and jade. His sweat became rain. The mites on his body were carried by the wind and became the black-haired people. (Xu Zheng, *Wuyun Linian Ji*, in Birrell, 1993, p. 33)

Rather than depicting creation as the production of a separate world, this narrative presents the cosmos as emerging through transformation. The boundaries between body, nature, and cosmos remain continuous, suggesting a model in which order develops through metamorphosis rather than external design.

Nüwa is also described as the creator of human beings in Chinese mythology. According to the myth, she moulds humans from yellow earth and brings them to life. In some versions, she later creates additional humans

by using a cord dipped in mud, allowing droplets to form people (Thury & Devinney, 2017). A distinction is also drawn between those individually shaped from yellow earth and those formed from mud, with the former associated with higher social status and the latter with lower classes (Cheng, 2004).

This narrative extends cosmological explanation into the social domain. Creation here not only accounts for human origins but also naturalizes hierarchical distinctions, indicating that cosmological order and social order are conceptually intertwined.

A related cosmological explanation describes the emergence of living beings through the interaction of Yin and Yang. In this framework, turbid *qi* (Yin) gives rise to animals, while limpid *qi* (Yang) produces human beings. This further reinforces a model in which differentiation and balance between complementary forces generate the diversity of life, without recourse to a singular creator figure.

The Heliopolitan creation myth of ancient Egypt also begins from a primordial state of chaos but develops through a different logic. In this tradition, the creator god Atum emerges from the waters of Nun and initiates the formation of the cosmos. He produces Shu and Tefnut, who in turn generate further deities, forming a genealogical structure that establishes cosmic order (Calvert, 2022).

Unlike Chinese cosmology, this model emphasizes intentional creation through divine agency. Order is produced through a sequence of generative acts carried out by a central creator figure, resulting in a structured and hierarchical cosmology.

Although the creation of humanity is not the central focus of Egyptian mythology, several accounts describe human origins. In one narrative, Atum's tears become human beings (Pinch, 2002). In another, the god Khnum shapes humans from clay on a potter's wheel and breathes life (*ka*) into them before placing them in the womb (Shaw, 2003).

These accounts reinforce the same cosmological principle: Creation is deliberate, controlled, and continuously enacted by divine beings, rather than emerging through impersonal processes.

Taken together, these narratives reveal a fundamental divergence in how the transition from chaos to order is conceptualized. Chinese cosmology presents creation as an emergent process grounded in transformation and the interaction of forces, whereas Egyptian cosmology frames it as the result of intentional, hierarchical divine action. This distinction forms a key analytical basis for understanding the broader differences between the two traditions.

### Duality of Creation

Beyond the initial transition from chaos to order, many creation narratives describe the formation of the cosmos through processes of differentiation that produce complementary forces or paired elements. These dual structures function as organizing principles through which balance is maintained after the emergence of order. Comparing how different traditions conceptualize such dualities provides insight into their underlying cosmological assumptions. In both Han Chinese and Egyptian traditions, paired forces play a central role in structuring the cosmos, though their meanings are articulated differently.

Anne Birrell notes that the *Tianwen* (Questions of Heaven) refers to a primordial vapour arising from an initial state of chaos (Birrell, 1993). This vapour differentiates into opposing forces that struggle for dominance, repeatedly rising and descending until equilibrium is achieved. The heavy and dark elements settle to form the earth (Yin), while the light and clear elements rise to form the heavens (Yang). In this framework, creation is not attributed to a singular deity but to the stabilization of opposing forces.

Here, duality is not a fixed opposition but a dynamic process. Yin and Yang function as relational principles whose interaction produces order, indicating a cosmology grounded in balance and transformation rather than external design.

This structure is further articulated in the *Dao De Jing*: “Dao begets one; one begets two; two begets three; and three begets all things. All things carry Yin and embrace Yang, and through the blending of these two forms of *qi* harmony emerges” (*Dao De Jing*, Chapter 42; Schipper, 2011). Duality in this context is generative, with difference serving as the condition for multiplicity rather than conflict alone.

A related formulation appears in the myth of Pangu. Some accounts describe Yin and Yang as coexisting within a primordial cosmic egg prior to Pangu’s emergence. When equilibrium is achieved, the egg splits, and Pangu separates heaven and earth by pushing the sky upward and holding the earth below (Birrell, 1993).

Although Pangu appears as a central figure, his role is not that of a creator in the strict sense. He mediates the separation of pre-existing elements, reinforcing a cosmological model in which order emerges through differentiation rather than through the imposition of structure.

A comparable dual structure is found in the Heliopolitan creation tradition of ancient Egypt. The creator god Atum produces Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture), who form one of the foundational pairs within the Ennead (Pinch, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). Unlike the Chinese case, however, this duality is embedded within a genealogical system. The emergence of paired forces is the result of deliberate creation rather than spontaneous differentiation.

