

The Study on Interactive Relationship of Heroic Images and Folk Beliefs - The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf

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Abstract: The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf both showcase the interplay between heroic images and folk beliefs. In The King of the Bronze Drums, heroes are divine beings venerated by the Yi, highlighting Yi culture. Beowulf's heroes symbolize valour and nobility influenced by British beliefs. This interaction emphasizes the role of culture and religion in shaping heroic images and societal values. Folk beliefs, with their religious and cultural elements, deeply impact societies, reinforcing cultural identities and moral values, offering new insights for cultural studies.

1. Interaction

Interaction is a computer term. When the computer plays a multimedia program, the programmer can issue instructions to control the operation of the program, rather than the programme being implemented unilaterally. The program receives the corresponding instructions from the programmer and responds accordingly, which is called interaction ^[1]. Interaction is a functional state pursued by many Internet platforms. Through a certain Internet platform with interactive functions, users can not only obtain relevant information but also can communicate and interact with each other or with the platform, thus colliding with more creative ideas, thoughts and needs ^[2].

The concept of interaction can also be drawn upon in the study of the relationship between heroic images and folk beliefs. Interaction is not just a way of interacting between a computer and a programmer, but can be understood as a process of mutual influence and interaction between two different things. Like the interaction between a computer program and its programmer, a similar interactive process exists between the heroic images and folk beliefs.

2. Heroic Images in the Epics

2.1 Connotation and Development

Heroic figures are usually considered to be characters with extraordinary qualities and superhuman abilities. They represent courage, integrity, wisdom, selflessness and sacrifice to protect others, fight against evil and change the world. Heroes not only excel in physical strength and fighting skills, but also display outstanding qualities on a moral and spiritual level.

The development of the heroic images can be traced back to the ancient myths of the East and the West. In stories, heroic images are extremely legendary and mysterious, with epic works such as Water Margins and Journey to the West. These works are famous for their fantasy worldview. For example, the omnipotent Sun Wukong, also known as the Monkey King removed the demons of the world from the earth, and the heroes of the Water Margins fought for justice, they not only surpassed ordinary people in strength, but also possess great power on a spiritual level ^[3].

In addition, the image of Eastern heroes shows a lofty concept of the unity of heaven and man. Most of the Eastern myths are ideal deities with high moral cultivation, and the boundary between man and God is not very clear, for example, Pangu was portrayed as a hero, who opened up the heaven and earth in the midst of chaos and incarnated all things in nature. In ancient times, China's political ideology of respecting heavens and protecting people generalized ancestor worship and

deity worship as the worship and obedience to the heavens, the promotion of mysticism, and reliance on the blessings of the bloodline.

In Western mythology, the heroic figure reflects the ideology of the confrontation between the heaven and man. Gods and monsters are not invincible, and man should take risks to challenge them in order to realize his personal values. The Greek heroes Hercules and Achilles accomplished a series of tasks and battles with extraordinary strength and courage; the Norse heroes such as Odin and Thor were warriors and sages who saved the world. In their eyes, although Gods and monsters have great power, they also have human nature of evil, justice, favouritism and injustice^[4].

Over time, the Western heroic images have been widely explored and expressed in literature, art and media. From ancient epics such as Holland's Iliad and Odyssey, to medieval legends of Knights and King Arthur, to modern superhero stories and science fictions, the heroic images have evolved and reinvented time and time again^[5].

Different values create different heroes. The hero culture of the East was born in the chaotic times. As a result, the hero should have the spirit of struggle without fear of sacrifice, but also have the humanistic spirit of reverence for nature. The creation of Western heroes is closely related to their culture, which emphasizes individual freedom and the spirit of challenge as the core values of Western culture. As a cultural phenomenon, the emergence and evolution of the heroic images and its concept have profound historical and cultural significance to the development of society.

2.2 Portrayal and Representation

The King of the Bronze Drums is one of the precious cultural heritages of the ethnic minorities in China. Therefore, the epic has a long-time span and summarizes the social life and struggles of the Yi ancestors in a rather long historical period. More importantly, the epic shows the extremely long history and rich cultural heritage of the Yi drum culture with transmission of the drum king from generation to generation^[6].

