

Cultural and Value Differences of Goddess in Ancient Greece and China

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Abstract

Ancient Chinese and Greek mythology are regarded as two wonders in the world history of literature. In Chinese ancient mythology and ancient Greek mythology, the image of the goddess with its romantic love story and rich image-building has become a hot research topic. Goddess originally means superior female immortals with unattainable qualities in ancient mythology. Unlike today, the implication of goddess is extended, referring to the women with good temperament and outstanding in real life, they are the object of men's admiration and women's imitation. Different people define their own favorite goddess based on their unique aesthetic standards, the term 'goddess' is widely used in the present day, and it has become a hot topic in pop culture. This paper analyzes and compares the images of goddess in ancient Chinese and Greek mythology literature from four aspects: quantities, image-building, historical responsibility and status, and attitudes towards love and sexual relations. And then compared the different images of 'goddess' between ancient and nowadays, to understand the goddess images of ancient mythology literature and the cultural connotations inhered by goddess images, relate it to the right, culture and state towards women nowadays, to study their impact on Chinese and Greek society. Through the analysis of goddess images of ancient Chinese and Greek literature, to evaluate their impact in shaping the Western culture, national identity, values and other aspects of value orientation.

Keywords: Chinese, Greek, goddess, myths, comparative mythology

Introduction

Since ancient times, because of the very different geography, national history and spiritual culture, China and Greece have formed their own distinctive ethnic characteristics (Liu, 2000; Wu & Zhang, 2006 and Yang, 2011). Myth is a way for early humans to understand and explain various natural phenomena and social problems accumulated in the national culture, is the most primitive of human valuable cultural heritage, cultural

development in generations is affected by the myth (Li, 2004; Shi & Yu, 2006 and Liu, 2000). Liu (2000) and Ma (2012) argued that each nation has its different national character and psychology, which led to different myths and legends of all ethnic groups, in turn, the myth as the early literature of human beings, also led the development of different cultures, and deeply affected the formation of the national character and the psychology. Therefore, through the research about the differences between Western and Chinese mythology, we can understand the differences between the two cultures from a deeper level. Especially the distinguishing features of the goddess image in literature are often regarded as the epitome of cultural characteristics of the Greek and Chinese.

Based on historians' research, Chinese civilization originated in the primitive matriarchal society (Hu, 2005 and Zheng, 2009). And Hu (2005) claims that goddess worship, female ancestor worship, and female genital worship are major features of primitive society. Hu (2005) and Wang (2007) further pointed out that China, since ancient times, its parental populations, cultural identity and cohesion of the gene, are all inseparable with the worship of the goddess of a matriarchal society. In ancient Chinese mythology literature, the goddess image contains population genetic affinity, group cohesion, noble sentiments, moral perfection, and reserved style type of national character (Hu, 2005 and Yang, 2011). In ancient Greek mythology literature, the image of the goddess contains Western peoples' feisty and combative qualities, unique personality and the pursuit of freedom, open and free national character and personality (Li, 2008 and Guo, 2005). Characteristics of Chinese culture owned by ancient Chinese goddess image is a singular flower of Chinese classical literature, and it plays an important role in inheriting the spirit of the tradition of Chinese culture (Yang, 2011).

Ancient Greek civilization is regarded as the source of Western civilization, and the ancient Greek myth as the representative of Greek civilization is undoubtedly the source of Western civilization (Zhao & Yuan & Li, 2010 and Zhang, 2004). In Greek mythology literature, there are far more quantities of the Goddess images than male God, and the images of the goddess are richer, more distinctive in personality (Wu & Zhang, 2006). Liu (2000) and Li (2004) argued that ancient Greek goddess often have super strength, but in character they are loving and hating, jealous, aggressive, and persistence for the pursuit of freedom, which is significantly different with the goddess in Chinese literature. Chinese goddess is advocating morality and pursuing individual perfect character.

