



Comparative Analysis of Pre-Qin and Ancient Greek Mythological female images

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Abstract. China and Greece represent the civilizations of the East and the West, and their respective myths are also familiar and have portrayed numerous characters. The purpose of this paper is to compare and analyze the female images in Pre-Qin and Ancient Greek myths, to explore the similarities and differences in the portrayal of females in different myths under different cultural backgrounds, and to analyze the socio-historical reasons and differences in values behind these similarities and differences.

Keywords: re-Qin, Ancient Greece, Mythology, Female Image, Comparison

1 Introduction

As a treasure of early human culture, myths have been widely recognized in the academic world, which profoundly reflect the perception of gender roles in different cultural contexts. As the cradle of Eastern and Western civilizations, the female characters in the mythologies of Pre-Qin and Ancient Greece have their own styles, which is an important window to explore the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. Women in pre-Qin myths are often regarded as the guardians of life, such as the creation of the world by Nuwa; women in Greek myths are more famous for their wisdom and beauty, such as the wisdom of Athena. Therefore, this paper will mainly focus on the myths of the pre-Qin and ancient Greek periods, refer to related literature, compare and contrast the images of women portrayed in different myths, and analyze the reasons behind the literary phenomena.

2 The Concept of Myth and the Definition of the Scope of Investigation

2.1 What is a Myth

The question of what is a myth has generated many different opinions in the academic world. Yuan Ke in his book *Chinese Myths and Legends* quoted Gorky's words to answer the question: "Generally speaking, myths are natural phenomena, struggles

against nature, and reflections of social life in vast artistic generalizations.” [1] Lu Xun's *A Brief History of the Chinese Novel*, *Dictionary of Words*, and other works offer a different view. Western scholars have produced six schools of thought on myth, the natural mythological school, the anthropological school, the functional school, the psychoanalytical school, the religious ritual school, and the structuralist school.[2] The examination of myths by modern Western scholars has the following two main revelations: myths are a unique way of reflecting and grasping the world (nature and society) by the primitive first people. As well as from the development trajectory of mythological research, the elaboration of the concept of myth presents a logical direction from focusing mainly on the issue of origin to emphasizing the structure and function of myth. Therefore, in order to ensure the rigor of the article's research, we mainly adopt Mao Dun's explanation of myth in *The Study of Myth*: “A kind of popular folk tale in the ancient times, the narrator is beyond the human ability above the actions of the gods, although absurd and nonsensical, but the ancient people related to each other, but believed in the truth.”[3]

2.2 The Scope of Pre-Qin and Ancient Greek myths

The scope of pre-Qin myths: pre-Qin myths, as the name implies, are the myths of the pre-Qin period, the spread of myths in this period is mainly oral accounts of the spread of relatively few written records, so the written research materials on myths and legends in this period can be broadly categorized into two ranges: one is the existence of related myths and legends in the pre-Qin period in the scriptures and histories, for example, “*Classic of the Mountains and the Seas*”; and the other is the existence of myths collated in the latter part of the world that have not lost their full appearance, such as the “*Classic of the Mountain and the Sea*”. The first is the myths and legends in the pre-Qin scriptures and histories, such as the *Shanhajjing*; the second is the myths and legends in the later compilations that have not been lost, such as the *Huainanzi*. Of course, the research results of contemporary scholars, such as Yuan Ke's *Chinese Myths and Legends*, are also worthy of reference.

Scope of Ancient Greek Myths: The two most important works in the study of ancient Greek myths are the *Genealogy of the Gods* and the *Homeric Hymns*, and the ancient Greek tragedies and Homeric hymns to the gods are of great research value. The organization of these legends is also essential, such as the German Schwab's “*Greek mythological stories*”, Russia's N. Kuhn's “*Greek mythology*”, China's Wu Yaling's “*Divine Spectrum Notebook*”, the above are very important literature when examining the ancient Greek myths.

3 Interpretation of Female Characters in Chinese and Greek Mythology

Pre-Qin and Ancient Greek myths respectively portrayed their own very distinctive female figures, they have similarities and differences, they reflect the social environ-

ment of their respective countries, the author through the selection of a specific object of study for comparative analysis to explore the causes behind the phenomenon.

