

A Comparative Analysis of Female Consciousness in Chinese and Western Mythology

-- Taking Xiwangmu and Hera as Examples

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Abstract: Female consciousness is an important discussion topic about women in Chinese and Western mythology, and it is also the self-confidence and consciousness of women for their own life experience and value significance in male political society. The similarities and differences of female images in Chinese and Western myths reflect the differences of female status and values in different cultures. The expression of female consciousness in mythology highlights the values of self-liberation and independence of women in the early period of social history. This paper chooses two samples of Xiwangmu (In view of the different opinions on the image of the Xingwangmu in mythology and folk, this paper agrees with the statement recorded in the *Shanhaijing*, and holds that she is a female deity in ancient times and a right deity who can predict disasters. In addition, this paper also agrees that the Xiwangmu is equal to the role of the Queen Mother, and the Jade Emperor is her husband.) and Hera to compare and analyze the differences of female consciousness in Chinese and Western myths, presents the female consciousness from three aspects of power concept, marital status and family consciousness, and explores its differences and causes. This provides a reference for the salvation of self-consciousness of Chinese and western women, and can encourage contemporary women to have the courage to pursue self and freedom positively.

Keywords: Myth; Female consciousness; Xiwangmu; Hera.

1. Introduction

The cultural experience and values contained in Chinese and Western myths show the differences of female consciousness in two different social backgrounds. Chinese and Western myths have a long history of spreading. In the long process of development, they have been widely discussed and studied. The existing comparative study on Chinese and Western myths at home and abroad have been enriched, and the research on goddesses in myths is also numerous, which is of great reference significance. From multiple perspectives, theorists discuss and study the female image and power status in Chinese and Western myths, and deeply analyze the causes of the differences. In particular, distinguishing the image characteristics of Chinese and Western mythological goddesses has been the focus of many scholars' attention, and more research results have been achieved. These achievements are mostly contrasted from religious traditions, living environment, national spirit and other aspects of Chinese and Western religions. Most of them are embodied in the individual interpretation or image comparative analysis of Chinese goddess Nvghua, Xiwangmu, Mazu, Guanyin, and Western goddesses Gaia, Hera, Medea, etc., from which the differences between Eastern and Western women are deeply explored. Among them, there are most studies on feminist analysis in Greek mythology, focusing on exploring the embryonic form and development of female consciousness in Western mythology. Among them, there are very few literatures with West Queen Mother and Hera as the main objects of comparison, and most of the existing relevant literatures are limited to the comparative analysis of the differences in the image characteristics of the two, and few specific analysis and interpretation of the female

consciousness of the two. The comparison between the two goddesses, West Queen Mother and Hera, is that they are the supreme leaders of the female fairy gods, with supreme authority and noble status, and they both have a husband as the king of gods.[1] Therefore, this paper tries to dig out more concrete forms of the female consciousness differences between West Queen Mother and Hera, and analyzes more valuable differences on the basis of textual analysis and comparative study of Chinese and Western myths.

2. Interpretation of Female Consciousness

Female consciousness is the process of women's value, self-cognition and experience in the society. This awareness emphasizes women's role in society, self-cognition and responsibility to society and others. It also calls on women to respect and accept their traditional roles in society, while also paying attention to their own living conditions, life experiences and emotional expression. In practice, female consciousness can help women consciously perceive and fulfill their life obligations, social responsibilities and historical missions. This means that women should be completely clear and clear about their different ways of participating in social life from men, and be able to integrate the two identities of people and women. Female consciousness embodies the unique gender requirements of women.

In order to realize female consciousness, women need to have a full understanding of their own social identity, be aware of their own commonalities and characteristics as social subjects and as human beings, and be able to consciously build a life to meet various basic needs. Female consciousness also needs to be aware of the characteristics

corresponding to the identity of women, and have femininity consistent with physical and psychological characteristics. At the same time, according to the role of women, consciously exert the advantages of women and assume the social obligations of women's roles. Finally, women also need a correct understanding of male roles to develop and progress together with men.

The awakening of female self-consciousness reflects the self-esteem, self-love, self-confidence and self-improvement of women as people and women. It rejects self-deprecation and pursues equality between men and women. [2] Only in this way, female consciousness can truly become a kind of value, not to emphasize that women are respected or above men, but the ultimate pursuit of the realization of women's self-worth as human beings, as well as the satisfaction of women's various basic needs, and ultimately achieve equal rights between men and women.

