

A New Interpretation of the Traditional Ethnic Rational Spirit Presented by Ancient Chinese Myths

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Abstract—Ancient Chinese myths are the source of Chinese culture, contain the emotions and thoughts shared by the Chinese nation, and embody the spiritual soul of the Chinese nation. Ancient Chinese mythology is deeply rooted in China's long-standing cultural soil. It is a unique myth that grew up in China, and it permeates the light of oriental wisdom. Purposefully and selectively inheriting the precious spiritual cultural heritage in mythology has positive practical significance for us.

The content of ancient Chinese myths is rich and all-encompassing. The main feature is that it advocates reason and morality, and emphasizes ethics. It conveys the spirit of dedication, fighting and struggle of the primitive people in the confrontation with the natural and social environment. This kind of spirit allows people to draw strength and courage from it, so that human beings can go through all kinds of difficulties and come to today with a smile. This paper mainly uses the method of literature analysis to excavate and sort out the salient features of the concept of rationality in ancient Chinese mythology, try to judge and reflect on ancient mythology with today's value and vision, and provide theoretical and practical support for the promotion of our country's traditional culture and national spirit and historical references.

Index Terms—Ancient mythology, dedication, rationality, struggle spirit.

I. INTRODUCTION

What is the true meaning of mythology? Scholars of different disciplines at home and abroad have studied mythology as the object of attention, but their opinions have not been completely unified. Writers believe that myth is the source of literature and a manifestation of the aesthetic consciousness of primitive ancestors; historians maintain that myth is a description of some historical facts; anthropologists have discussed myths as the creation of primitive ancestors from the perspective of evolution; Religious scientists believe that myths existed objectively in ancient times; psychologists emphasize that myths are the product of primitive thinking. Whether in the West or in China, the most influential is the traditional anthropological view. As the carrier of early human spiritual phenomena, myth has attracted scholars from many disciplines.

There are many important aspects of human spiritual culture - religion, philosophy, literature, art, etc, all of which are inextricably linked with mythology. As proposed by Lu Xun "In ancient times, regardless of novels or poetry,

its elements cannot be separated from mythology. India, Egypt, and Greece are the same. China is no different" [1].

China is the only ancient civilization that has been handed down. The rational concept of the Chinese people is influenced by various aspects of the social, economic and cultural environment, and has been imbued with moral ethics and socio-political colors. Ancient Chinese mythology is a unique myth that grew up in China. It is deeply rooted in China's long-standing cultural soil and permeates the light of reason. The concept of rationality is also often regarded as a kind of spiritual power unique to human beings to regulate and control human desires and behaviors. Each myth has commonalities in its dominant spirit and literary influence worth exploring. A comprehensive review of the images and fragments in each link and type of ancient mythology shows some consistent spiritual characteristics despite their different contents.

II. THE DEDICATION SPIRIT

There are many familiar characters in ancient mythology. They all have lofty ideals. They are moral models of serving the country and the people, setting an example, and working hard and thrifty. Their deeds contain a strong spirit of dedication, they sacrificed everything for the richness of this world and the happiness and stability of human life. The most typical characters are Pangu, Houyi, and Shennong. The specific deeds are as follows:

The earliest document recording Pangu is the '*San Wu Li Ji*' written by Xu Zheng, a native of Wu during the Three Kingdoms period: "Before the opening of the world, heaven and earth were in a chaotic mess, like an egg. Pangu was born here. After 18000 years, heaven and earth separated, the light and clear Yang Qi rose to heaven, and the heavy and turbid Yin Qi sank to the earth. Pangu is in the middle of heaven and earth" [2].

Pangu is the god who created the heavens and the earth. He has powerful supernatural powers, and all things he created include human beings. However, Pangu is not immortal. He sacrificed himself to complete the creation of human beings.

For example, according to Zhang Junfang of the Song Dynasty Collection: "Before Pangu died, he turned his eyes into the sun and the moon, his limbs and head into the five mountains, his blood into the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, his hair into mountains, forests and trees, his muscles into soil, his bones into gold and stones, and the parasites on his body into the earth. His breath turned into the common people" [3].

Pangu's dying incarnation handed over everything to nature, and became everything in the world. This kind of

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analogy with the shape of the heaven and the earth with the shape of human beings, inferring the origin of the heaven and the earth and the reasons for the formation of all things, clearly reflects the primitive ancestors a primitive analogical thinking. Therefore, myth, as a way of thinking, is closer to the essence of spirit than logical idea.