3.1 Nuwa and Caiya

On the topic of creation myths, people in the pre-Qin period generally believed that Nuwa was the god of creation and the originator of mankind. In the *Shanhaijing* (Classic of Mountains and Seas), the Western Classic of the Great Desert, the account of Nüwa reads, "There were ten gods, named Nüwa's intestines, who turned into gods, and who were located in the wilds of Kurihiro, in the crossroads of the road." [4]The meaning of this is that there were ten gods who were transformed from the intestines of Nuwa. It is also mentioned in the *Huainanzi Shalin*: "The Huangdi gave birth to yin and yang, the Shangjiao gave birth to ears and eyes, and the Sanglin gave birth to arms and hands; this is why Nuwa was transformed into seventy." [5] Gao Yuxi's note: Nuwa is the king of the world. Seventy transformations of creation." [6]The above brief description clearly indicates that Nuwa has the power of creation and is able to create all things. Caiya in ancient Greek mythology also had the ability to create everything. The *Genealogy of the Gods* describes her in this way: "They first chanted with holy voices the awe-inspiring family of the gods - they were the first gods born of Caius, the goddess of the earth, and of Uranus, the god of the vastness of the heavens; and the gods, the doers of virtue, were born of them". [7]Although they are both gods of creation, their ways of creation are different. Yuan Ke, in *Chinese Myths and Legends*, records that Nuwa used the yellow earth, modeled after herself, to fabricate a human being, and these were the children she created, whereas Gaia in Ancient Greece gave birth to the gods through her union with her son, Uranus. To some extent, this reflects the difference in moral ethics between China and the West.

Secondly, the divinity manifested by the two is yet completely different. In the pre-Qin myths, Nuwa has noble moral sentiments, a spirit of dedication, and has made great contributions to mankind by treating the water and mending the sky, as recorded in the *Huainan Zi-Tianhei Xun*, "In the ancient times, the four poles were abolished, the nine states were cracked, the sky was not covered, the earth was not circumferentially loaded, the fire was hot and not extinguished, the water was vast and unending, the beasts ate the Zhuanmin people, and the birds of prey seized the weak and the old. So Nuwa refined the five-color stone to mend the sky, chopped up the turtle to establish the four poles, killed the black dragon to help Jizhou, and accumulated ashes to stop the obscene water." [5] In addition, Nuwa created the psalm and reed and established the institution of marriage, and she is praised and remembered by all. While Caius in Greek mythology, although she is the Creator, she is more of a human being. [7]The Greek Mythology records that she planned with her son Cronus to kill her husband Uranus, and then called on the Titans to try to overthrow her grandson Zeus, she provoked wars and attempted to dominate the world, and that she possessed human emotions, and could be angry and selfish. She has human emotions, is angry and selfish. Unlucky marriages and in-fighting among her children and grandchildren are all reflected in this creator god of Greek mythology. As the mother of the earth, Nuwa is selfless and admired, while Gaia reflects one of the characteristics of Greek mythology - the ho-

mogeneity of gods and humans. She has human emotions and despite her divine powers, she is unable to cope with such emotions.

3.2 Chang'e and Artemis

The myth of Chang'e running to the moon was recorded in the *Huainanzi* (淮南子), which reads: "Yi asked the Queen Mother of the West for the elixir of immortality, and Hou Yi stole it to run to the moon. Hou Yi was disappointed and had no way to renew it. Hou Yi did not know where the elixir of immortality came from." [5] Hou Yi is Chang E, the Chang E woman. Hou Yi is Chang E. It is written in Hou Yi Zang: "In the past, Chang E took the medicine of immortality from the Queen Mother of the West and ran to the moon as the Moon Spirit." Therefore, the mainstream view in China is that the moon goddess is Chang'e. Regarding the speculation that Artemis played the role of the moon goddess in Greek mythology, Chen Pengcheng mentioned in *Comparative Study of Mythological Values in Pre-Qin and Ancient Greece* that "she and Apollo, as a pair of siblings, and Apollo was the god of the sun, it is understandable that she was worshipped as the god of the moon. American scholar Bunafui analyzed this specifically. He pointed out that in many ethnic groups, the sun god and the moon god are brother-sister or sister-brother relationship." [2] This is in the human intuitive life experience, both are closely related to human life, so in Greek mythology the moon goddess centralized as Artemis. Both are moon goddesses with similarities and differences.

