

A Comparative Study of the Image of Deities in Greek and Chinese Mythology

Nan Zhuang

School of Humanities and Education, Xi'an Eurasia University, No. 8 Dongyi Street, Xi'an, China

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Abstract: Myth is one of the spiritual wealth created by human beings. As a kind of culture, the myths in the world have certain commonalities, but the myths produced in different cultural backgrounds must have their own personalities. Just like Chinese mythology and Greek mythology. Both of them are important products of human civilization and have profound and lasting influence on the development of their respective cultures. But because they were born in different fields, there are many differences between them. Among them, there are obvious differences in the images of gods presented by the two. Most of the images of gods in Chinese mythology are mysterious and restrained, with a strong sense of mystery. However, most of the gods in Greek mythology are vivid and have obvious human characteristics. This paper takes the difference of god image as the research starting point, and analyzes the reasons for the similarities and differences between god images in Chinese mythology and Greek mythology by comparing them, so as to find out the similarities and differences between China and Greece in terms of cultural background.

1. Introduction

Myth is the first spiritual wealth created by human beings, carrying a long history and rich cultural connotation, with inestimable research value. As a kind of cultural carrier, myth has certain commonness, but the myth produced under different cultural background must have its own personality. "God" is the embodiment of natural forces and natural objects, and gradually begins to have some social attributes with the development of society. The gods in Greek mythology have the characteristics of "homomorphism". In Greek mythology, gods and people are similar in appearance and character. On the other hand, the gods in Chinese mythology are mostly mysterious and do not have the characteristics that are highly similar to human beings [1]. Based on quantitative analysis, this paper focuses on the image of god in Chinese mythology and Greek mythology. Through the research, it is found that under the appearance of the difference in the image of gods, it reflects the correlation and difference between different cultural backgrounds.

2. Chinese Mythology and Greek Mythology

2.1. Chinese Mythology

Chinese myths are stories and legends that reflect ancient people's primitive fantasies about the

origins of the world, natural phenomena and social life, and are expressed in the form of supernatural images and fantasies. In the early days, they were handed down by word of mouth and in the later days, they were recorded in books and pens. Chinese mythology reflects the primitive fantasies of ancient people about natural phenomena and social life, and is expressed in the form of supernatural images and fantasies, and is specifically defined as 'the natural and social forms themselves, processed in an unconscious artistic way through the fantasies of the people' [2]. From the national perspective, Chinese mythology is the cultural achievement created by all the Chinese nations, and also the important foundation and development source of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. This is because the Chinese nation has always inherited and praised such fine moral qualities as diligence and responsibility, which can be traced back to Chinese mythology.

Chinese mythology usually features gods and goddesses, including various nature gods and deified heroic figures such as Pan Gu, Nu Wa, Hou Yi and Kua Fu. Most of these deities are robust, but their appearance or size differs from that of ordinary humans (e.g. Pangu was a tall man), each has its own characteristics, possesses magic and superhuman powers, and has a certain contribution or influence on the lives of future generations.

2.2. Greek Mythology

Greek mythology, dominated by heroic myths, is the spiritual product of primitive clan societies and was the earliest literature in Europe [1]. Greek mythology was mostly collated by reference to two epic poems by Homer (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*), but according to a later examination these two texts were not the main content of Greek mythology, as they consisted mostly of hymns and therefore played only a reference role in the collation and formation of Greek mythology.

The gods of Greek mythology had the same gender as humans and were almost identical in size to them. They have the physical beauty of human beings, and also have human emotions, know happiness and sadness, and participate in human activities. In Greek mythology, the difference between the gods and humans is simply that the gods can live forever and have no period of death, whereas humans have a limited life and are born old, sick and die.

3. The Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Greek Mythology in Terms of the Image of the Gods

3.1. External Image

The external images of gods in Chinese mythology are mostly tall and strong, resembling humans but not humans, half human and half animal. For example, in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a gem of Chinese literature, there are many descriptions of these inhuman-like spirits:

[Hua She] A man-faced jackal with wings, a walking snake and a loud voice. Can draw water.

[Ying Zhao] A man has a horse's face, tiger stripes, bird-like wings and a voice like pomegranate. Claimed to be the god of gardens for the heavenly emperor [3].

Not only that, in the earliest records, Fuxi Nuwa was a human face with a snake body, Yan Di was a human head of an ox, Chiyou was a human head of an ox with four eyes and six hands, Pangu was a dog head of a human body, and so on. In the image of gods in Chinese mythology, half human and half animal dominated. But the gods in Greek mythology were for the most part exactly the same as humans, only more physically fit. Such as the god of love Venus has men all over the world to see the appearance of love; Vienna, goddess of wisdom, had the wisest brains; Apollo, the sun god, had a radiant charm. In Greek mythology, almost all the gods were beautiful and perfectly formed. Even the terrifying Medusa, with hundreds of snakes on her head, had a fit body.