Shu and Tefnut give rise to Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), who are initially bound together. Shu separates them, creating the space necessary for the structured cosmos to emerge (Pinch, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). This act parallels the separation of heaven and earth in the Pangu narrative, yet the underlying logic differs. In the Egyptian tradition, separation is enacted by a divine agent within a hierarchical system, whereas in the Chinese tradition it emerges as part of an ongoing process of transformation.

These differences indicate that similar structural motifs may operate within distinct conceptual frameworks. Duality in Chinese cosmology is processual and relational, while in Egyptian cosmology it is genealogical and authority-driven. The assignment of symbolic roles, including gendered associations of heaven and earth, further reflects culturally specific systems of meaning rather than universal patterns.

Some scholars have also suggested that the Pangu narrative may have originated outside the early Han mythological corpus before being incorporated into later traditions (Birrell, 1993; Wu, 2011). This incorporation illustrates that cosmological models are not fixed but evolve through processes of reinterpretation and integration.

### **Culture and Myth: The Female Creator in Han Mythology**

The figure of Nüwa provides a critical lens through which to examine how mythological narratives reflect broader cultural transformations. Creation myths do not merely explain origins; they encode assumptions about authority, gender, and cosmological order. In the Chinese context, the evolution of Nüwa’s narrative demonstrates how cosmological traditions are reinterpreted within shifting intellectual and social frameworks. Rather than fixed accounts, these narratives reveal layered structures in which earlier cosmological ideas are preserved but reconfigured.

Nüwa is among the earliest creator figures referenced in classical Chinese literature. She appears in the *Tianwen* (Questions of Heaven), traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan, where she is associated with both the repair of the cosmos and the creation of human beings (Birrell, 1993; Yang & An, 2011). In these early references, she

functions as an autonomous creative force occupying a central position within the cosmogonic imagination. This portrayal suggests a cosmological model in which creative authority is not yet subordinated to later hierarchical structures, preserving traces of earlier conceptions in which female agency is central.

In later mythological traditions, however, this position is gradually reconfigured. The male culture hero Fuxi is introduced and paired with Nüwa as both her brother and consort, and the two are presented as progenitors of humanity following a cosmic catastrophe. According to one version of the myth, they are the only surviving beings after the collapse of the sky and must marry to restore human life. The narrative emphasizes their hesitation due to their sibling relationship, and in some versions Nüwa covers her face with a fan during the ceremony, a motif interpreted as reflecting later cultural discomfort with sibling marriage (Birrell, 1993).

In this shift, Nüwa is no longer the sole agent of creation but part of a gendered pair, and the narrative begins to incorporate norms related to kinship and social order. The tension surrounding sibling union suggests that later retellings actively negotiate earlier mythic elements in order to align them with evolving ethical frameworks.

Subsequent retellings further modify Nüwa's role. In widely circulated versions, she moulds humans from the mud of the Yellow River and animates them by breathing life into them. After becoming exhausted, she introduces marriage so that humans can reproduce independently, and in some accounts she is assisted by Fuxi in establishing social practices (Yang & An, 2011).

Here, the narrative extends beyond cosmological origin to the regulation of human society. The act of creation becomes intertwined with the establishment of social institutions, suggesting that myth operates as a framework through which social organization is naturalized.

These transformations have been linked by scholars to broader shifts in Chinese intellectual and social history. Early mythological traditions may preserve traces of powerful female creator figures, yet later developments influenced by Confucian ideology increasingly emphasize patriarchal hierarchy and male authority. As Allan (1991) observes, mythological narratives in early China were frequently reshaped to reflect changing cosmological and social frameworks, while Chang (1983) argues that myths were adapted to reinforce systems of ritual and political order.

Within this context, the repositioning of Nüwa can be understood as part of a broader process in which cosmology is aligned with emerging social and ethical structures.

The introduction of the Pangu creation myth during the Eastern Han period further alters this narrative configuration. In this account, Pangu becomes the central figure responsible for separating heaven and earth and generating the natural world (Yuan, 2020). Some scholars suggest that this myth may have originated outside early Han traditions and was later incorporated into Chinese cosmology, thereby reshaping earlier creation narratives (Allan, 1991; Wu, 2011). As Lewis (2006) notes, early Chinese mythic traditions were frequently reorganized as they were transmitted and compiled across historical periods.

The elevation of Pangu as a primary creator figure reorders the narrative hierarchy and contributes to the marginalization of earlier models of creation, including those centered on Nüwa.

From a broader perspective, these developments illustrate how mythological traditions evolve alongside changing social structures. As patriarchal systems became more firmly institutionalized, mythological narratives increasingly foreground male culture heroes while diminishing earlier female creative figures.