Ancient Chinese mythology and ancient Greek mythology are the most concentrated demonstration and are the flashiest reflection of their own national spirit, are the oldest and most tenacious robust life root of their own national culture (Liu, 2000 and Li, 2004 and Yang & Yu, 2006). In a sense,

the ancient Chinese mythology and ancient Greek mythology are not only the source of different national literature, but also the source of Chinese and Western culture, is origin of Chinese and Western culture respectively, which contains philosophy, art, religion, customs and moral value system of the entire nation. Marx once praise ancient Greek mythology and art as the beautiful poems of human childhood, an impossibly high standards and templates with a permanent charm. The ancient Chinese civilization also gave birth to his beautiful brilliant myth. They shine with extraordinary splendor in history (Yang, 2006 and Wu & Zhang, 2006, Shi & Yu, 2006).

The Goddess of Ancient Greece and China

Myth is the product of original thinking and reflection of ancient human social life (Yang & Yu, 2006 and Li, 2001). Colorful mythology and history not only shares mutual background, but also provides an inexhaustible source for future generations of literature. Ancient Chinese mythology first appeared in a matriarchal society, in which ancestors were worshiped along with the nature, especially the motherhood and reproductive power, so the original God were almost women (Hu, 2005 and Zheng, 2009).

Hu (2005), Zheng (2009) and Wang (2007) claimed that most Chinese goddess image are weird, different from mortal being, full of mystery. On the one hand, they are almighty with noble morality, goodness and beauty, never against humanity, and mankind can sacrifice the interests of justice, the benefit of mankind. For example, the Creator Goddess of ancient China, called *Nü Wa*, her upper part of the body is human, the lower part of the body is snake. Her three major achievements are creating human, repairing the hole in the Sky and controlling the flood (Guo, 2006 and Wang, 2007). Sun goddess *Xi He* is the mother of ten suns; Moon goddess *Chang Xi*, is the mother of twelve moons in legend; and *Chang E*, she is famous for stealing elixir of immortal from her husband the Great Archer *Yi*, and flying to the moon, though some say *Chang Xi* and *Chang E* are the same goddess of Moon, *Chang Xi* was the original form of *Chang E* (Zheng, 2009; Wu & Zhang, 2006; Liu, 2004). On the other hand, Chinese goddess are otherworldly, not troubled by mortal passions, strictly adhere to the rules of immortal world, which separates the two different worlds, heaven and earth (Liu, 2000). Liu (2000) further argued that the emotional entanglements of mortal gods must have suffered severe punishment, such as the Weaver Girl falling in love with Cowherd Dong Yong, White Snake falling in love with her husband Xu Xian, San Shengmu, or the third Heavenly Mother, falling in love with the scholar Liu Yanchang (Ma, 2012 and Yang & Yu, 2006). Their forbidden love was punished: they were either banished to opposite sides of the Silver River, locked up under the magic Leifeng Tower, or under sacred mountain (Yang & Yu, 2006).

Yang (2011) and Yu & Lv (2011) pointed out that Greek mainland consists of mostly desolate barren mountains, its living environment forced them to go sailing and take risks. This free-spirited Greeks created a living, advocating wisdom, daring, courage to conquer character, its character, with a clear expansion, openness, had the idea that man can conquer nature, the ancient Greek mythology stressed people-oriented, female social prominent role, therefore, in ancient Greek mythology, there are a large quantity of goddess (Carroll, 2008; Guo, 2005 and Li,2008). Carroll (2008) described that after lifting their mystery Veil, removing their aura, the civilian population character comes to light, sashay and charming. Ancient Greeks put the characteristics of common women into the body of the goddess. The world of God and Goddess reflect the anthropomorphic characteristics, reveals rational, humane and aesthetic appeal of Greek, and their understanding and interpretation of their own life, at the same time, it reflects Greek national character and culture (Guo, 2006 and Wang, 2007).

