

An Ecological Holistic Study on the Characteristics of Mythology

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Abstract: With the transformation from industrial civilization to ecological civilization and the outbreak of COVID-19 global pandemic and natural disasters all over the world, it warns us that humankind's rampant destruction of the natural world has fundamentally threatened human survival. Ecological holism, as an important ecological aesthetics, a brand-new aesthetic concept put forward by Chinese scholars in the middle 1990s, it takes the ecological relationship between man and nature as the basic starting point, to study the ecological relationship between man and nature, man and society, man and spirit, to take the overall interest of the ecosystem as the highest value rather than the interest of human beings as the highest value. With literature research method, investigation research method and, and qualitative research method, this paper intends to explore the characteristics of mythology from the perspective of ecological holism on the following points. First, mythology is part of folk literature and is the subconscious artistic creation of their ancestors on nature. Mythology is full of curiosity about the formation of nature, the origin of human beings, and productive life, a reverence and exploration of nature. Mythology is full of rich imagination and fantasy totem worship. Our ancestors created many myths about social life during their long-term social practice, reflection of social life. Mythology is a prehistoric art handed down orally by primitive ancestors, obvious rap oral transmission. It is concluded that our ancestors pursue and admire the ideal ecological environment and achieve a certain fit with ecological holism.

Keywords: Mythology; Characteristics; Ecological Holism; Nature; Society; Spirit

1. Introduction

Mythology is one of the sources of other literary forms and arts. It is diverse, distinctive, and all-encompassing, reflecting the strong primitive thinking of our ancestors who have been exploring the relationship between all things in the universe since the very beginning. Ecological holism is concerned with the overall interests of the ecosystem and rejects the excessive transformation of nature by human beings. Our ancestors' mythology is rich in ecological holistic consciousness. It is concluded that our ancestors pursue and admire the ideal ecological environment and achieve a certain fit with ecological holism. This research is significant to the ecological study and also an enlightenment to other disciplines as well we the construction of ecological civilization.

2. Mythology

Mythology (or Traditional Tales) arose during the primitive tribal period and were illogical and absurd, an imagination of the struggle with nature [1]. In the prehistoric period, when people were still ignorant and dominated by nature, they showed their reverence for the sun, moon, stars, etc. They believed that everything in the universe was divine and that there was an irresistible force in nature, so they had to worship and venerate to get shelter from the spirits. Therefore, it can be said that in the early days of human society, man was unable to break through his own limitations and needed to borrow some supernatural power or anthropomorphic divine power to explain mysterious phenomena, such as floods mythologized as divine punishments, to rationalize the perception of the natural world through such fantasy. Myth is a product of primitive thinking, and from the perspective of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure of historical materialism,

the ancient people's mythological understanding of the relationship between nature and society was formed only because of the constraints of productivity and mode of production at that time. The historical consciousness expressed by these barnyard histories, folk songs and legends is still in a hazy state, so they belong to a nation of hazy concepts.

China's mythology is part of folk literature and is the subconscious artistic creation of ancestors on nature, etc., rich from records, including myths about nature, the creation of the universe by Siba—the god of creation; myths about the origin of human beings, the children of divine monkey and Luoche'nv who inherited good and evil qualities of parents; and myths about labor production. The most famous myth is the legend that the sea has changed into a land: a five-headed poisonous dragon came to the original inhabited area, who vowed to destroy everything on the earth; when five colored clouds floated in the sky, they used their divine power to subdue the poisonous dragon, with the eastern side into a forest, the southern side into a garden, the western side into good land, the northern side into pasture, and the five fairies finally into five main peaks standing on the southwest edge of the current Everest "Goddess Peak". China's mythology reflects the intertwined stories of gods and goddesses, with *Gesar* the longest epic myth in the world, which tells the story of King Gesar who was ordered by heaven to earth to subdue demons and protect living beings, and the whole poem shapes a heroic image of King Gesar who is widely loved by the people, depicting a magnificent scroll of struggle with evil and disaster. All these reflect that most of these myths have strong national and plateau characteristics, reflecting the social living conditions, aesthetic concepts and ideologies of ancestors in ancient times.