3. Comparison of Female Consciousness between Xiwangmu and Hera

3.1. Concept of power

In ancient Chinese myths and legends, the Queen Mother of the West was the goddess of eternal life who reigned over the female immortals, and all the fairies had to obey her orders and be governed by her. *The Three Classics of the West* says: "The Queen Mother of the West looks like a human... It is the genius and the five faults." In layman's terms, she is the god of murder and safety. Another classic book *West Classic of the Sea* says: "eight rocks, on the occasion of Chishui, it had to be Ren Yi can mount the rock" myth, Ren Yi "mount the rock" is in order to ask the Queen Mother of West for immortal medicine, thus we can learn that the Queen Mother of the West has the responsibility to master the immortal medicine. According to *Yong city collection fairy record* records: "Golden mother, is the nine Lingmiao turtle mountain's golden mother. One called Tailing nine light turtle altar golden mother, another named Xiwangmu, is the most wonderful of the Xihua, the extreme respect of the cave Yin..... and nurture heaven and earth, shape and arrange everything." According to this, we can understand that the Queen mother of the West is born of the wonderful gas of the Xihua, and her power is derived from her nature, not from the relationship between parents and husband and wife.

As the legal wife of Zeus, Hera was in charge of marriage and family, and was honored as the "Queen of God." The reason why Hera has a higher status and power than any lover of Zeus and enjoys supreme honor is not only because of her own strong divine power, but more importantly because Zeus promised to share his status and power with her when proposing to her. From this point of view, fundamentally speaking, Hera is still controlled by Zeus. For example, after Hera's crazy revenge on Zeus's lover, Zeus punished Hera in public, locked Hera with an iron chain and hung her in the sky. Zeus' thunderous anger made all the gods dare not plead for Hera, and Hera tasted all the pain and shame.

Through the comparison of the two, it is not difficult to conclude that the power of the Xiwangmu comes from the condensation of all things from yin, which is natural; Hera's exalted status and powerful power came from her union with Zeus, who shared the power of lightning with him and became the most honored woman on Mount Olympus.[3]

3.2. Marital status

According to ancient Chinese folk legend, the spouse of the Queen mother of the West is the Jade Emperor, one of them is called the emperor, one is called the queen of the mother, the two words "emperor" and "king" should be put together. From this point of view, the Queen mother of the West is the female god relative to the king of heaven and the son of heaven, the status of the Queen mother and the Jade Emperor is the same. However, we can find that the combination of the Queen Mother and the Jade Emperor, whether from the perspective of myths and legends or folk associations, will completely bring the Wangmuniangniang into the social background of patriarchy and hierarchy, and actually deprive of most of her autonomy and originality. Therefore, we can neither be absolutely sure that the Queen Mother's position in the marriage is absolutely equal to that of her husband, but we also cannot deny that as the Queen Mother, the West Queen Mother holds the vast majority of power and does not need to be dependent on others to obtain it.

Although Hera was the legal wife of Zeus, her marriage life was not happy, and Zeus' philandering and mercy made her suffer from pain and torture. Hera also tried to win her husband's favor, and she even borrowed a belt from Aphrodite, the goddess of love, in order to attract Zeus's attention and make him addicted to her beauty. Later, because of jealousy, Hera launched a crazy revenge on Zeus's lover, and even anything related to the rival. When Hera learned that Zeus' lover Semele was pregnant with her husband's child, she turned into Semele's old nurse to lure her and eventually burned Semele alive. For the kingdom of Aquinas with the same name as her rival in love, Hera was even more merciless, she brought a terrible plague into the island of Aquinas, making the island shrouded in toxic fog and miasma, resulting in the plague of all humans and birds and animals in the entire kingdom..

From the perspective of marital status, in the marriage of these two goddesses, one is the image of having a relatively equal status with her husband, while the other is the existence of pursuing equal status and being in a dependent position.

3.3. Consciousness of family and country

Chinese women's concept of home and country is "give up the small family for everyone", the greatness of women lies in this maternal love and tolerance, this selfless dedication comes from the love of home and country. Chinese women first choose to maintain the integrity of the country, even at the risk of dying for the country, and the completion of their own small family should give way to the interests of the country, women are growing up in this concept of family and country. Although Xiwangmu pursued social power, she did not seek to ensure personal interests, but to lead people out of suffering, punish evil and promote good for the people, and therefore was respected and worshipped by people. Her image represents the good quality and traditional virtue of Chinese women, with a kind and kind heart; At the same time, she also played a positive role in reconciling folk life and calming people's feelings..