Quantities of Goddess

In Ancient Greek mythology, there are a large quantity of goddess, e.g. Hera, the queen among immortals; Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty; Athena, the goddess of wisdom; Artemis, the goddess of the moon and hunting; Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and so on. Each of these goddesses performs her own duty, constituting a rich, complete system in the world (Jacques, 2011; Pomeroy, 1975).

The number of goddess is much more than the number of male deities in ancient Greek mythology. According to Gustav's *Greek mythology*, the total number of goddess are accounted for 64%, these examples in ancient Greek mythology, highlighting the large number of the goddess (Birchall, 1974 and Chen, 2015). Compared with the number of goddess stories in ancient Greek mythology, myths and legends of ancient Chinese goddesses are far fewer, except for the few famous popular legend, such as *E Huang* and *Nü Ying*, *Jingwei*, *Chang E*, there are rarely associated with myths and legends of the goddess (Cheng & Liu, 2011). The existing Chinese ancient mythology is only a small part of the ancient mythology, and these fragmented parts might be originated from different locations of China (Chen & Liu, 2011).

The total number of Chinese mythology goddess is only a small part of Gods because of the low social status of women (Mcneal, 2012). Because ancient Chinese people seem to deliberately ignore the existence of women. Women were subservient to men, and they listened to the words of their husbands and sons. The reasons for this situation are mainly related to the agricultural community of ancient Chinese society. Women cannot have a significant contribution to agricultural production as men due to their

physical constraints. In the agricultural community, peasants are mostly not rich, to marry a wife is not an easy task, they regard their wife as property and keep their wife in the house, for fear of "missing" (Yu & Lv, 2003). In family life, women must succumb to the established range of roles in life and set itself on the men, women were confined to the home, subject to her husband and do heavy domestic work (Yu & Lv, 2003).

The ancient Greek with democracy, fairness, openness characteristics, women's rights have been better protected, they are rarely subject to the limitations of the scope of activities, they engaged in the work of women, including baskets, grinding millet, toast and other tedious housework. Meanwhile, they also worked together with men in fields, pottery work, etc. (Billington & Green, 2002; Carroll, 2008). They were greatly respected in the theater or watch the game when they can sit in the front row. It is the vital role of women in social production, which plays the decision. Greek women are responsible for the task of reproduction and ensure society continuity and development (Carroll, 2008). They are even respected by the people and memorial after death. Ancient Greek women played a more important role than ancient Asian women in society. This is one reason that the quantity of Greek goddess is much more than Chinese goddess (Ma, 2012).

Images of the Goddess

Greek and Chinese mythology is derived from their environment and spiritual culture. Differences in the image of the goddess between China and Greek mythology, are closely linked with the geography and historical development of the two countries (Yang & Yu, 2006).

On the external form of the goddess image shaping, Chinese mythology seems has its special characteristic. Except *Chang E* and a few other goddesses, the appearance of many goddesses in today may seem to have some grotesque features (Yu & Yu, 2006; Li, 2001).

Zhang, Yuan & Li, (2010) and Zhang, (2004) described most Chinese goddess image as weird, different with human being, and full of mystery, such as the Goddess *Nü Wa*, was described in *Shan Hai* as snake body and human face, and she can transform its' body seventy times daily. The *Queen Mother of the West* was described as a human with a leopard's tail and tiger's teeth. (Zhang, Yuan & Li, 2010). Generally, the shape of God is often portrayed as half man and half beast-like, a kind of human-animal hybrid. As for a goddess, it might be half woman and half beast, advocating feminism (Hu, 2005).

Chinese goddess always has a strange shape, which is very different from the Greek goddess. Motz (1997) and Zhao (2004) argued that in Greek mythology, goddesses always have a human shape, they have graceful,

handsome looks, and their appearances are beyond mortal. *Hera* is the queen with dignified and beautiful. *Athena* is the goddess with wisdom and elegant. *Aphrodite* is the goddess of love and beauty with tenderness and charming. According to their own appearance, the Greek people created the goddess as beautiful model for human themselves to pursuit (Zheng, 2009).