3. Ecological Holism

Ecocritical terminology was first mentioned in the American Eco-critic William Ruckert's *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, a vigorous denunciation of the anthropocentric mode of existence in the

context of the deteriorating ecological and natural environment, and the need to turn to an ecological holism model in order to eradicate the ecological crisis [2]. Ecological holism is represented by Leopold and Ralston, whose core idea is to take the overall interest of the ecosystem as the highest value rather than the interest of human beings as the highest value, and to take whether it is conducive to maintaining and protecting the integrity, harmony, stability, balance, and continued existence of the ecosystem as the fundamental measure of all things and as the ultimate criterion for judging human lifestyles, technological progress, economic growth and social development.[3] Ecological holism emphasizes decentering and focuses on the organic connection between the whole or the parts. Guided by the idea of ecological holism, the ecological beauty of the text—the harmonious and stable relationship between the various ecological subsystems in the text—is explored by mining the ecological relationship between literature and nature. Michael Polanyi explains life that "If life is an emergent property of matter, then life cannot be explained only in terms of physics and chemistry; if mentality is an emergent property of neural processes, then mentality cannot be explained only in terms of brain physiology" [4].

Aldo Leopold is a famous American ecological writer and ecological thinker. In the process of long-term close contact with nature, Leopold gradually formed an ecological holistic view beyond the spirit of the times in the process of actively participating in protectionist actions. Holmes Rolston is a famous contemporary American environmental ethicist, known as the father of environmental ethics. Influenced by modern ecological science and organic view of nature, on the basis of insisting that nature has intrinsic value, he advocated ecological holism and emphasized that the whole has priority and the overall interests are higher than the individual interests. Rolston advocates that man is the strongest existence of subjectivity on earth, and the exertion of human subjectivity should follow the ecological law as the premise. People live not only in the

biological community, but also in the cultural community. The development of culture should not only follow nature, reflect man's respect for ecological laws, but also transcend nature, and combine naturalism with humanism to better promote the harmony between man and nature.

4. Ecological Holistic Analysis of Mythology Features

Rachel Carson, a famous American marine biologist, said in his masterpiece *Silent Spring*: "Now we are standing at the intersection of two roads. These two roads are completely different" [5]. One of the road is to protect environment, to uphold ecological harmonist ideas. Myths are distinctive, mostly reflecting the primitive understanding of the development of ancient society and the highland environment, reverence of the mysterious nature, full of rich imagination and fantasy, and moreover showing all aspects of People's social life in prehistoric times, while rapping is obvious. Nature is a true and immortal existence, and mythology has the sacredness of natural beauty, which has transcended the existence of individual heroism and is infinitely close to the idea of ecological holism.

4.1 Reverence for Nature

Ecological holism develops subjectivity into intersubjectivity and emphasizes the equal symbiosis between man and nature [5]. Mythology is full of curiosity about the formation of nature, the origin of human beings, and productive life. As the Chinese myth "Pangu Separates the Sky from the Earth" says: In the beginning of "Taiji"—before the world, heaven and earth were originally chaotic together. Then the sky was opened up and the earth was created. The sky was very high, the earth the opposite, so heaven and earth were formed. The myth of the origin of the universe and the formation of heaven and earth was the first concern of the ancestors. As for the initial formation of nature, the ancestors did not have the scientific knowledge, but to rely on conjecture to give a sense of nature; heaven and earth is originally an organic whole. China's creation myth says,

"When Siba was first formed, heaven and earth were mixed together; who had divided heaven and earth? When Siba was first formed, yin and yang were mixed together.....; at the initial formation of Siba, heaven and earth were mixed together, and after separating heaven and earth, there's the roc; what was on the head of the roc?; Initially when heaven and earth were formed, yin and yang were mixed in up; after separating yin and yang, there's the sun; what was on the top of the sun?.....". In China Siba means: the world, the universe, the separation of heaven and earth. Yin and yang is due to the action of Siba or the universe's own laws rather than human subjective initiative, which is also in line with the characteristics of classical aesthetics. Everything that conforms to the laws is beautiful, the beauty of which is the value of ecological holism denying the anthropocentric dichotomous values and affirming the beauty of the overall harmony of the ecosystem. Regarding the formation of heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, it is stated that in the myth "The Song of the Siba Slaughtering Cow", the bright red beef becomes the crown of the rooster, the white butter becomes the belly of the flowering magpie, and the red bull's blood stains the beak of the red-billed duck. Ancestors showed a strong desire to explore nature, to constantly know and master the laws of nature, and to form a stable tradition of ecological consciousness. The ancient Greek mythology also speaks of the chaos of ancient times, when heaven and earth were not divided, expressing a simple historical materialist view that the entire ecosystem is a sustainable being, and that humans can only stand in the overall ecological interest with a balanced equality and sustainability.[6] Although the primitive exploration of nature by ancestors is still at the stage of conception, this speculation has transcended the limits of ecological otherness and magnified the totality of the biosphere. The main manifestation of ecological holism is the deep ecology, the ecological equality that everything, including human beings, has its own value and is in an equal position in the whole ecosystem [7].