Western women pay more attention to the harmony and integrity of the individual family, whether it is the noble queen, or poor women, their concept of home and country is to have a home first, then the country. The gods in ancient Greek mythology truly reflect the personality characteristics of western nations that advocate individualism and pursue self-value as the ultimate goal. In ancient Greek mythology, the

gods pay attention to physical and spiritual enjoyment, with strong egoism and hedonism. Although Hera is a diva, she rarely takes social responsibilities. She is more concerned about family grievances and maintaining her love, and pays less attention to the interests of the group.

It can be seen that female consciousness in Chinese and Western mythology is manifested as collective will on one side and individual satisfaction on the other; One is social responsibility, the other is personal interests; One is the group, the other is the individual family.

4. Analysis of the Causes of Differences

4.1. The difference in the characteristics of The Times

In the matrilineal society, women are more independent, while men seem to be more dependent, which makes the status of women in the tribe significantly higher than that of men, which is a characteristic of primitive society, and reflects the role of women in mythology. The matrilineal clan period in primitive society has left a profound trace in Chinese civilization. The Chinese society in the period when the myth of the Queen Mother came into being was still not completely out of the primitive society. Even though the rise of the paternal clan period makes the goddess of the matriarchal clan period disappear one after another, the matriarchal clan period is an important stage of human society, and its impact is indelible. Therefore, although the Queen Mother of the West was forced to become the spouse of the representative of the paternal theocracy, she still had great independence and lofty status, and was respected and worshipped by the vast number of believers.

Homer's Epic described in Homer is a patriarchal society ruled by Zeus, the father of the gods. On the surface, this society recognizes the legal marriage of monogamy, but under the domination of men, men can do whatever they want in the relationship between the sexes, while women have no say in their happiness. Although Hera's description of the defense of marriage status in Greek mythology can reflect the awakening of Greek women's consciousness at that time, it also reflects that the idea of pursuing freedom and equality has taken root in female psychology. However, Hera did not have a correct and clear understanding of her female role and the antagonistic relationship between women and the patriarchal society, and she could not directly challenge the core of the patriarchal society, so she could only vent her anger on other female characters who were in competition with her and oppressed by the patriarchal society.

4.2. The difference in geographical location

China is a landlocked country with a long history, based on agriculture, relatively closed and inward looking. The simple production mode of small-scale peasant economy has a certain impact on the inner spirit of the Chinese people, which makes the Chinese civilization have a "mean character", and this in turn has a certain effect on the gods in Chinese mythology, and finally the gods tend to unify their personalities. They abandoned the seven emotions and six desires in the secular world, and just looked at the life and death of all things in the world with a normal heart. Also the Xiwangmu, whose character later evolved into the existence of nothing special.

Located at the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula, Greece is surrounded by the sea on three sides and enjoys a thriving

maritime trade. In such an economic environment, the ancient Greeks had a passionate and adventurous character. When faced with the authority and coercion of Zeus, Hera did not blindly compromise and tolerate. As a goddess with strong feminist consciousness, Hera never stopped her resistance. This is Hera's strong sense of femininity in order to gain self-respect.[4]

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the differences of power and status between the Xiwangmu and Hera, we can explore them from the characteristics of their times and different geographical locations. The female consciousness is reflected in their rebellious behavior, indicating that they are clearly aware of the necessity of establishing a new self to change their social image and social status.

Engels pointed out: "The status of the goddess in mythology shows that in earlier times women enjoyed a relatively free and respectable position, but in the heroic age we see that the status of women has been reduced by the domination of men and the competition of female slaves." [5] With the development of productive forces and the arrival of the Iron Age, the patriarchal society and the concept of male power are becoming increasingly prominent, and the female subjective consciousness has suffered distortion and alienation in the process of development. Throughout the history, up to the modern period, the roles of women in the patriarchal clan society have been changing constantly. The aura of absolute authority of women in the past has gradually faded, their dominant position in society has been replaced by men, women have been excluded from social production activities, and childbearing and housework have become their primary social responsibilities. The strong patriarchy in society has largely deprived women of their independent status. [6] Under the oppression of male politics, women can only use extreme ways such as hysteria, madness, and even self-sacrifice under the cultural surface to compete with male society and highlight their self-consciousness. The reality is that the role of women in society is no less than that of men, but women are often in the oppressed side of the binary relationship, and women's issues are often ignored. Therefore, in order to achieve the harmonious development of gender relations, it is necessary to pay more attention to the growth history of women, as well as the female consciousness and other aspects of in-depth exploration.

Although the era of myth has gone, the rich connotation and human wisdom created by it still have profound and enlightening value for modern society. Drawing lessons from the awakening and growth of different female consciousness in Chinese and Western myths, today's women are more courageous to liberate themselves, pursue freedom and fight for rights, no longer suffer discrimination, and obtain equal opportunities and rights with men.

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