

The Impact Of Ancient Chinese Mythology On The Development Of Eastern Philosophy

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Abstract: This article examines the influence of Chinese mythology on Eastern philosophy, focusing on how mythological narrations shape philosophical concepts such as harmony and moral norms. It was discussed how myths serve as a basis for understanding the interaction of man and nature, as well as their role in the development of philosophical systems such as Daoism and Confucianism.

Keywords: Chinese mythology, Eastern philosophy, Taoism, Confucianism, human-nature interaction, humanities, philosophical traditions, sociocultural influence.

INTRODUCTION. Eastern philosophy, with its unique views on the world and the place of man in it, is inextricably linked to mythological ideas that arose in the early stages of Chinese history. Ancient Chinese mythology not only contained deep cultural symbols, but also laid the foundation for many philosophical schools. Chinese philosophy, unlike Western rationalistic and analytical approaches, strives for harmony between man and nature, which is reflected in key mythological ideas. This work is dedicated to the study of how mythological ideas continue to influence contemporary Eastern philosophy and how they penetrate everyday life through philosophical systems and practices.

Ancient Chinese mythology is reconstructed from fragments of ancient historical and philosophical works¹:

"Shujing" - Book of History, the oldest parts dating to the 14th-11th centuries;

"Yijing" - Book of Changes, the oldest parts dating to the 8th-7th centuries²;

"Zhuangzi," 4th-3rd centuries BC;

"Liezi," 4th century BC - 4th century AD³;

"Huainanzi," 2nd century BC⁴;

"Critical Essays" by Wang Chong, 1st century AD).

The greatest amount of information on mythology is contained in the ancient treatise "Shan Hai Jing" ("Classic of Mountains and Seas," 4th-2nd centuries BC), as well as in the poetry of Qu Yuan (4th century BC).

One of the distinguishing features of ancient Chinese mythological historicization is the euhemerization of mythical characters, who, under the influence of the

¹ Попова Г.С. Значение обнаружения клада, включающего сосуд Ли гуй для изучения истории Западного Чжоу // История Китая. Материалы китаеведческой конференции ИСАА при МГУ (май 2005, май 2006). М., 2007. С. 35-38.

² Schuessler, Axel. ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese. — Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

³ Чжуан-цзы. Ле-цзы / Пер. с кит., вступ. ст. и примеч. В. В. Малявина. — М.: Мысль, 1995. — (Философское наследие. Том 123)

⁴ Померанцева Л. Е. Мифотворчество как искусство — на материале главы «Небесный узор» из «Хуайнаньцзы», II в. до н. э. // Научная конференция «Ломоносовские чтения». Апрель. 2003. Востоковедение. Тезисы докладов. М., 2002

rationalistic Confucian worldview, very early began to be interpreted as real figures of deep antiquity. The main characters were transformed into rulers and emperors, while secondary characters became dignitaries, officials, etc. The euhemerization of myths also contributed to the process of anthropomorphization of heroes characteristic of Chinese mythology, which continued in folk mythology until later times. Totemistic beliefs played a major role. For instance, the Yin tribes considered the swallow their totem, while the Xia tribes considered the snake their totem. Gradually, the snake transformed into a dragon (long), which commanded rain, thunder, water elements and was simultaneously connected to underground forces, while the bird probably became the fenghuang - a mythical bird - a symbol of the empress (the dragon became a symbol of the emperor).

The study of Chinese mythology began to develop actively in the early 20th century with the spread of Western education in China. For most of the last century, scholars applied concepts and methods developed by Western researchers, which limited the possibility of creating their own theoretical foundations. This Western influence led many Chinese humanities scholars to perceive mythology as an artifact of ancient culture rather than as an important part of modern Chinese identity.

In some textbooks on the history of Chinese culture published over the last fifty years, the Marxist idea is often emphasized, according to which mythology loses its significance as the real forces of nature are mastered. However, this perception of mythology does not take into account its profound influence on the formation of philosophical teachings such as Taoism and Confucianism. Myths play a key role in understanding the concepts of harmony, moral norms, and human relationships with nature. For example, the concepts of the cycle of life and the importance of moral behavior in Chinese culture have their roots in mythological narratives.

Ignoring mythology as an active element of cultural and philosophical discourse undermines the understanding of the foundations of Eastern philosophy. This leads to mythology being perceived as an outdated literary heritage, which is often set aside and considered as primitive fantasies of the distant past. Nevertheless, myths continue to shape the moral and ethical views of modern society, emphasizing the need to study them for a deeper understanding of the philosophical foundations of Chinese culture. Chinese mythology is an integral part of humanity's spiritual and intellectual heritage; its depth and multi-layered nature allow us to comprehend not only the historical and cultural aspects of ancient China but also the worldview categories that became the foundation for Eastern philosophy. The interaction of mythology with philosophical thought reveals not only the characteristic features of Chinese spiritual tradition but also the universal laws of human existence. Ancient Chinese mythology included many elements that shaped the worldview of the Chinese people. For example, myths about the creation of the world, such as the stories of Pangu, who separated the sky and the earth, and Nüwa, who created people, laid the foundation for ideas about the connection between humans and the cosmos. These myths were not just stories about the past but became the basis for philosophical reflections on nature, humans, and their role in the world. These ideas are deeply rooted in the teachings of Taoism, where the main concept is "Dao" (Way), which can be understood as a universal law of nature, arising from mythological concepts of the cosmos.