4.2 Worship of Totems

Ecological aesthetics advocates the concept of natural beauty. The inter-sexual relationship of equal symbiosis between nature and human beings. Nature is not the humanized nature. In ancient China, there are a large number of works of ecological beauty that accord with this inter-sexual relationship. In Li Bai's poem "Sitting Alone in Jingting Mountain", "there's a friend-like emotional communication between the character and Jing Tingshan in silence, which is a kind of natural ecological beauty of equality between people and mountains" [7].

Mythology generally contains gods, totems, and heroes. China's mythology is full of rich imagination and fantasy totem worship. For example, the five peaks of the Himalayas, mainly Mount Everest, are the incarnation of five sisters, or the five nymphs of longevity, and the five sisters is always on the roof of the world looking down on the woes of the earth. When it comes to the sun, "The sun has a father and a mother and a child; who is the father of the sun? It is the sunshine; who is the mother of the sun? It is the sunset; who is the son of the sun? It is the blaze of noon....." [6]. These are romantic imagination, nature and human beings merging into one; nature has been personified, alive and closely related to the China's ancestors' belief in animism of benevolent religion. In the "Song of Siba Sacrificing Cows", the head of the cow is compared to the mountain, the skin of the cow is compared to the earth, the tail of the cow is compared to the forest, and the beef is compared to the crown of the chicken. Among the China's myths and legends about ancient times, the most influential story is the union of the devil woman of rock and the sacred monkey, in which the macaque monkey married the Rakshasa woman and gave birth to six little monkeys, a phenomenon of totem worship in primitive society in which man and nature become one, the animistic view of the oneness of things, just as Thoreau's meditation in the Walden; all kinds of things in the universe are interpenetrated by blood relations, and nature is also perceived and recognized. Although such association and imagination sound unscientific and even childish, this kind

of relationship between human and nature like brother and sister can best express the ecological aesthetic consciousness of the ancestors since ancient times. Another story, "The Egg-Born Hero" briefly describes how, at the beginning of the world, an egg formed by five kinds of babies broke and gave birth to a hero with tiger-like claws, an elephant-like trunk and a lion-like head, and it is easy to see that this worship of animals is the subconscious and untouched processing of natural totems by the China's ancestors, and it is an expression of their love for this magical land. In spiritual ecology, spirituality exists in man, nature, society and culture, and ecological holism also focuses on man's spiritual ecology, opposing anthropocentrism and emphasizing man's ethical responsibility to nature, that all natural creatures have natural rights and should enjoy an equal relationship, and that all human emotions are integrated into totemic imagery. In 1972, Gregory Bateson, an American ecologist, defines spirit as "the systematic phenomenal characteristics of things" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* [8]. Spirit has always been a part of matters, and the relationship between spirit and matter should be balanced scientifically. The traditional view of the universe regards the universe as a trinity of nature, God and man. From this view of the universe, human beings must integrate themselves into nature, cherish nature, protect nature, conform to nature, rely on nature, and achieve harmony between man and nature. The nature worship has transformed the from instinctive awe of nature to a spiritual sustenance, which gives rise to the idea that as long as people worship gods and protect all things, they can obtain peace and happiness [9]. Holism believes that "the human being, composed of a mind body and soul integrated into an inseparable whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, is in constant interaction with the universe and all that it contain" [10].

4.3 Reflection of Social Life

China's ancestors created many myths about social life during their long-term social practice. These myths reflect another stage in the development of human society, namely,

the conquest and transformation of nature, basically following the line of thought from herding to agriculture.