The transformation of Nüwa from an autonomous creator to a secondary figure within a relational and hierarchical framework therefore reflects not only narrative variation but also shifts in the ideological foundations of cosmology.

From a broader cultural perspective, these transformations illustrate how mythological traditions evolve alongside changing social structures. As patriarchal systems became more firmly institutionalized within imperial Chinese society, mythological narratives likewise shifted to emphasize male culture heroes while diminishing earlier female creative figures. The evolving portrayal of Nüwa therefore provides a clear example of how cosmological narratives are reshaped through ideological processes rather than merely transmitted across generations.

Taken together, these developments suggest that creation myths function not only as accounts of origins but also as sites of cultural negotiation, where competing values, social norms, and cosmological models are continuously reinterpreted and restructured.

### **Female Creation in Egyptian Mythology: The Case of Neith**

While the evolution of the Nüwa narrative illustrates the gradual reconfiguration of female creative authority in Chinese mythology, Egyptian cosmological traditions present a contrasting pattern. In several Egyptian theological systems, female deities retained prominent roles in the creation and maintenance of the cosmos. The figure of Neith provides a useful comparative case through which to examine how female creative power is conceptualized within a different cosmological framework.

Neith is commonly described as a goddess of war, yet in certain traditions she was also revered as a primordial creator deity. In the city of Sais in Lower Egypt, she was associated with the primordial waters from which the universe emerged and, in some accounts, described as the mother of Atum and as a divine presence existing prior to the formation of the cosmos (Wilkinson, 2003; Pinch, 2002).

In contrast to deities who emerge from primordial matter, Neith is in some traditions identified with that matter itself. Rather than acting upon a pre-existing substance, she is understood as the source from which creation unfolds, embodying a cosmological model in which creative power is inherent rather than externally applied. Creation, in this framework, is not mediated through differentiation or hierarchical succession but grounded in an originary, self-generating principle.

An inscription associated with Neith's temple at Sais declares:

I am all that has been, that is, and that will be;  
No mortal has yet lifted my veil.

Later recorded by the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (412-485 CE), this statement emphasizes Neith's identity as an eternal and self-generating cosmic force (Abdelwahed, 2015). The formulation presents her not simply as a creator among others but as a totalizing principle of existence, encompassing past, present, and future within a single divine identity.

Unlike the gradual marginalization of female creator figures in later Chinese mythological traditions, Egyptian cosmology preserves female divinity within central creative roles. Neith's worship from the Predynastic period onward and her continued association with a major cult center in Sais indicate the sustained integration of female creative authority within religious practice (Wilkinson, 2003).

This contrast suggests that the reconfiguration of female cosmological authority is not a universal process but is shaped by specific historical and ideological conditions. Whereas Chinese mythological traditions increasingly reposition female creators within relational and hierarchical structures, Egyptian traditions allow for the persistence of a model in which female divinity retains primordial and autonomous creative power.

### Comparative Insight

The comparison between Han Chinese and ancient Egyptian creation traditions reveals not only structural parallels but also fundamental differences in how cosmological authority and creative power are conceptualized. While both traditions incorporate female creator figures, their narrative trajectories diverge in ways that reflect distinct configurations of gender, authority, and cosmological order.

In early Chinese mythological narratives, Nüwa appears as an autonomous creator responsible for the formation of humanity and the restoration of cosmic order. Over time, however, her role is reconfigured within later textual traditions. The introduction of figures such as Fuxi and Pangu restructures the narrative hierarchy, repositioning Nüwa within relational or secondary roles rather than maintaining her as a singular source of creative authority (Birrell, 1993; Allan, 1991). This shift reflects a broader reorganization of cosmological authority in which creation becomes increasingly embedded within hierarchical and gendered frameworks.

By contrast, Egyptian mythology preserves female creative authority within a more stable cosmological structure. Deities such as Neith retain theological significance across different historical periods and coexist alongside male creator gods such as Atum and Ra. Rather than being displaced, female creative figures remain integrated within a pluralistic system that accommodates multiple sources of divine power (Hornung, 1996; Allen, 1988).

This divergence indicates that similar cosmological motifs, including the presence of creator figures and the emergence of order from primordial chaos, operate within fundamentally different conceptual systems. In the Chinese tradition, the restructuring of creation narratives aligns with the consolidation of hierarchical and patriarchal models of authority. In the Egyptian tradition, cosmological authority remains distributed across multiple divine agents without requiring such consolidation.

More broadly, this comparison demonstrates that creation myths function as sites where cosmological ideas and social structures intersect. The differing trajectories of Nüwa and Neith show that mythological narratives do not simply preserve inherited forms but actively reorganize them in relation to changing configurations of power, gender, and religious thought. Comparative analysis therefore reveals not only shared narrative patterns but also distinct cultural logics through which societies conceptualize creation and authority.