It can be concluded that the gods in ancient Chinese mythology are mostly in the shape of "half

man and half beast", while the gods in Greek mythology are created according to the image of human beings. The gods have the form, personality, emotion and other characteristics of human beings, making the image of gods very close to human beings, and have a beautiful appearance. In fact, the gods of Greek mythology are the concentrated embodiment of human beauty. It is said that "all gods are the ideal of beauty"[4]. In terms of the external image of gods, Chinese mythological gods are far from the image of the bodybuilding Greek gods.

3.2. Inner Image

Most of the gods in Chinese mythology are majestic and tall, with a strong mysterious color, which is the inner image of the gods promoted by Chinese mythology that they are superior, powerful and dominate the fate of human beings.[5] In addition, most of the Chinese gods are selfless and have no selfish interests. They have been making contributions to the survival of all mankind in the universe. For example, in Pangu the Creation of Heaven and Earth, Pangu sacrificed himself for the creation of heaven and earth. In Yu the Great Flood Control, Yu the Great worked too hard to control the flood by going through his house for three times. In "Shen Nong Tastes Hundreds of Herbs", Shen Nong tries hundreds of herbs in order to save the suffering of the world, but unfortunately dies of poisoning himself.

The Greek gods, like human beings, had a rich temperament. Some of them are just, some jealous, some cunning [6]. For example, Zeus, the king of the gods in Greek mythology, although he is the supreme ruler of the universe, he has all the habits of mortals. In his daily life he often indulged his desires and passions, so that there were many illegitimate children of Zeus. Hera, the queen of God, was even more jealous. She was full of jealousy and hatred for the mistresses of Zeus, and often used cruel means to deal with Zeus's mistresses and illegitimate children. It can be seen that most of the gods in Greek mythology have a strong secular character, but also reflect a strong humanistic character [7]. In terms of inner image, Chinese deities are almost the embodiment of "omnipotence", lofty in themselves and (extremely) with their lofty sense of responsibility, unselfish and dedicated to the world. The secular life of the Greek gods was more "human" by comparison. There is still a big difference between them in internal image.

4. Analysis of the Causes of the Difference in the Image of Gods

Through analysis and comparison, it can be found that there are some similarities between Chinese mythology and Greek mythology. For example, the images of gods in the contents of both are portrayed based on the images of human beings, and both create the images of the gods of creation. However, it can be found that there are more differences than similarities between Chinese and Greek gods. Both images are exaggerated to some extent, but the cultural backgrounds reflected are not the same. This reflects the national and regional nature of culture. It is precisely because the cultural soil of Greek mythology and Chinese mythology is different, so the different cultural characteristics and cultural backgrounds can be reflected through the analysis of the image of gods alone.

China is a river civilization with a relatively homogeneous but stable culture. In addition, the ancient Chinese people always took farming and agricultural production as the main way to obtain material materials, which created the Chinese people's emphasis on the countryside, ethnic, stability and harmony but relatively closed ideology.[8] Therefore, the atmosphere of Chinese mythology is solemn, the image of the gods is majestic, mysterious. However, the lofty and solemn image of the spirit with a sense of responsibility is reflecting the tenacious and persistent character of the Chinese nation and the national spirit with a sense of responsibility.

Ancient Greece is the Marine civilization, they have long been through the sea activities to gain

wealth and development. Long time at sea has made them yearn for freedom and brave personality. In their concept, technological wealth may be the first need for survival, which may be the Chinese sense of responsibility in the national spirit of the portion [9]. The posture of the gods in Greek mythology is simple and the charm is natural, which has a strong artistic appeal and reflects the Westerners' freedom avocation.

5. Conclusion

Through analysis and comparison, it can be seen that the two different forms of God images are the reflection of their respective civilizations and different cultural backgrounds. The portrayal of the selfless image of the gods in Chinese mythology reflects the Chinese nation's respect for enlightenment, as well as the Chinese culture's emphasis on moral ethics. The depiction of the gods in Greek mythology reflects Western culture's respect for freedom and power, as well as its pursuit of adventurism and heroism.

Chinese mythology weakens the existence of human nature, while Greek mythology emphasizes human nature. Chinese mythology emphasizes moral ethics, while Greek mythology emphasizes the expression of ideas. Perhaps from the perspective of humanistic care, Greek mythology is richer in some ways than Chinese mythology. However, through this comparative study, I think the significance of comparative study is not only to compare the two, but also to learn from and promote each other. Only with an inclusive and modest research attitude can a culture be developed and passed on for a longer time.

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