First of all, in appearance, according to the Greek Mythology, Artemis was as gorgeous as a sunny day; she carried a bow and quiver on her shoulder and held a hunting javelin in all her splendor. [7] As for the appearance of Chang'e, she was depicted in Han portraits with a human head and snake body, her head combed in a high bun, wearing a long jacket with wide sleeves, and her long tail behind her adorned with barbed, thin and short feathers. After the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Chang'e's image was depicted as a supreme beauty. It can be seen that Artemis is more valiant, while Chang'e is a representative of gentleness. In terms of identity again, Chang'e is Yi's wife, and she plays the role of a wife, a companion to Yi, and her appearances in mythology seem to be bound up with Yi. In the light of her husband, the moon goddess Chang'e did not play the role of a god. She was a standard wife, beautiful and virtuous, watching her husband pursue other women, but she could only choose to cling to the compromise, and ultimately ate the immortality drug to run to the moon, and she was endlessly regretful. Artemis, on the other hand, is different. In Greek mythology, she is an independent and radiant woman. She was a twin sibling with Apollo, the sun god, and she was also one of the twelve main gods of Olympus, equal in status to the other gods. At the same time, Artemis she cared for everything that existed on earth and everything that grew in the meadows and wilderness. To bring happiness to people. She also functioned as the goddess of hunting, she flew through the mountains and forests with her arrows, she was happy and free. It can be seen that, compared with the Chinese moon goddess, Chang'e, Artemis is obviously more independent. She is not dependent on anyone, and by her own divine power, she is also able to shelter the people on one side of the country and can shine brightly.

3.3 Queen Mother of the West and Hera

In Chinese and Greek mythology, each has a female fairy head of the female gods, they are the top of the goddesses, with supreme power. In later Taoist mythology, Xi-wangmu evolved into Wangmu, the Queen Mother, who is the head of the female immortals, and is in charge of the medicine for immortality, as mentioned by the author above, “Yi asked Xiwangmu to give him the medicine for immortality”. The image of Queen Mother of the West has evolved many times.

In the “Classic of Mountains and Seas”, the appearance of the Queen Mother of the West is described as follows: “South of the West China Sea, on the shore of the quicksand, after the Red Water and before the Black Water, there is a big mountain named Kunlunqiu. There was a god - a tiger with a human face and body, with a text and a tail, all white - in it. Below it was an abyss of weak water, and beyond it was a mountain of hot fire, which could be thrown at anything. There was a man with a tiger's teeth and a leopard's tail, and his cave was called the Queen Mother of the West. This mountain has everything.” [4] This record, the Queen Mother of the West human face, tiger body, tiger teeth, Dai Sheng has the image of the leopard tail is very vividly portrayed. As can be seen, the earliest image of Queen Mother of the West is half-human, half-animal, however, her image is not fixed, “Mu Tian Zi biography” of this historical novel and the “Bamboo Book Chronicle” of the Queen Mother of the West is to the image of the female king of the human, and then to the “Huainan Zi” in the Yi to the Queen Mother of the West to seek the medicine of immortality, as well as the “story of the Han Dynasty” “Han Wu Di Biography”, the Queen Mother of the West seems to have evolved into the image of the Immortals. The Queen Mother of later generations also evolved on this basis. It can be seen that the image of the Queen Mother of the West was not established from the beginning, but evolved from a half-human, half-animal appearance to the image of an immortal woman in later times. Hera, on the other hand, is different, as the wife of the main god Zeus, one of the twelve main gods, called the queen of the gods by the people, her image is determined from the beginning, and there is not much change. The Greek Mythology describes her appearance in this way: “The goddess Hera was exceptionally beautiful, with a pair of large, peaceful eyes, arms as white as a lily, a beautiful curly hair like waves from the bottom of the flower crown. Her eyes gleamed with a look of majesty and peace.” [7] It can be seen that Hera appeared as a beautiful woman from her birth. The difference in outward image is one of the differences between the Queen Mother of the West and Hera.

Secondly, there are also differences between the two in terms of character. The Queen Mother of the West in the Classic of Mountains and Seas is majestic and mysterious, and the combination of animal and human forms, coupled with the mysterious environment of living in the Kunlun Mountains, adds to her majesty and coldness, so people pray to her in the hope of obtaining the blessing of the gods. The Queen Mother of the West in the biography of Mu Tian Zi (穆天子傳), the Queen Mother of the West in Huainan Zi (淮南子), and in the Taoist propaganda of the later generations, is a goddess of immense power and blessing to the people of the world.[8] However, compared to the divinity of Xi-wangmu, Hera, the god of Greek mythology, has the

characteristic of “god and man in the same form and same sex” in Greek mythology, she is more like a mortal, will be angry, will be jealous, and has all kinds of dark side of human nature. Hera was jealous of Zeus's lovers, and took cruel revenge on them. For example, once her husband Zeus fell in love with the beautiful Ie, Hera was so angry that she sent a hundred-eyed giant and a gadfly to make Ie suffer so much that she had to run away desperately. In addition, Hera persecuted Leto, so that she could not find a safe place to give birth, she also Zeus's lover Callisto into a black bear, and designed her to be shot by his own son. From all this, we can see that although Hera had the same power and divine strength as the Queen Mother of the West, she was proud, capricious and jealous, the same as human nature to some extent.[9]

