

Cultural contrasts between Chinese and Western flood legends from an intercultural perspective

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Abstract. Flood is a natural disaster that threatens the safety of people's lives and property, and there are myths and legends related to flood disasters in China and abroad. The Noah's Ark is one of the most famous stories in the *Bible* in the West, and the story of *Yu the Great Harnesses the Flood* is a well-known story in China. By comparing the story of *Noah's Ark* and *Yu the Great Harnesses the Flood*, this paper explores the deep cultural differences between China and the West, so as to understand and tolerate each other in intercultural communication and reduce unnecessary cultural conflicts.

1. Introduction

Mencius records that in Yao's time, the world was not yet peaceful and water was overflowing and flooding everywhere. The grass and trees were over-flourishing, birds and animals were breeding in flocks. The grain harvest was low and animals were threatening human safety. The people were deeply affected and had no fixed place to live and emperor Yao was worried, so he gathered the tribal leaders to discuss countermeasures. Everyone recommended the Cang to tame the river. Cang used the method of isolating the crowd and building high river embankments to control water, as a result, the river embankment was built higher and higher and once it was washed away by the flood, which brought disaster to the people. Cang's nine years of water control were ineffective and he was killed by emperor Shun for not accomplishing his mission and then Shun appointed Cang's son Yu to control the flood. Yu inherited his father's ambition, summed up the lessons of his father's failure to regulate rivers and watercourses and found that building border dikes and dams could not fundamentally solve the flood problem. Yu took advantage of the natural trend of water flowing from high to low and channeled floodwaters into dredged rivers, depressions, lakes and the sea, finally flood is under control, so that the people can move back from the highlands to plain to live and engage in agricultural production^[1]. Yu's achievements in leading the people to control flood were major political achievements, and he was supported by the people and became the first emperor of the Xia dynasty. In the process of the water control, Yu reduced taxes and adapted measures to local conditions, finally

achieved the effect of "People are edified and sound decrees are obeyed everywhere". Yu followed the nature of the terrain, passed through the door three times without entering, deepened and widened the main river channels, so that the floodwaters flow into fixed river channels. The upper water follows the course of the river and the lower water has an outlet, so that the nine rivers cannot become floods, so the people can move from the highlands to more fertile lowlands and develop agricultural production.

Noah's Ark is a story from the biblical book of Genesis. Adam and Eve stole the forbidden fruit to conceive mankind and their descendants spread all over the earth, after which Cain killed his brother and people killed each other, fought and plundered and the world was full of sin. God Jehovah was heartbroken by the sins of the world, regretted creating the world and decided to destroy the world with a flood. Noah, the one blameless man of his time, walked with the God Jehovah, who considered him a righteous man and told him to take refuge. At God's suggestion, Noah and his family established the ark. After Noah moved into the ark with his wife, three sons and their wives, as well as all kinds of animals, it rained heavily for 40 days and nights and everything living on the face of the earth was wiped out. Only Noah's family and animals still existed on the ark, and after more than 150 days, Noah released a dove and in the evening the dove flew back with an olive branch, which meant that the earth was exposed somewhere. Therefore, the dove holding the olive branch symbolizes peace. Seven days later, Noah released the dove again, but this time the dove did not fly back, because the earth dried up and the flood receded. Noah's family and various animals walked out of the ark, and Noah built an altar to the God and rebuilt the home with his family. When God Jehovah smelled

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the soothing odor, he decided not to kill every living creature and created a rainbow in the sky as a guarantee^[2].

2. Different ideas of the relationship between man and nature

There are differences in the understanding of floods between China and the West, in the story of *Yu the Great Harnesses the Flood*, the flood is regarded as a natural disaster that affects people's agricultural production and life, which can be overcome through human wisdom and strength, while in Noah's story, the flood is a disaster that God Jehovah sent to punish sinful human beings, which can not be resisted by manpower, and this difference in understanding also leads to the different coping strategies to the flood. Yu worked day and night, abandoning his father's strategy of "blocking" the water, and instead using the strategy of "dredging" to channel the flood into the sea, finally achieving harmonious coexistence between man and nature, which is an expression of the holistic view of "the unity of nature and man" of Chinese Taoist culture. Taoism emphasizes that "Man obeys the laws of the earth. The earth obeys the laws of the universe. The universe follows the law of the Tao. The Tao follows the laws of nature", which holds that human beings should conform to the laws of nature and abide by the basic laws that govern the functioning of everything and that if the basic rules and laws are violated, not only will things not be able to be done, but they will even harm human beings themselves. Its practical significance is that we should follow the laws in our life, and if we violate the laws, nothing will be achieved. This concept guides Chinese all aspects of daily life, for example, Chinese medicine practitioners have the principle of administering medicines according to the location and the seasons because the Chinese believe that patients with the same disease in different natural environments, such as in different regions and different seasons, will have different symptoms, so the prescription of medicines will be treated differently. During the period of agricultural civilization, man's ability to transform nature was limited and the ancient Chinese, who revered heaven and earth, followed the rules of their ancestors and revered nature, believed that everything in the world did not exist in isolation, but rather interacted with each other, acted on each other and was dependent on each other. Therefore, Chinese culture believes that man and nature, spirit and matter, subject and object, and mortal and divine are all one, focusing on the dependence and unity of the two. The famous Greek physicist Archimedes once said, "Give me a cardinal point and I can pry the whole earth". This sentence expresses the spirit of a man's bold exploration and transformation of the opposing natural world. The way of survival of the ancient Greeks was to rely on agriculture, handicrafts and commerce, commerce is the top priority, handicrafts and commerce is to rely on individual efforts, have more personal value opportunities, rather than relying on the natural

environment and conforming to the laws of nature, thus cultivating the national character of seeking innovation, change, curiosity and activity and the natural view of the separation of nature and man. Western culture believes that man and nature, spirit and matter, subject and object, mortal and divine are divided into two, with clear boundaries, emphasizing the coexistence of dualism and antagonism. Westerners, from ancient times to the present, tend to divide the universe into two distinct worlds of man and nature and the two are opposed to each other.

