

The Comparison of Worship Reflected in Creation Myths Between Mongolians and Native Americans

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Abstract

A creation myth is an early form of storytelling used by primitive people to explore the universe's origin, including the heavens, earth, sun, stars, and life. These myths reflect early societies' philosophical and spiritual thinking and have greatly influenced literature and culture. This paper explored and compared the creation myths of Mongolians and Native Americans from the perspective of comparative study of literature. It emphasizes the importance of preserving these myths as spiritual heritage and examines how they can enlighten modern society regarding human spirituality and ecological consciousness. Despite living in different regions, Mongolians and Native Americans share similar cultural practices. The study begins by analyzing the historical origins of both groups and delves into the deeper meanings within their creation myths. The paper also identified various themes, such as religious beliefs, ancestor and hero worship, views on nature, etc. It highlights that both cultures hold their ancestors and heroes in high regard and share a reverence for the spirit of nature.

Key words: Comparative study; Mongolian; Native Americans; Creation myths; Worship

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INTRODUCTION

A creation myth is the explanation of primitive people to understand the origin of heaven and earth, the sun and the stars, mankind, animals, and all things in the universe. Many scholars at home and abroad have defined creation myths throughout the ages. The ancestors and heroes in the creation myths are all divine, reflecting the primitive ancestors trying to use divinity to convince themselves that they are descendants of God and protected by their ancestors and heroes. They believe worshipping their ancestors and heroes can benefit themselves and their families. The worship has also become the spiritual sustenance of the original ancestors. Lucien Levy-Bruhl's law of participation and collective representatives are related to the results of certain things and can also reflect social stipulations. It was introduced in his book *How Natives think?*, which was an English version translated from the French original. With the help of theoretical analysis, it will be conducive to a deeper analysis of the worship of Mongolians and Native Americans.

1. THE WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS AND HEROES IN MONGOLIAN CREATION MYTHS

In the *History of Mongolian Philosophical Thought*, Suhe and Taoketao (2004) divided the process of Mongolian thoughts into three eras: the era of heroes, the era of Khan, and the era of popular culture. The significance of advocating the "destiny by Tengri" thought in the heroic era is "stabilizing the order within the tribe and the alliance." The ancestors of Genghis Khan, Alan Huoe, were conceived by destiny. Genghis Khan was born in destiny. This "destiny" thought is similar to the "divine right of Kings" in medieval Europe.

The myth of *Goddess Madel's Creation of the World* tells the story of "Goddess Madel's marvelous journey traveling on the back of a white horse to separate Heaven from Earth. In this myth, the goddess Madel is a woman of creation, like the mother of the earth, who nurtures everything in the world. She creates Heaven and Earth, whose ability is transcendent. Mongolians praise her great achievements. Her image epitomizes Mongolian ancestors' worship of the creation gods. She was confronted with the world after catastrophes and floods and inspected the world of 3,000 colors. She saw the peaks of Mount Xumier in the blue sky and some people in the caves near the top of the mountain. Madel rode her horse on the surface of the water, and her hoofs moved on the surface of the water. The burning dust turns to ash and falls on the water. Ashes accumulate thicker and thicker and gradually become the earth. The earth pressed against the water and sank, and the sky and the earth slowly separated. So Heaven and the earth formed, but the earth floated unstable on the water's surface, often shaking. The goddess Madel ordered a tortoise to be embedded at the bottom of the water and bear the earth. Sometimes, the tortoise stretched its waist and legs, and the earth shook, causing an earthquake. She also sent gods and goddesses to create the sun and moon for dwarf lighting" (Qiuxi, 2013).

The ancestors of the creation mythology are all divine, reflecting the primitive ancestors trying to use the ancestors' divinity to convince themselves that they are descendants of God. They believe that worshipping their ancestors can benefit themselves or their own families. The ancestor worship has also become the spiritual sustenance of the original ancestors. Mongolians regard the goddess Madel as their ancestors. In ancient times, the living conditions of the Mongolian people were harsh. The archaic people imagined the scene when Heaven and Earth first formed by experiencing the natural conditions of the times. Their ancestors, the goddess Madel, risked it all to create the world and bring light to the world. This myth also reflects the Mongolian people's praise of their ancestors. They hold sacrificial ceremonies to worship the goddess Madel.