In contrast, in order to survive and continue the race, Hou Yi overcame all the disasters in the gods and the human world. According to the record "When Yao's time came, ten suns came out together, and the crops were scorched. Now, all the plants and trees have dried up, and the people have no food to eat. Monsters, savages, water and fire monsters, evil birds, wild boars, snakes, etc. came out to harm the people together" [4]. Hou Yi relies on his own magical power and the spirit of dedicating everything to mankind has saved the people from the disaster.

In addition, in ancient Chinese mythology *Shennong* was also known as Emperor Yan (Sun God). He is not only regarded as the ancestor of agriculture, but also known as the ancestor of traditional Chinese medicine. According to legend, he was a bull-headed man who taught people to make farm tools and sow grains. In order to relieve the suffering of the people, he also "Taste the taste of herbs and the sweetness and bitterness of water springs, and guide the people to avoid the harmful and approach the beneficial. At this time, *Shennong* encountered poisonous plants and water seventy times a day" [1]-[4]. *Shennong* After tasting all kinds of herbs, in the end, he died of poisoning and rotten intestines. It not only left us with the glorious Chinese medicine civilization, but also reflected the fearless spirit of the ancestors to conquer nature, perseverance and dedication.

III. THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

Despite the harsh living conditions of human beings, it inspired the unyielding spirit of resistance of the ancestors, which gave birth to a large number of mythical heroes who rebelled against nature and the emperor.

Jingwei is the daughter of a deity (Emperor Yan), she is no longer an omnipotent deity, but a "personalized deity" with human will. She dares to fight and fight with nature. The Classic of the Northern Mountains Chapter 3: "There is a bird called Jingwei which looks like a crow and has white markings on its head, a white beak and red claws. <...> The bird was originally *Nüwa* the youngest daughter of Emperor Yandi. She was drowned when swimming in the East Sea and was unable to return. Thus she transformed herself into the bird jingwei and often carried broken woods and pebbles in the mouth to fill the East Sea" [5]. The greatness of the East China Sea and the smallness of Jingwei, the depth of the East China Sea and the smallness of wood and stone form a strong and sharp contrast and opposition. Her weakness shows the worship and fear of primitive people to the mysterious nature, and her death undoubtedly symbolizes human beings. A heavy price to pay in the struggle against nature.

This story has a strong tragic atmosphere, but it also illustrates the belief and ideal of our ancestors to defeat nature, and praises the lofty sentiments and aspirations of "Jingwei" to fight against the heaven and earth.

In addition, in Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from heaven and nature for human beings. Humans took the

first step of civilization through Prometheus using fire and saving fire. In ancient Chinese mythology, the fire was obtained by the Suiren family by drilling wood, "There is a sage who makes it, drills the fire to make fire, so as to dispel the stinky smell, and the people are pleased with it. He was elected king by the people, and the people called him Sui Ren" [6].

The conquest and use of fire, in a way, symbolizes how humans conquer the entire external world represented by nature. Sui Ren's drills wood to make fire. It shows that people creatively imitate the phenomenon of birds pecking trees. In today's words, it is a kind of scientific association. Suiren's drilling wood to make fire is really an epoch-making rise of human spirit. This rise depends on reason, not irrationality, so the brilliance it emits is also the brilliance of rationality. This is not only reflected in the thinking and method in this creative process, but also in the attitude towards fire. Sui Ren has no fear or worship of fire, he just wants to control fire for the benefit of mankind. The method of Sui Ren's making fire reflects the brilliance of first-line rationality in Chinese fire culture.

However, Gun is a Prometheus-style rebel figure. The Classic of Areas within the Seas: "The great flood inundated the whole continent. Gun stole from the God of Heaven of the divine soil to curb the flood. As Gun refused to wait for the God of Heaven to allow him to do so, the God of Heaven ordered Zhurong to kill him near Mount *Yushan*. Later Gun gave birth to King Dayu. The God of Heaven then ordered King Dayu to delimit a boundary and settled the territory for nine provinces of the country" [1]-[5].

Gun's death reminds us of Prometheus. In order to steal fire to the world, he was willing to be chained by Zeus on the Caucasus Mountains and endured the pain of stinging his heart and liver by eagle. Facing the flood, Gun was in a dilemma. He had two options: one is to wait for the emperor's order and sacrifice the people; the other is to steal the soil and sacrifice himself. He chose to sacrifice himself against authority for the good of mankind.