Secondly, in terms of shaping the personality of the goddess, Greek and Chinese mythology are full of diverse parties (Yu & Lv, 2003). In ancient Chinese mythology, the goddess has all the virtues especially focus on collective responsibility and social ethics, while ancient Greek mythology emphasized the human personality, value individual rights. In Greek and Roman mythology, many God's personality reflects the common people's emotions, both good and bad, their selfishness, vanity, jealousy, lust, cruelty, power struggles, vindictive, etc. (Hu, 2005). Thus, in Greek and Roman mythology, the image of God is closer to human, there is little mysticism, not a perfect example of high moral character, they are divine, but it is more humane, advocating strength, honor, and wisdom. So, ancient Greek mythology fully reflects people oriented values, pays much attention to individual personality (Hu, 2005).

Through the comparison of images of goddess, we can find the difference between Chinese and Greek myths. Although both have the aspect of "humanism", the former seems pay more attention to the virtue and social functions of the goddess, but the latter focus more on physical beauty and individual personality (Wu & Zhang, 2006).

Attitudes of Goddess towards Love and Sexual Relations

Love is the eternal theme of human society, in barbarism time, love and sex is for reproduction and fertility, is human's instinct physiological needs, to the civil society, in addition to the combination of gender requirements, there are more and more high-level needs, which are feeling of love and sense of belonging (Zhang, 2004 and Li, 2008). The foundation view produced between love and sex, including lust, a strong desire of sexual nature that is based on the physical attraction and combination, and spiritual love, a tense feeling of affection that is based on the spirit and soul binding (Bernhardt, 2008). Regarding love and sexual relations, there are significant differences between ancient Chinese and Greek mythology.

Ancient Greeks established a variety of modes of production and open economy, also had their own idea of open sexuality (Faraone, 2009). This philosophy is reflected in the pursuit of personal values and the widest range of hedonism. Many Greek mythology is national cultural details dissecting of that time (Faraone, 2009 and sellers, 2001). The pursuit of individual freedom, free love, and value sexual, heavy desire is an important feature of ancient Greek concept of love and sexual relations. And

relationship between goddesses and male gods reflected in ancient Greek mythology reveals the tradition consanguinity in marriage of ancient time (Billington, 2002). It is argued that ancient Greek relationship is derived from the Greek tradition and custom. Since ancient Greek women's social status are relatively high, the ancient Greek woman has a strong feminist consciousness in love, and the loving atmosphere are relaxed (Li, 2008). For example, in ancient Greek mythology, the sun god Apollo unrequited love goddess Daphne. Apollo tries hard to pursuit Daphne, but Daphne shows no love for Apollo. To get rid of Apollo, the goddess Daphne turned into laurel to keep virginity to reject Apollo's courtship. Among Greek goddess, there are many disputes over love affairs. Affairs outside marriage or relationships are common (Zhang, 2004), for example, the goddess Venus married and have children, but she has many lovers. For thousands of years, nobody blamed her passionate, people love her beauty that her affair was caused by her charm, dissolute romantic story of all Greek goddess showed us that the spiritual world is full of human emotion. Various goddesses were given flesh and blood, real and credible character, is rational, close to humanity (Yang, 2011).

In ancient Chinese culture, love is placed in a very low-level position (Hu, 2005 and Liu, 2000). Thus, in ancient Chinese mythology, almost no description about love (Hu, 2005). Only some love mythology in women, just having shown the spirit of Chinese traditional culture, such as chastity view and loyalty (Hu, 2005; Yang, 2011). Comes to love, sexual relationships of goddesses embodied in ancient Chinese mythology, which compared to Greece are very different. Chinese mythology is difficult to find traces of free love (Yang, 2011). In the aspect of sexual and morality, China formats introverted and closed culture tradition. This culture of sexual relations is largely suppressed, which is the root cause for description of the sexual relations in ancient Chinese mythology (Hu, 2005). In ancient Chinese mythology, the goddesses live a simple and plain life, also strictly follow rules and behave appropriately, they value abstinence instead of philandering (Hu, 2005).