### Cosmic Order and the Structuring of the Universe

Creation myths not only account for the origins of the cosmos but also articulate the principles through which order is sustained. The emergence of order establishes enduring frameworks that regulate the relationships between natural forces, divine authority, and human society. Examining how different traditions conceptualize the maintenance of order therefore provides insight into the broader philosophical assumptions embedded within their cosmologies.

In Chinese cosmological thought, the universe develops from a primordial state of undifferentiated potential through the interaction of *qi* and the polarity of Yin and Yang. These principles are not conceived as forces in permanent opposition but as complementary processes whose interaction generates all phenomena, often described as the “ten thousand things” (Needham, 1956; Major, Queen, Meyer, & Roth, 2010). Order in this context is understood as dynamic equilibrium rather than a fixed or externally imposed structure.

This cosmological model extends beyond the natural world into the social and ethical domain. Classical texts such as the *Yijing* interpret the balance of Yin and Yang as a model for harmonious governance and moral

order. Political stability and social organization are therefore conceptualized as extensions of cosmological balance, linking human systems to the continuous regulation of natural processes (Allan, 1991; Puett, 2002). Order, in this framework, is not enforced by a singular authority but emerges from the alignment of human conduct with underlying cosmological patterns.

Ancient Egyptian cosmology likewise begins with the emergence of order from primordial chaos, often represented by the appearance of a creator deity such as Atum from the waters of Nun. However, the defining feature of this system is the establishment of Ma'at, the principle of order, balance, and justice that governs both the cosmos and human society. Unlike the Chinese model, Ma'at is not self-regulating but requires continuous maintenance through divine authority and ritual practice (Assmann, 2001; Allen, 1988).

This emphasis is reflected in the genealogical structure of the Egyptian pantheon. In the Heliopolitan tradition, Atum generates a sequence of deities, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys, whose relationships correspond to natural elements and cosmic functions (Pinch, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). Order is thus expressed through a hierarchical system in which divine relationships structure the cosmos and legitimize systems of authority.

While both traditions emphasize the importance of maintaining balance, they conceptualize its operation differently. Chinese cosmology presents order as an emergent and self-regulating process grounded in the interaction of complementary forces. Egyptian cosmology, by contrast, situates order within a framework of divine authority that must be actively upheld.

This comparison highlights that creation myths function not only as accounts of origin but also as models for understanding how order is sustained. Although both traditions address similar concerns, they do so through distinct conceptual frameworks: one privileging process and equilibrium, the other emphasizing authority and continuity. These differences underscore the role of cultural context in shaping how cosmological order is defined and maintained.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the creation narratives of Han Chinese mythology and the Heliopolitan tradition of ancient Egypt in order to analyze how different civilizations conceptualize the emergence and organization of the cosmos. While both traditions articulate a transition from undifferentiated beginnings to structured existence, the comparison reveals that this shared motif operates through fundamentally different cosmological logics.

Chinese cosmological narratives conceptualize creation as an emergent and process-oriented phenomenon. The interaction of *qi* and the dynamic balance of Yin and Yang generate order through continuous transformation rather than through a singular act of creation. Even when mythological figures such as Pangu and Nüwa are present, their roles remain embedded within broader cosmological processes. In contrast, Egyptian creation narratives emphasize intentionality and hierarchy. The cosmos is structured through divine agency, genealogical succession, and the sustaining principle of Ma'at, which requires ongoing reinforcement through ritual and authority.

The divergence becomes particularly evident in the treatment of female creative power. In early Chinese mythology, Nüwa appears as an autonomous creator, yet her role is progressively reconfigured within later traditions, where it is subsumed into relational and hierarchical frameworks. Egyptian mythology, by contrast, maintains the cosmological significance of female deities such as Neith, whose creative authority remains

integrated within a pluralistic theological system. These differing trajectories reflect broader variations in how cosmological authority and gender are conceptualized within each tradition.

Taken together, these findings indicate that creation myths function not merely as narratives of origin but as models for understanding how order is generated, structured, and sustained. Structural similarities, such as the movement from chaos to order, do not imply shared meanings; rather, they mask deeper differences in how societies conceptualize process, authority, and the relationship between the natural and the divine.

By placing Han Chinese and Egyptian cosmologies within a single analytical framework, this study demonstrates that comparative mythology must move beyond the identification of surface-level parallels and instead engage with the internal logic of each tradition. Such an approach allows for a more precise understanding of how similar narrative forms can encode distinct philosophical and theological assumptions.

More broadly, the analysis highlights the value of comparative inquiry in revealing both the recurrence of shared cosmological concerns and the specificity of their cultural expression. Creation myths, in this sense, are not universal templates but culturally situated systems of thought that articulate different ways of understanding the structure and meaning of the universe.

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