The myth and worship of ancestors is the most typical part of the gods' view of the soul. Almost every tribe has an ancestor who has been worshiped. He is not only a tribal founder, but also a fascinating myth of pregnancy. The common feature of these myths is the intention to deify the ancestors, emphasizing the divine identity of the ancestors and finding a legal basis for the existence of this tribe and its descendants in the divine lineage. In order to make his rule more convincing on the sacred origin of his ancestors, many cultural merits and moral powers were added (Jing, 2010, p. 7).

The ancestral myth of Genghis Khan can also be explained as above. The ancestors of Genghis Khan

were born of destiny. However, the creation myth of the Mongolians is originated from that primitive people have no way to explain the origin of human beings and cannot rebel against the forces of nature. Only in this way can a virtual God or a human being unable to reach the imagination to explain the problem: "where human beings come from".

In addition, *Tengri* is in charge of the order of the universe and the destiny of mankind. Therefore, every monarch must accept power from heaven. The monarch is the messenger or representative of the god. *Tengri* worship is to maintain its strength and unity through the monarch. When the country was in a state of war or divided, the spirit of *Tengri* and the monarch will be weakened. *Tengri* will be replaced by other gods. The worship of the monarch will be transformed into the worship of folk heroes. Besides the worship of the ancestors, Mongolians' worship of shaman gods is obviously earlier than the consciousness of hero worship.

The book, *The Comparative Research of Mongolian Folk Literature* (Chen, 2001), has a story of a hero recorded. "In the war between the Eastern and the Western Gods, the God of Khan Holmusta *Tengri* killed the head of the Eastern God of God, Atai Ulan, bringing the dead body of the God of Atai Ulan to the earth, and the left hand became the Lord of the devils Khan Sirim Tishultu, the upper body became the occupied Aberguchan Mangus of the northeast, and the lower body turned into the Mangus Leville Hala Lawbus Galladay on the Iron Black Horse. These three demons later harmed humans, and finally they were destroyed by Gesar, who saved human beings (Chen, 2001, p. 22)."

Before Mongolians formed tribes, they mainly prayed to the gods by worshipping the gods and the power to resist nature and prayed that the gods could shelter human beings. With the collapse of the clan society, the emergence of the tribe, the society has been further developed, and the Mongolians have the ability to resist natural disasters. At this time, the contradiction with the natural world has gradually faded, and the territories and other conflicts between the tribes and the tribes have intensified. Meanwhile, the tribe needs to have heroes who are brave and good at war, and lead their tribal soldiers to confront or annex other tribes and fight for the best interests of their tribes. The hero who won the victory is treated by the other people in the tribe with the highest courtesy. The masses worship such heroes because the hero can resist the invasion of enemies and bring people a stable and happy life.

Lu Xun (2009) once claimed that in the process of development, the central figures of myths became increasingly human until the myths turned into legends. The chief figures of legends had semi-divine attributes or were ancient heroes with outstanding intelligence and skill, braver than all ordinary men. They received

special gifts from Heaven or were aided by the gods (Lu, 2009, p. 9). But there is another situation that as legends developed, the invents or heroes were given divinity for some reason. For example, *The Secret History of Mongols* (Daoruntibu, 1991) begins with the myth of Boertie China (Yisügei ba'atur), who was born in the command of god. He was the ancestor of Genghis Khan. In order to add mystery factors to the origins of Genghis Khan, the story was documented as a myth. Since the archaic Mongolians admired their ancestors, Boertie China was related to divinity. The archaic Mongolians also respected Genghis Khan and believed their ancestors blessed them.

Regardless of the consideration of the empire's ruling people and the deep-rooted cultural factors, Mongolians have objects of worship at different stages of historical development. Primitive Mongolians created myths about how humans came to the world and heroes emerged with their rich imaginations. They believed that the first mankind or their ancestors must come to the world under the guidance of God and make them safe and prosperous. The primitives' cognition of human origin was just at the beginning. They explained the reason why they were born by creation myths. They do not have enough living materials to resist harsh living conditions, so they put their hope of a good life on the divine ancestors and the heroes who help them resist enemies.

2. THE WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS AND HEROES IN NATIVE AMERICAN CREATION MYTHS

Frye's (1957) cycle theory refers to the success of a hero's growth to go through a process. Spring, summer, autumn and winter are a cycle. Sunrise, sunset, and night are also a cyclical process. The birth of a hero-victory-death-rebirth is also a cyclical process. Frye from many hero stories. The middle draws a relatively fixed cycle pattern similar to the natural circulation, which gives inspiration to future scholars to study myths. However, this cycle mode is not a panacea; it has limitations. Many national myths heroic epics, legends, are not the ending of a hero's rebirth. Creation myths have been influenced by many factors in the process of production and evolution. Some myths, such as the eulogy of ancient collective religious rituals, will also be influenced by class interests and ruling needs. At this time, the figures of ancestors and heroes are no longer circular patterns but linear models or even branch structures.