Status and Social Responsibility of Goddess

On the aspect of historical status and responsibilities of goddess, most of the goddess of ancient Chinese mythology are lacking their own existence value, mostly dependent on their husbands to get their name known, such as *Xi*, *Chang Xi*, *E Huang*, *Nü Ying*, were all the emperor's wife (Hu, 2005, Yu & Lv, 2003). They are well-known because of their husbands, rather than their own abilities (Yu & Lv, 2003). This is due to the status of women in ancient Chinese society (Yu & Lv, 2003). At that time of the society, women were only men affiliated. They took orders from their

husbands. They did not have the opportunity to freely choose their own way of life and love. They hide within the walls, quietly and silently existent, then quietly and peacefully died. The society belonged to men, not women (Wang, 2007). Women even allow other women to share husband. The low number of goddess in Chinese mythology shows the humble status of women in the ancient society (Zheng, 2009).

Regardless of the status of the rights of the East or the West, it is an indisputable fact that women were more vulnerable than men (Pomerory, 1975). However, in ancient Greece, women's rights are much better protected than Chinese women, whether the law of monogamy, property or inheritance rights, social status, are all higher than Chinese women (Jacques, 2011). Of course, there are significant differences in the rights and the status of women in the ancient history between the East and West.

In ancient Greek mythology, most of the goddess are indulgent aristocratic women, they are demanding, selfish, extremely jealous, pursue right and self-satisfaction. These goddesses hate and revenge their enemies, indulge in illicit relationships, making fun of human, and participate in conflicts among human (Rurther, 2005). For example, in the famous "golden apple" incident, Aurora Intuit, Athena and Hera compete for the most beautiful goddess, triggering the Trojan War, which bring the world into a war (Ruther, 2005). Trojan War, Athena to prove that she is the most beautiful goddess, she uses her divine power and conspiracy to help the Trojans (Ruther).

However, in the ancient Chinese myths and legends, goddess always keep overlooking the world of all mortal beings in a caring, tolerant, compassionate feelings, they are concerned of the relief of common people, and seemed love full-heartedly the common people on Earth (Liu, 2000). And their personalities reflect the distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture: hardship endurance, self-sacrifice, relieving common people's hardship, and serving common people living on the earth as their only duty. For example, the ancient Chinese goddess image of *Nü Wa*, compared with the image of the ancient Greek goddess are completely different (Chen, 2015). On the historic mission, the ancient Greek goddess is not like the ancient Chinese goddess who take sacred social responsibility. Ancient Chinese goddess mostly working women, who are not sheltered aristocratic women (Chen, 2015 and Chen & Liu, 2001).

Because of ethical constraints, ancient Chinese women (goddess) did not have the freedom to choose her partner, but once they fall into true love, they would persist to pursuit the freedom for love and indomitable to anything, without regret even if lose their lives, they wouldn't compromise to reality (Li, 2008). Such as a Chinese goddess the weaving maid, without compromising the pursuit of love, falling in love with an ordinary cowherd,

challenging the secular vision, expressing her standpoint to against the feudal ethics, fighting for autonomy love and happiness (Li, 2008). The Chinese Valentine's Day is a celebration of the annual meeting of the cowherd and the weaving maid on the seventh day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar.

Interpretation of Goddess Revealing Cultural and Value Differences

By comparing the quantities and images of the Goddess, their attitudes to love and sexual relations, as well as the status and social responsibilities of goddess, we find that the ancient Greek mythology is a complete system, including God anthropomorphism, indulgent, hedonistic advocacy, and the concept of destiny (Guo, 2007). The concept of the West and its real-life (welfare, the cult of personality, freedom) at the same height, Westerners are unrestrained, and indulgent, this feature facilitates the rapid development of Western science, culture, art and democracy (Jacques, 2011).