There are mainly myths of pastoralism and agriculture as well as construction. The myth “Horse and Mustang are the Same Family” tells that in the long ago, there was a mare and a stallion on the ninth heaven, who gave birth to a foal, but there was not enough water and grass in the sky, so the foal came down from the sky to a place called Jilong Dangwa where three foals were born. Again, as there was not enough water and grass, they were scattered to different places; later the eldest of the three brothers was killed by the wild yak. To avenge for the elder brother, the third one even hired people to be helpers. From then on, in order to repay people’s kindness, the third brother promised to serve human beings forever, and the second brother became a wild yak on the grassland. This myth is about the life of China’s hunting in primitive society. The story not only reflects the kinship between domestic horses and wild horses, but also highlights the love of fish and water between humans and horses, and the interdependence between humans and horses. Myths about agriculture include: “The Origin of Barley Seeds”, “The Origin of Seeds”, and “The Story of Taking Tree Seeds”, etc. Among them, the story of “The Origin of Barley Seeds” tells that in ancient times, there was a prince called Achu, who was determined to ask the Snake King for barley seeds alone in order to let everyone eat food. He led his knights go through hardships and difficulties. Although only Achu himself was left in the end, and later stole barley seeds from the snake king under the blessing of the mountain god, who found him and turned him into a dog. When he married a girl and regained his human form, the couple worked hard and barley grew everywhere. This period has a great development of agriculture and Achu has a little male power or patriarchal image, reflecting that human was turning from the matriarchal ethnic society to the patriarchal society, but more it glorified the male farming and women weaving, barley wine and ghee tea, such a harmonious picture. The more typical myth about the architecture is “The Seven Brothers Stars”, which said, a long time ago

King Gesar ruled inhabited areas, to subdue demons to make people lead a happy and stable life, but those defeated demons tangled together into a storm ravaging the grassland; in the end, people cannot resist the storm, so the seven brothers built a three-story building for the people, the middle layer for people, the lower layer for livestock, and the upper layer of grain. When gods in the sky heard about this, they asked the seven brothers to build a house for them. Ecological holism attaches importance to the harmony of the entire ecosystem, that is, the harmonization of the various subsystems within the system, and in ancient Greek mythology, Kronos ruled the kingdom of heaven in which humans and nature lived together in harmony.

4.4 Obvious Oral Transmission

Mythology is a prehistoric art handed down orally by primitive ancestors, and each person is both the inheritor and the processor of the myth, a product of collective wisdom, and myths are often passed down in the form of oral tradition. China’s mythology was passed down orally because of the illiteracy of the China’s ancestors, who did not pay attention to writing. One of the characteristics of mythology is the combination of speaking and singing, a narrative performance, in order to tell the story clearly, half-speaking and half-singing, properly adjusted to facilitate the transition between narrative and lyricism. China’s mythological rap uses both first-person narrative and third-person in the specific performance process, mimicking the tone of the characters in the story when narrating objective things. China’s mythological rap emphasizes the combination of music and language, in order to ensure that the words “Lama Mani” artists in the rap are correct, rich in rhythm, of symmetry. For example, in the question-and-answer song of “Siba’s Slaughtering Cow”

Q: When Siba slaughtered the calf,
Where do you put the head of the bull?
I don’t know, to ask minstrels.
When Siba slaughtered the calf,
Where do you put the tail of the cow?
I don’t know, to ask minstrels.
When Siba slaughtered the calf,

Where to put the skin?

I didn't know, to ask minstrels.

A: When Siba slaughtered the calf,
Cut off the head of a cow and put it on a high place.

That is why the mountain peaks are high and towering.

When Siba slaughtered the calf,
Cut off the tail of the cow and plant it in the shade of the mountain,

So the forest is thick and lush.

When Siba slaughtered the calf,
Peel off the cowhide to lay on flat place
So the earth is flat and tame.

This mythical story uses the form of question and answer, to narrate objective facts, rich in singing and repeated rhythm, very easy for oral transmission. For rap art, the creation of literariness dominates, not only to sing out the content, but also to achieve artistic expression, to create the perfect artistic image. At the beginning, ancestors could not read or write, so they could only pass on the story orally through rap, especially to sing and dance on holidays or on occasions such as farming, using a combination of rhyme and dance to express their emotions, and the story is passed on orally from generation to generation.

5. Conclusions

Myths are rich, diverse and distinctive, based on the understanding that all things are one, plainly to condemn anthropocentrism. When studied from the perspective of ecocriticism, it is actually responding to the ideal ecological environment, and achieves a certain fit with ecological holism. Zeno, the representative figure of ancient Greek Stoicism, also held the view of life that man and nature live in harmony, and in the advanced stage of human failed to reach rational understanding. Although this perceptual understanding of everything in the universe lacks a certain degree of initiative, scientification and systematization, we cannot ignore the idea of ecological holism in mythology.

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