4 Analysis of the Differences between Female Images in Chinese and Greek Mythology

Through the comparative analysis of the specific objects mentioned above, we find that the female figures in Chinese myths are mostly half-human and half-animal in appearance, either Nuwa with a human head and snake body, or Xiwangmu with a human face and a tiger body, while women in Greek myths tend to be in the same shape as human beings, and they are beautiful and dazzling. In addition, there are also differences in the divinity of women in Chinese and Western myths. The goddesses in Chinese myths are either the gentle Chang'e or the selfless Nuwa, who seem to be unearthly, with unlimited authority, and far from the seven emotions and six desires, while the goddesses in Greek myths, all of them are more or less tainted with the world, and have become the same as human beings. [10]The formation of their different images is due to their respective social backgrounds. Next, the author will analyze the reasons for the differences between the images of women in Chinese and Greek mythology.

4.1 The Difference Between the Self-interested Thought of Individual Heroism and the Altruistic Thought for the People

We will find that many stories in Greek mythology are designed to promote personal excellence and the heroic spirit of risk-taking, and the realization of personal values is very important in the minds of Greeks. For example, Iason's capture of the Golden Fleece, in which he overcame difficulties including poisonous dragons, giants and various monsters, and finally succeeded, demonstrates Iason's spirit of bravery as an individual hero in order to achieve his goal. Another example is the birth of Athena, who was born with a certain heroic color, jumping out of the head of Zeus with a spear and a shield.[11] As the embodiment of Zeus' wisdom and power, she was seen as the embodiment of valor from her birth. Heroic figures such as Achilles and Heracles accomplished great deeds not for the benefit of mankind, but more for the pursuit of personal honor. The gods in Greek mythology were mostly egoistic, such as Hera who could persecute other mortal women for her own selfish desires.[12]

Hera could persecute other mortal women for her own selfish desires. They would also take revenge on a kingdom for having the same name as their love rival. Their behavior was mostly motivated by their own personal desires. This kind of thinking is closely related to the nomadic life in ancient Greece, where the long nomadic life and semi-nomadic and semi-nomadic life of the ancient Greek forefathers fundamentally determined their reverence for strife, [13]and in order to compete for resources, they needed to have a sense of competition, so the preservation of themselves, the continuation of life, and the pursuit of personal value and enjoyment became the thinking of the ancient Greek forefathers.

In Chinese mythology, what we can see more is the contribution of the mythological characters to the times and mankind, the embodiment of the idea of altruism for the sake of the people. Jingwei transformed himself into a bird and vowed to fill the sea that plagued the people; when heaven and earth collapsed, Nuwa refined colorful stones to mend the sky; Queen Mother of the West blessed the earth with compassion; [14]Yao Ji helped Yu to cure the water and transformed herself into the Goddess Peak to guard the living beings. Chinese mythological characters, who are mostly the protectors of mankind, have the spirit of dedication and sacrifice. Unlike the Greek heroes, when personal interests conflict with collective interests, the heroes in Chinese myths would choose to sacrifice themselves to preserve the collective interests, which is the embodiment of the idea of serving the people in Chinese myths. The reason why such an idea is formed has nothing to do with the social environment. China entered the agricultural civilization at an early stage, and for the ancient people, under the situation of low productivity, in order to overcome the nature, they need to rely on the collective strength to resist the obstacles to survival, so those who have contributed to the collective should be the object of praise.