In the book *American Indians Myths and Legends* (Erdos & Ortiz, 1984), there is a creation myth of the Modoc people named *Grizzlies walking upright* (Grizzly Times, n.d.). The context is shown as following.

Then the Sky Spirit took his walking stick, steeped from a cloud to the peak, and walked down to the mountain. When he was

about halfway to the valley below, he began to put his finger to the ground here and there, here and there. Wherever his finger touched, a tree grew. The snow melted in his footsteps, and the water ran down in rivers. The Sky Spirit broke off the small end of his giant stick and threw the pieces into the rivers. The longer pieces turned into beaver and otter; the smaller pieces became fishes dropped from the trees, he picked them up, blew upon them, and so made the birds. Then he took the big end of his giant stick and made all the animals that walked on the earth, the biggest of which were the grizzly bears (Erdos & Ortiz, 1984, p. 86).

That's why the Indians living around Mount Shasta would never kill a grizzly bear. Whenever a grizzly killed an Indian, his body was burned on the spot. And for many years all who passed that way cast a stone there until a great pile of stones marked the place of his death (Erdos & Ortiz, 1984, p. 87).

The Modoc people left a stream of clues on how their ancestors lived throughout history. One of them is that admiring their ancestors because they believe that their ancestors were half-god and half-animal. God or the Great Spirit must be honored, or he will punish the offenders. As descendants of bears and gods, human beings should revere their ancestors. Even though one person is hurt by a bear, he can not kill the bear in turn. His fellowmen will bury him on the spot of his death and throw stones on the spot. Then anyone who passed by this place will do the same thing. In this way, they show their respect to their god and ancestors.

The Algonquians of the north recognize as the chief of their Manitous, Gitche (or Kitshi) Manitou, the Great Spirit, whom they also call the Master of Life (Alexander, 1916, p. 20). The word "Manitous" is translated by Christians as God. And Native Americans often use it in the church. In one Algonquin creation myth, the Great Spirit is the Great Earth Mother who creates the world. And her two sons were named Glooskap (or Michabo, a form of Nanabhozo among other Algonquians) and Malsum. The first was a culture hero who embodied goodness and creativity. Malsum (the Wolf) was evil and destructive, a devil persona. Earth Mother died and Glooskap created all the elements of nature, including animals and humans from her body. Malsum used the mother sources to create evil and dangerous plants and animals (Leeming, 2010, p. 36). After death and resurrection, Glooskap finally defeated Malsum. Justice triumphs over evil. This reflects the world view of the binary opposition of the primitives.

Besides the worship of ancestors, the respect for heroes is not much less. The oral form of a story about heroes is an epic, which fixed in the form of written literature. Sir Jack Goody argued that "The epic itself is a prime example of how we wrongly impose the characteristics of a literate society onto a non-literate one" (Goody, 2010, p. 44). The Homeric poems are former stories told among the ancient Greeks and collected, edited by Homer. The minstrels of ancient times traveled around Europe and exchanged information from one place to another. They

preserved ballads, stories, and history through their songs. What they sang is regarded as oral literature works. "It is often assumed to be a typical product of oral cultures, being sung by professional bards at courts or in army camps" (Goody, 2010, p. 44). In Great Britain, there was the long narrative epic the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. In Mongolian history, there existed *The Epic of King Gesar*, which was believed to date from the 12th century. The epic is about the heroic deeds of a certain figure in a nation's history, and usually admired by the forerunners.

Different from the Mongolians' creation myths of worshipping ancestors and heroes, in the creation myths of Native Americans, gods usually appeared like mankind. Gods can not be offended, or human beings will be punished. Despite all this, the ancestors of Native Americans are still with divinity, so they worship their ancestors. Things are alike in the Mongolian creation myths. While heroes representative rightness, the primitives hoped that heroes could fight for them when the primitive people were attacked by enemies. Thus, heroes were often invincible and deified.