The King of the Bronze Drums reads “This is also the root, the drum is the Yi people’s drum, exchange it to save lives. bronze drum saved lives, whose favor lasts forever”; bear this gratitude to drum in heart, pass the Yi’s suffering from generation to generation”. In the epic, the main characters are the successive generations of drum kings. Each of these heroic characters is portrayed with flesh and blood, leaving a deep impression on people. Heroic characters in the work, often linked with the drum their story is mainly about the casting or protecting drums. from the casting of drums by the first drum king Polo couple, to the later fightings for drums, and the sacrifice of lives of drum kings, every drum king is with his own personalities. Other heroes who earned merits of resisting against looting and invasion, are self-reliant leaders who led their tribes to war with the drums. They are kings of valour who emerge from the constant wars and migration^[7].

The portrayal and representation of the heroes in the British epic Beowulf is full of unique charm. This epic tells the legendary story of Beowulf, a warrior, who was faced with the enemy twice like vicious monsters and dragons, but still dared to take on the enemy single-handed and unarmed. After he grabbed Grendel, he ripped off its shoulder, and Grendel was so badly hurt that it died on the way. After the mother of Grendel attacked the Deer Hall, Beowulf broke into the lair at the bottom of the pool and killed all his fellow monsters and took the life of the mother of Grendel; and when the giant dragon attacked, he fought with the giant dragon alone though he was old, and in the end, the two of them both perished together. Beowulf fought against fate all his life, and though he lost his life, he won glory. He was brave, full of honour, and fought to defend his country and people. It is written in the epic that "He'd have travelled to the bottom of the earth, Edgetho's son, and died there, if that shining woven metal had not helped—and holy God, who sent him victory, gave judgment for truth and right, ruler of the heavens once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting." "Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all to avenge our friends, not mourn them forever. Each of us will come to the end of this life on earth; he who can earn it should fight for the glory of his name; fame after death is the noblest of goals". The image of Beowulf shows the heroic qualities and a sense of responsibility. He is a symbol of justice and courage, inspiring people to pursue truth and justice^[8].

3. Folk Beliefs in the Epics

3.1 Folk Beliefs

Folk beliefs are the expression of a particular community or culture's beliefs and religious concepts combined with everyday life. It is a manifestation of people's worship and respect for a deity, ancestor or spiritual being, and through a series of rituals, prayers, celebrations, parades and ceremonies, it allows people to establish a connection with their deity or ancestor, and enables them to maintain social order, pass on cultural traditions as well as to shape their identities. It can provide moral norms and values, unite communities in solidarity and collaboration, and serve as a source of comfort and hope.

3.2 Portrayal and Manifestation

The King of the Bronze Drums demonstrates the close connection between the Yi people and the natural world through rich symbolic imagery and delicate descriptions, such as "The fate of bronze drum and Yi people are always tied up. When the Yi people run into difficulty, they pray for drums to show divine abilities to help finding good grains." Among them, the bronze drum is regarded as a sacred symbol, representing the Yi people's prayers for a good harvest and happiness. The hero in the epic, the king of the bronze drums, is a character with mysterious powers, able to communicate with the Gods and protect the safety and happiness of the Yi people. It is written in the epic, "We Yi people, everytime when encountered with disasters, seek shelter from the bronze drums. Drums are the treasure of the Yi, which always works out.", which conveys the worship and faith of the Yi people in Gods, as well as their reverence and obedience to the power of nature^[9].

Beowulf, on the other hand, exemplifies the medieval English people's quest for divinity and honour^[10]. Beowulf is a valiant knight who practices the beliefs of chivalry and goes forward to uphold justice and honour. His struggles with dragons, demons and other mysterious creatures exemplify mankind's fight against the forces of evil, and highlight mankind's reverence for justice and courage. As what's recorded in the epic, "Unferth's noble weapon, could do nothing, nor could I, until the ruler of the world showed me, hanging shining and beautiful on a wall, a mighty old sword---so God gives guidance to those who can find it from no one else. I used the weapon He had offered me, drew it and, when I could, swung it, killed the monstrous hag in her own home". Through the image of the heroes and the plots of the adventure, the English people is connected to the divine power, giving them courage and hope. The hero also demonstrates trust and loyalty to God in the epic, as when Beowulf lets out a bold statement before the battle against Grendel. The following is what is depicted in the epic: "My lord Hygelac might think less of me if I let my sword go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid behind some broad linden shield: my hands alone shall fight for me, struggle for life against the monster. God must decide who will be given to death's cold grip".