The conception of Gun Myth reflects a cultural and psychological characteristic of the Chinese nation: a bright ending and a balanced and stable structure. Simply put, this structure is a life-and-death cycle structure. This is the tendency of human nature to be kind, and it is also the symbol of the emotional and ethical culture of Chinese tragic cultural spirit. The pragmatic, persistent and resolute will of a nation reflected in Gun has been further sublimated in Dayu [7].

Xingtian is another rebel figure. Among the myths that reflect the struggle between ethnic groups and tribes in ancient China, the myth of Xingtian is the most unforgettable, philosophical and rational myth. According to the pre-Qin ancient book "The Classic of Areas Overseas: the West": "Xingtian and the God of Heaven came to this place and vied with each other for the leadership. As a result, the God of Heaven beheaded him and buried him on Mount *Changyang*. Using his nipples as eyes and navel as mouth, Xingtian still wielded his battleaxe and shield, dancing wildly" [2]-[5]. He was indomitable, and still died, although his head was chopped off, he has been fighting hard. What a brave and strong, how awe-inspiring! Therefore, Tao Yuanming praised in his poems "Xingtian dances with thousands of relatives, fierce ambition is always there".

IV. THE STRUGGLE SPIRIT

Coordinating the relationship between man and nature can be said to be the eternal theme of human beings. The productivity level of primitive society is low, people's living environment is harsh, and people need to pay hard work to gain something. The Chinese ancestors were not daunted by the difficulties that lay before them, and they carried on an even more arduous struggle.

Facing the torrential floods from the sky, the Chinese ancestors did not follow the will of God and built some "Noah's Ark" to avoid disasters, but openly stole the "soil" of the Emperor of Heaven. After Gun's death, Da Yu inherited his father's legacy and led the people to start a more tenacious struggle against water control. He persevered, split the mountain to divert water, dig the ground to release the flood, and spent ten years overcoming the flood and winning a new life. Da Yu went to his house three times, however in order to control the flood he didn't get in, that shows how having been devoted to his responsibilities he ignored his private life. The image of Yu portrays people's social nature and social responsibility, as well as the moral and ethical concept of remaining selfless and putting virtue and public needs first. Yu's contribution fully illustrates the optimistic and positive cultural spirit of the ancestors.

The ancient people in the struggle with nature showed a brave and persistent, indomitable excellent quality, the courage to overcome all difficulties and obstacles determination and perseverance, when the human face the moment of crisis. The myth of Nuwa smelting stone to mend the sky, showing the heroic spirit and fighting spirit to save mankind. Nuwa's feat of mending the sky came after the creation of the world, "Nuwa's theory of patching up the sky was first seen in "Huainanzi: Lanming Xun": "In ancient times, the four poles were abolished, the nine states were split, the sky cannot cover the earth, the earth cannot fully carry all things, the fire is broad and violent and will not go out. The waters are endless, ferocious beasts devour good people, and ferocious birds grab the old and the weak with their claws. Therefore, Nuwa refines the five-color stone to make up for the sky, and the broken ao is enough to stand up to the four poles, to kill the black dragon to Jizhou, and to accumulate the ashes. Stop prostitution. Cangtian nourishes, the four poles are right; prostitution dwindles, Jizhouping; cunning worms die, good people survive" [2]-[4]. In the Western "At Classification" and Thompson's "Folk Literature Motif Index", there is no such thing as mending the sky type of story [8]. The strong will and tenacious fighting spirit of the Chinese nation have already begun to emerge here, and the concept of Confucianism of later generations to save the world and make up for the sky also comes from this. More importantly, the spread and evolution of the stories about Nuwa mending the sky in future generations also derived and developed along this positive and healthy tone.