3. THE COMPARISON OF THE WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS AND HEROES IN MONGOLIAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN CREATION MYTHS

The Mongolian and the Native Indians are two ethnics both with a long history. In the non-literate society, primitive people created splendid culture. The oral "literature", as a part of their culture, played a very important role in the archaic people's life. Some scholars think the two ethnics are modern primitives. Their myths in their own culture contain lots of historical connections. From the texts of their creation myths, it is clear that both ethnic groups endowed their ancestors and heroes with divine factors and hold rituals to worship the ancestors and heroes. The ancient worship traditions are preserved till today.

To get a better understanding of Mongolians' and Native Americans' worship, one term must be introduced. Collective representatives are defined as a whole without entering into detail, may be recognized by the following signs. They are common to the members of a given social group; they are transmitted from one generation to another; they impress themselves upon its individual members, and awaken in them sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on, according to the circumstances of the case (Bruhl, 1966, p. 3). Their existence does not depend upon the individual, but they present themselves in aspects which must be considered individuals who have similar characteristics. Therefore, it is a language, although, properly speaking, it exists only in the mind of the individual who speaks it, but it is based on the

indisputable social reality of the collective representation set, because it is for each.

One of the similar collective representatives at modern times, is concert, where fans or believers voluntarily participate in the media's hype, and are proud to be able to get close to the idol or co-located. The fusion of elements such as music, dance, lighting, sound, and beauty will make this huge feast especially rich, stimulating the nerves of the audience. The interaction of the idols, the meticulous arrangement of the programs and the setting of the seats will make the whole ceremony feel intimate and solemn. In the process, the designer will do everything he can to keep the viewer's nerves in a state of excitement, or tears in their eyes, or dancing, and at the end of the day, most of them are still unfinished. When a fan is alone, whenever he thinks about the grand occasion of the concert he has participated in, the emotional experience he once experienced will be evoked again, and the emotion reflected by the appearance will surround him. Over time, this mood will gradually disappear, so concerts will be held from time to time. This gathering and worship of idols is random, voluntary, the appeal of full-screen idols and the hobbies of fans. The rituals, ceremonies and other activities of the primitive people are largely held regularly. Such as the rituals of aobao of Mongolians. In the Native American Grizzlies Creation, it was also mentioned that after the death of the man by the Grizzlies, everyone buried him in the place where he was killed. Then everyone who passes by this place will put a stone in this place.

With the help of worship and praise of ancestors and heroes, primitive people relied on their religious beliefs in the peaceful living through the harsh living environment. They believed that their ancestors were sacred and that their souls could protect them from wild animals. The worship of heroes can help them build up confidence and bravely fight against the harsh natural environment. The reason why people need poems, arts, or fiction is the reason why they need myths. Analysis of the texts of the creation myths of Mongolian and Native Americans, thinking about what is changing between different versions of the same subject, what is constant, helps make contemporary people understand the historical development process of Mongolian and Native American culture from a mythological point of view.

In this way, in Native American societies and Mongolian conventions, particular custom burials and commemorations, such as the Native American hone of stone stacking and the Mongolian aobao ceremony, encapsulate a significant recognition of the dead and the assurance of sacrosanct destinations. By taking off behind images such as stones, these ceremonies not as it were serve as an unceasing recognition of the expired, but moreover develop a otherworldly bond between the living and their predecessors and the characteristic environment.

They rise above the domain of straightforward devout or otherworldly exercises and have gotten to be an vital way of passing on social memory, keeping up community personality, and communicating regard for the common and otherworldly world. The proceeded hone of these conventional customs guarantees the coherence of social character and the transmission of person and collective recollections, convictions and values from era to era over time.

CONCLUSION

This paper systematically and thoroughly explores the phenomena of ancestor and hero worship in Mongolian and Native American creation myths, revealing how ancestor worship stabilizes the structure of tribal alliances and promotes the identity and sense of belonging among tribal members through the sanctification of ancestors; meanwhile, hero worship celebrates the noble values of strength, courage, and wisdom, and the deeds of heroes travel through time and space to inspire future generations to aspire to and pursue a better future. Through cross-cultural comparative analysis, this paper elucidates the extensive and far-reaching role of these worship practices in shaping unique cultural values and influencing social structures, and emphasizes the irreplaceability of myths as a tool of cultural narrative in constructing spiritual worlds, consolidating social structures, and passing on cultural memories. In addition, this study not only provides valuable information and theoretical insights for an in-depth understanding of ancient civilization, but also opens up new research paths for future exploration

of the potential influence of myths in the cultural and psychological structure of contemporary society.

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