3. Differences in religious views

China's long-standing agricultural culture has created the cultural characteristics of the Chinese culture of rational, pragmatic and focusing on the present world. In the thousands of years of intensive agricultural practice, Chinese has cultivated the national character of emphasizing reality and dethroning unrealistic fantasies and its religious beliefs seek to have direct help to the actual production and life, which is completely different from the mentality of westerners to pursue happiness after death. China is a polytheistic country, the supreme power is not given to a certain immortal, but every immortal in China has his own position, such as Dragon King with rain power, the God of Land who guards the land of all parties, the God of Money who can bring wealth and treasures to people and even the God of Kitchen can bless the people with food. In the belief of ancient Chinese, if you want abundant grains, smooth wind and rain and national security and civil security, you must awe universe and worship nature. In the West, it is believed that there is only one absolute being in the universe that dictates the fundamental nature of everything. Based on this perception of the universe, western world beliefs are exclusive. The mainstream western culture follows the monotheism, God Jehovah is the only true God, the only master of all things in the world, and has the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that is, western people would rather give God Jehovah "multiple identities" than accept that other immortal as a complement to God Jehovah.

Adam and Eve stole the forbidden fruit, mankind was branded with original sin, Noah escaped the flood disaster and offered a devout sacrifice to God Jehovah and mankind began to repent to God Jehovah. Compared to the Chinese mentality of "rational and pragmatic, pay attention to reality", westerners believe that outside the earthly world, there is a blissful world and only by being strict with oneself, repenting and praying every day, cleansing the soul and dying can one enter the kingdom of heaven, otherwise, God Jehovah will not forgive and bless, or even suffer God's punishment. This belief supports the spiritual world of westerners, connects the ethical inheritance of generations as a moral link, and provides possibilities for the humanistic thinking of freedom, equality and fraternity in the West. This difference in religious beliefs can cause difficulties in communication

between people of different cultural backgrounds and even develop cultural conflicts. In the stereotype of westerners, Chinese have no religious beliefs, but in fact, unlike western theism thinking, Chinese firmly believe in the power of the people, so there is a people-based idea^[3] if only when the people are the foundation of the country and the foundation is solid, can the country be peaceful .

4. The differences in values

Yu's achievements in governing water are the merits of Yu, Yi and Houji who gathered the people to control water together, not Yu alone, reflecting China's cultural characteristics of advocating collectivism. The highest state of ancient Chinese politicians was to worry before the world and to rejoice after the world, emphasizing the interests of the collective. Since ancient times, people like Yu, who cares about the world and worries about the country and the people, are models for officials. This coincides with the Mohist thought of universal love. In Chinese culture, those who work hard for the prosperity and strength of the country and the well-being of the people are deeply loved by the people and have left a name in history. For example, Geliang Zhu, who regardless of his own selfish interests, did his best to serve the country and the people until his died. When individual interests conflict with collective interests, Chinese culture tends to sacrifice individual goals for the collective well, which is difficult to understand in the West, which advocates individual heroism. Noah obeyed God's will to build Noah's Ark to protect his family and creatures, highlighting Noah's spirit of careful planning, seizing opportunities, acting in a timely manner, using external conditions to cope with crises and perseverance.

The Records of History tells that Yu's management of floods was that the son inherits the father's business, which reflects patriarchal Chinese families focus on vertical family succession^[4]. The biblical fact that Noah took refuge with his wife and children reflects the basic unit of the social structure in the West is the husband and wife. The concept of the Chinese family has a wider scope than that of the West. The Chinese family includes parents, wives children, clansmen and brothers. Chinese social relations extend outward from the family as a unit. In contrast, the Western concept of family is horizontally centered on the husband and wife, with husband and wife and children in the family.

In intercultural communication, communication subjects with different cultural backgrounds show differences in the encoding and decoding of information due to their personality characteristics in cultural orientation, values, religious beliefs, ethical norms, ways of thinking, ways of life, etc. We should face up to and perceive these cultural differences due to different cultures, so as to avoid misunderstandings, prejudices, disputes and contradictions in intercultural communication. Therefore, intercultural communicators appropriately cultivate their own communicative empathy ability, that is, a psychological

experience, emotional displacement and cognitive transformation carried out by communicators in order to ensure smooth communication between different cultures and the psychological tendency to consciously transcend the psychological constraints of the national native language and cultural stereotype and stand in another cultural model. Cultural empathy requires that the communicator get rid of the influence of the local culture as much as possible and thinks in the way that the foreign culture may think, in order to find common ground to switch and connect between different cultures. The most significant feature of intercultural communication ability is cultural empathy, revealing the psychological mechanism of cultural empathy and you can master the basic laws of intercultural communication.

5. Conclusion

Cultural communication is the work that people do in coming to terms with the communicative demands of their life-worlds^[5]. The existence of cultural differences is both objective and average. Understanding differences, appreciating it, respecting it—is central to all practical treatments of intercultural communication^[6]. The comparison of different forms of culture highlights the distinct cultural characteristics of various nationalities, which can help us understand the different cultural ideologies of different nationalities and is also conducive to the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds and avoid cultural conflicts. The study of cultural connotations help people to jump out of their own prejudices and narrow-mindedness, respect each other, be harmonious with differences, seek common ground while reserving differences and also help cultural integration and development in the process of intercultural communication.

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