4. Interactive Relationship

4.1 Combination of Worship for Bronze Drum and Ancestor

In the epic of the Yi people, The King of the Bronze Drums, the worship of bronze drums and the ancestral spirits are endowed with profound cultural connotations. The bronze drum, as an important symbol of the Yi faith, is regarded as a sacred and inviolable existence. The king of the bronze drums, a legendary figure in Yi mythology, is honoured as the embodiment of the Yi ancestors. His existence is closely linked to the bronze drums and is regarded as the guardian deity of the Yi people. The Yi people believe that the power of the king of the bronze drums can guarantee the peace and prosperity of the tribes and keep people away from disasters and hardships.

In the ancestral worship, the Yi people often worship bamboo spirits as ancestors' spirits. There is a saying among the Yi people "After the cremation of the parents, the son should leave a bit of bone in the ashes and carry it on his back as the ancestral spirit. Later, in a flow, he lost the ancestral spirit in the mountain, and searched for it in all directions. Since it was lost in a bamboo forest, it

had to be replaced by a piece of bamboo.' These folklore from different perspectives confirm the origin of the bamboo worship and its relationship with the ancestral spirit, indicating that the "Frontal bone slice" of the deceased after cremation is the spirit card of the ancestors, which was produced in the custom of the Yi ^[11].

The Yi people hold the belief that their ancestors' spirits inhabit in another world and can protect their descendants^[12]. Therefore, in the sacrificial activities, the bronze drum was used to communicate with the ancestors and make a pray. By beating bronze drums, the people of Yi pay their respects to their ancestors' spirits, who hope that the ancestors can bless the peace and prosperity of the family. Therefore, the worship for Bronze Drum and Ancestor are interrelated.

4.2 The Fusion of Heroic Spirit and Christian Tradition

The Beowulf records that "I will meet him with my hands empty—unless his heart fails him, seeing a soldier waiting weaponless, unafraid. Let God in his wisdom extends his hand where he wills, reward whom he chooses!". This reflects the fact that Beowulf 's behaviour and decision-making often bear some resemblance to the values of the Christian tradition. He demonstrates the qualities of justice, compassion and forgiveness in battle, fighting fair and honourable battles against powerful opponents and showing tolerance and mercy to vanquished foes. Although he is a warrior, his actions and decisions often coincide with Christian moral and ethical codes ^[13].

This fusion of heroic spirit with Christian tradition reflects the process of change in medieval folklore and belief systems. An early account in the epic reads, "I swear that nothing he ever did deserved an end like this, dying miserably and alone, butchered by this savage beast: we swore that these swords and arm or were each for us all ! " And later it develops into, "For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank our father in heaven, ruler of the earth— for all of this, that his grace has given me, allowed me to bring to my people while breath still came to my lips. I sold my life for this treasure, and I sold it well." With the spread and influence of Christianity, the western society gradually accepted and incorporated Christian values and moral codes. The heroic figures of Beowulf retain the courage and determination of the Germanic heroes, while at the same time combining it with Christian qualities such as compassion and forgiveness ^[14].

Beowulf not only retains the courage and determination of heroes but is also combined with Christian qualities of compassion and forgiveness.

5. Conclusion

The veneration for heroic images in the two epics not only reflects people's pursuit of heroic qualities, but is also a continuation and inheritance of folk beliefs. The interactive relationship of heroic images and folk beliefs is embodied in the hero's deeds, and is not only condensed and sublimated by the worship and inheritance of the folk beliefs, but also more concretely and vividly expressed by the shaping and presentation of the hero's image. Heroic images represent a kind of spiritual pursuit and values, while folk beliefs are people's reverence and worship for the sacred and supernatural power. Only through the in-depth study and understanding of this interactive relationship can we better pass on the spirit of ancient heroes and understand the spiritual connotation of folk beliefs, and provide more in-depth and wide-ranging thoughts and insights for the development of contemporary society and culture ^[15].

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