4.2 Differences in Ethical Concepts and Chastity

Chinese and Greek myths differ in ethical concepts. Greek mythology lacks ethical concepts and incest occurs from time to time, while Chinese myths emphasize human relationships and put ethics above all else. Greek mythology was developed and matured during the transition period from the clan society to the slave society, reflecting the society from the barbaric period to the civilized period. The primitive instincts of the Greeks still existed in this period, so there is a lack of ethics in their stories. In addition, Greece was located on an island with mountainous terrain and less arable land, making it impossible to develop agriculture. In order to survive, the Greeks went to the sea to seek resources, thus they had a spirit of adventure. The exploration of the sea also made the Greeks accept the impact of cultures from various ethnic groups, and their tolerance of foreign cultures formed their open-mindedness. Primitive instincts and open-mindedness made the Greeks dare to pursue their own primitive desires, and it is this pursuit of desire that caused the lack of ethics, and the phenomenon of incest is very common in Greek mythology. For example, the child born from the union with Gaia was her son, Uranus, and Gaia encouraged her son, Cronus, to cut off the genitals of his father, Uranus, who succeeded in succeeding to the throne and took his sister, Rhea, as his wife. Zeus married his sister Hera and ate his daughter Athena. In addition,

the gods in Greek mythology pursued sexual desire and did not attach importance to the concept of female chastity, Aphrodite, despite being married, she often had sex with other male gods, and was designed by her husband to let the gods see her cheating scene, the gods did not reproach, and Hermes even felt that even if he was in deep trouble, he had to sleep with the beautiful Aphrodite. It can be seen that the Greeks for the lust is not to be bound, they support the people sound and color pleasure. [15]In Greek mythology, a son can kill his father, a father can eat his child, and siblings can get married. The confusion of ethical relationship is the embodiment of the Greeks' primitive instincts, and the pursuit of desires is not prohibited, even the gods have desires. To a certain extent, the "homogeneity of gods and men" also reflects the humanistic ideas of ancient Greece, that is, human beings can be used as a standard to measure all things, and even humanize the gods.

On the contrary, in Chinese mythology, the concept of ethics is more prominent. As a landlocked country, China's forefathers were closed and conservative with traditional ideas. In fact, Chinese myths were not finalized from the beginning, their formation was modified by later generations of literati, and basically they were finalized by the feudal society, so the ethical concepts among the myths would be influenced by the feudal society's thoughts, focusing on blood relationship and the concept of human relationships. In the pre-Qin Chinese society, clans were very important, and the relationship between people was very stable, so the concept of clan and blood relationship was preserved and continued. In feudal society, the rites and music system is the normal operation of the country's guiding law, "the son of heaven to build a country, the vassals set up a family, the Secretary set up a side room, the great doctor has two zong, the Shi has a subordinate children," the essence of the rites is to make clear the hierarchy, to determine the upper and lower, inferiority and superiority, affinity, the relationship between the eldest and the youngest, the rites and music system makes the ancient people to establish the order of inferiority and superiority, and the near and far, the network of human relationships, plus the concept of clan, blood relations have been preserved and continued. Therefore, the system of rituals and music made the ancient people establish the order of honor and inferiority, and the harmony between the near and far, coupled with the influence of Confucianism's benevolence, righteousness, filial piety and fraternal duty, the concept of morality and human relationships of the Chinese forefathers can be said to be very simple and traditional, and therefore, basically, we can't see any patricide, matricide and incest in Chinese mythology. [16]As for lust, in Chinese myths, what we see more is the concept of female chastity and the subordinate status of women. After seeing her husband cheating on her, Chang'e could not be jealous or resentful, but could only choose to suffer in silence. Confucianism has developed into a shackle that binds women at a later stage, where men are superior to women, and the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, from one to the other, are the moral norms that women must abide by. While men can have three wives and four concubines, and can cheat on their husbands, women are oppressed by all kinds of concepts of chastity. It is for this reason that, in Chinese mythology, the goddesses are expected to abandon the seven passions and six desires and to stay away from the mundane. It is also because of this subordination of women to men that the creation

myth of Nüwa was gradually diluted and marginalized, and the figure of women in pre-Qin myths is very rare.

5 Conclusion

Both Chinese and Greek myths have female figures, but there are differences in their image portrayal. This paper explores the reasons for the differences in image portrayal between pre-Qin Chinese and Greek myths by comparing the differences between the Chinese and Greek goddesses Nuwa and Caiya, Chang'e and Artemis, and Xiwangmu and Hera, exploring their comparisons and discovering their similarities and differences. Under the influence of China's altruistic thinking for the people, the gods have the spirit of devotion. Under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese gods have prominent ethical concepts, emphasize chastity, and are introverted and subtle in their expression of sexual desire. Influenced by geography and social environment, the gods in Greek mythology promote individual heroism, the pursuit of self-interest, ethical deficiencies, and the worship of sexual freedom. Myth can be said to be the source of human civilization, which has been passed down for thousands of years and is still alive and well. Literati and scholars of all generations have contributed to the study of myths, and many questions about women's roles in myths and myths are still waiting to be discovered and explored.[17]

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