The ancient Chinese mythology is relatively scattered, messy, advocating collectivism and the spirit of sacrifice, worship and moral strength (Mcneal, 2012). To a certain extent, the ancient Chinese mythology is the source of the core values of Confucianism. Images of goddesses in ancient Chinese mythology is a moral benchmark. The ancient mythologies are being constantly adapted to the later mythology. The goddesses' personal lives have rarely been described, and more description about important mission entrusted to God and the process of completing these missions appeared in the greatness of noble character (Hu, 2005). This reflects that Chinese people advocate morality to improve the personal conduct to maintain the collective interests since ancient time, and individual's interests are trumped (Hu, 2005). But to some extent, the Chinese conservative introverted personality traits constrained the human personality, but through the millennia has weathered immortal, unyielding to prop up the revitalization of the nation building given the endless spiritual wealth of China, turns out to be strengths and weaknesses (Guo, 2007).

Influence on National Values

Influenced by the goddesses of the ancient Greek and Chinese mythology, national values of China and the West are different (Wang, 2007 and Zheng, 2009). Western people advocated force, focused on individual interests, individuality, stressing freedom, and masculine character of Western people were emphasized as offensive possession, aggressive, which embodied in its' political, military, diplomatic and other aspects (Li, 2008; Guo, 2007 and sellar,2001); The Chinese people advocated moral training, emphasizing the collective interests were more important than individual's, promoting the spirit of sacrifice. Compared to the Western culture, Chinese

culture is more feminine, to create a harmonious relationship between the Chinese people, seeking ethical peaceful, law-abiding personality (Yang & Yu, 2006).

Influence on Cross-cultural Communication

We live in an era of globalization, exchanges and contacts between countries are more increasingly close (Mcneal, 2012). To reduce the differences that exist in the Western exchanges, learning the ancient myths, especially learning the image of the goddess, can play an important role in reducing the exist differences (Mcneal, 2012). In cross-cultural communication, since the myths can be regarded as the earliest human civilizations pillar, to enhance mutual understanding of different cultures, cross-cultural communication friction reduction, contrast cultural differences between Chinese and Western mythology is one of the most convenient and effective way for us to recognize the West. Cultural differences are often the most important factor to cause a failure in communication, while avoiding communication failure is the most effective way to get to know the language, customs, life and values, moreover, studying Western mythology provides a good channel for us to achieve this goal (Jacues, 2011 and Hu, 2005). Thus, to learn English language and culture and people, should be strengthened in improving ancient Chinese mythology and ancient Greece mythology awareness, understanding mythology goddess image, knowing the source of the myth of Western culture. Knowing ancient mythology has a significant impact in western literature, art, religion, architecture (Hu, 2005 and Mcneal, 2012).

Conclusion:

From the above analysis, we can see that there are many ancient Greek goddess and complete ancient Greek goddess system. The number of the goddess is almost more than half of the number of all Greek gods, whereas Chinese mythology goddess are much less, neither goddesses themselves nor their mythology forms a complete system. The goddesses in Chinese mythology have grotesque appearance, often partly human hybrids. They have moral excellence and righteousness. In ancient Greek mythology, although goddesses possess outstanding appearance and graceful posture, yet their personalities reflect the person's emotions, both good and bad, goddesses are the same as human, they are sometimes selfishness, vanity, jealousy, lust, cruelty, power struggles, vindictive. Most of the Greek goddess are debauched aristocratic women, do not assume social responsibilities, but mostly Chinese goddess take their social responsibility to bringing benefits to working mankind. Regarding their attitudes to love and sexual relations, the Greek goddesses are sexual confusion, and with

many lovers, while few Chinese goddesses have love experiences. Ancient Chinese mythology and ancient Greek mythology have far-reaching impact on their own generations, such as the influence on generations' ethnic character, value orientation. In the increasingly close international environment, understand the cultural differences between Chinese and Western mythology is the most convenient and effective way for us to recognize the West and reduce cross-cultural communication.

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