In addition, the famous fairy tale of Kua Fu chasing the sun is well known. The tragic ending of Kua fu chasing the sun clearly reflects the firm will and unremitting pursuit of the ancestors. "Kua fu runs with the sun and finally walks into the scorching sunlight. Feeling thirsty, he drinks up all the water in the Yellow River and the *Weishui* River, but he still cannot quench his thirst. He then goes to the north, desiring for the water in a big marsh there. Unfortunately, he dies of thirst

half the way. On the verge of death, he throws away his walking stick, which immediately transforms into a forest called Denglin" [3]-[5]. Although Kua fu devotes himself day by day, the records of the myth do not have the slightest resentment, but reveal Kua fu's self-improvement, indomitable will and spirit of exploration. The crutches that Kua fu lost when he died turned into a peach forest, which also reflected the pursuit of eternal life of the primitive ancestors. The life of Kua fu was extended to a forest full of vitality, so that people could see the hope of immortality and would not give in and admit defeat. The fighting spirit still lives on in the world. In order to achieve his goals, Kua fu holds a persevering and courageous spirit, showing a tenacious will and a heroic and noble personality.

Whether in China or in the West, heroes in myths are outstanding leaders in ancient social life and their own tribes, who are worshipped and deified by people. In Chinese myths and legends, there is never a conflict between heroes and gods. On the contrary, it is gods who absolutely sacrifice themselves, dedicate themselves, have a heroic and tenacious fighting spirit, and use their own strength and wisdom to defeat the enemies of mankind. The development and growth of the nation has played a huge role. This kind of relationship between heroes and gods reflects the relationship between man and nature tortuously.

The stories of challenging and resisting the gods in ancient Greek mythology imply the irreconcilable contradictions between man and heaven, man and god, and reflect the determination and perseverance of Westerners to win and dare to conquer nature. Pangu and Nuwa took on the mission of gods to sacrifice the ego to fulfill the great ego. This myth of transforming themselves into all things reflects the ancient Chinese people's pursuit and yearning for the "harmonious" relationship between human beings, all things in nature, heaven and earth, and gods is the initial manifestation and philosophical basis of the humanistic spirit of "harmony between man and nature".

In a word, ancient Chinese mythology, as the original appearance of the spirit of the Chinese nation, is characterized by advocating rationality and paying attention to morality, such as "Dayi, Nuwa, Pangu, Jingwei, Kua fu, Dayu, etc., they don't want to be the masters of the universe, but either as a symbol of eliminating evil for the people, or as a spiritual representative of conquering a certain force" [9]. These mythological images more show the indomitable struggle and fight of Chinese ancestors under the severe natural environment and complex social conditions. The spirit of struggle is the portrayal of the spirit of the Chinese nation for thousands of years.

V. CONCLUSION

As an original cultural accumulation, myth is a valuable spiritual wealth left by the human ancestors, providing a spiritual model for the later generation, affecting the cultural psychology of the later generation. "Chinese mythology, as a symbolic form of primitive cultural phenomenon and the product of spiritual activities, reflects the cultural psychology and thinking conditions of ancient Chinese ancestors under certain historical conditions" [10].

The cultural connotation and spirit presented by myths

affect the way of thinking, behavior, survival and spiritual character of a nation. In addition, it has far-reaching influence on literature. Literary works are not only an all-round reveal of human emotions, but also a product of human rationality. Emotion and rationality together build a unity of literary works from sensibility to rationality. Mr. You Guoen pointed out in "History of Chinese Literature" that from Qu Yuan's Chu Ci, Zhuangzi's prose, Li Bai's poetry, Dongpo's poetry, Wu Cheng'en's "Journey to the West", Lu Xun's "New Story" and other literary works, we can see the mythical novelty and unrestrainedness of the works. fantasy and exaggerated peculiar romantic spirit.

Ancient Chinese myths and stories are full of idealized colors, filled with the deep aspirations of the ancient ancestors, and highlighted the actions and initiative of human beings. The specific manifestations are the unyielding fighting spirit to compete with nature, the lofty ambition to save the world and the people; the industrious, brave and indomitable quality; the will to strive for improvement and self-improvement; the harmonious concept of advocating benevolence and virtue; the courage to face difficulties and challenges, with the pioneering and innovative spirit, etc. are the precious wealth of the Chinese nation.

Therefore, as the foundation and source of human culture, mythology is a vital phenomenon affecting human spiritual life in human history. As S·N Kramer said "Scholars believe that the myths of the ancients are one of the most profound achievements of the human spirit, produced by the creative wisdom of genius. A work full of inspiration—a creative wisdom that has not been compromised by the prevailing attitude of academia, which is obsessed with so-called analytical thinking, and thus opens the door to a profound understanding of the universe" [11]. Ancient Chinese mythology is the crystallization of the wisdom and original

creativity of the ancestors. The dawn of human reason has long been revealed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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