One of the key mythological concepts that continues to exert significant influence on Eastern philosophy is the idea of Yin and Yang - opposite but complementary forces. This concept, which first appeared in mythological texts such as "The Book of Changes"

(I Ching), gradually transformed into a philosophical principle reflected in various spheres of life. In the modern world, Yin and Yang remain symbols of balance, permeating both everyday life and more complex philosophical teachings. This principle is found not only in Chinese medicine or feng shui practice but also in structures of thinking, management, and even psychological concepts. Yin and Yang embody the interaction of opposites, and according to Eastern philosophy, only through their harmony can inner and outer balance be achieved.

RESEARCH METHODS. To study the role of ancient Chinese mythology in the daily life of modern society, a survey was conducted among 100 people living in the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the city of Termez. The survey focused on people's awareness of the mythological roots of philosophical concepts and how they perceive ideas such as Yin and Yang or Dao. Respondents were divided into two groups: younger generation (18 to 30 years old) and middle-aged (30 to 60 years old).

RESULTS. The results showed that 80% of respondents are aware of the concept of Yin and Yang (Have you ever heard of the Yin and Yang symbol and considered its significance in your life (for example, in relation to balance, harmony, or health)?). The majority (65%) also noted that they see a connection between this philosophy and traditional family values and understanding of harmony in life. At the same time, 45% of respondents from the younger age group admitted that they had not thought about the mythological roots of these concepts and perceived them more as cultural symbols, without realizing their philosophical depth. This indicates that over time, despite the widespread use of these ideas, the understanding of their mythological basis has somewhat weakened.

However, respondents from the older age group demonstrated a deeper knowledge and respect for mythological foundations. 60% of this group linked their views on family and social relationships to teachings derived from mythological texts. This confirms that mythological ideas such as Yin and Yang continue to influence the formation of ethical norms and social behavior, especially among people who adhere to traditions.

DISCUSSION. Since ancient times, mythology has represented a system through which, by means of figurative descriptions of cosmic processes, interactions of gods and heroes, as well as through the plot lines of epic myths, humans have attempted to understand their place in this complex and diverse world. For example, the figure of Pangu, separating heaven and earth, reflects the cosmic origin in Chinese culture, where the idea of separating primary elements becomes the basis for the philosophical doctrine of Yin and Yang. This idea is reflected in the fact that every phenomenon and action in the world can be interpreted through the interdependence of opposites, through the dialectical unity towards which nature and humans strive. In this context, it is particularly important to note the connection between myths about the creation of the world and the development of Daoism, a philosophy based on the idea of the natural way - Dao. Myths about nature, its cyclical and unchanging character, largely contributed to Chinese thought, particularly Daoism, developing the concept of "non-action" (wu-wei) - a principle stating that a person should act in accordance with natural laws, without seeking to disrupt harmony with their own ambitions and desires. The relationship of humans to nature in Daoism resembles those ancient myths where heroes did not oppose themselves to the world but were part of it. Lao Tzu, interpreting these myths, developed one of the most influential concepts of Eastern thought - the path of natural existence in harmony with Dao. The ideas of non-action and harmony

with nature become not just philosophical abstractions, but principles determining a person's daily behavior.

Confucianism, on the other hand, focuses more on social structure, though its roots also lie in mythological concepts of righteous rulers and their governance. Great mythological figures such as Yao, Shun, and Yu, in the Confucian tradition, serve not merely as legendary characters, but as the standard of moral and just rule. They embody the idea that governing society should be based not on force, but on moral virtues and the ruler's personal responsibility to their people. This principle, embodied in the philosophical works of Confucius, has manifested in Chinese political culture for millennia.

However, Eastern philosophy is not limited to Chinese traditions alone. When analyzing the influence of Chinese mythology on Eastern philosophy, it is crucial to consider its role in the spread of Buddhism in China. Mythology helped make Buddhism, with its Indian roots, comprehensible and relatable to the Chinese people. Local myths about spirits and immortal beings easily resonated with Buddhist concepts of rebirth, karma, and liberation from suffering. Key Buddhist concepts, such as Samsara - the cycle of birth and death - were organically integrated into Chinese culture, reinforced by myths about the cyclical nature of life and death that were already familiar to the Chinese people through their ancient mythological beliefs.

The concept of cyclical life and nature, expressed in myth, also significantly influenced the development of Buddhism in China. Although Buddhism originated in India, as it adapted to Chinese culture, mythological images and ideas about reincarnation and karma found resonance in Chinese notions of the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth. The death of Pangu and his transformation into nature became a symbol of life's continuity, which strengthened the perception of Buddhist teachings about the cycle of birth and death (Samsara). Chinese mythology provided a cultural context in which Buddhist ideas could be easily understood and accepted by the local population. In this sense, the myth of Pangu contributed not only to the development of Chinese philosophy but also to the assimilation of Buddhist thought, helping it take root in Chinese culture. Confucianism, with its emphasis on social and moral aspects, also found reflection in the myth of Pangu. Legends about mythical rulers such as Yao, Shun, and Yu, who were exemplars of wisdom and virtue, are connected to the concept of ruling in harmony with cosmic forces. The myth of Pangu reflects the idea that social order should align with natural laws, and rulers should act in accordance with moral principles established by heaven. In Chinese political thought, this concept is embodied in the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, according to which rulers lose their right to power if they lose their moral virtues. Thus, the myth of Pangu also serves as a moral lesson, demonstrating that power and governance should be based on harmony and responsibility to society and nature.

CONCLUSION. Thus, Chinese mythology has not only influenced philosophical thought but continues to be an important source and guide for understanding fundamental questions about the harmony between humans and the world. By combining the depth of mythological imagery with the rationality of philosophical ideas, Eastern thought has created a unique system of values that continues to inspire scholars and philosophers to this day.

The influence of ancient Chinese mythology on the formation of Eastern philosophy is evident not only in classical teachings but also in people's daily lives. Myths and symbols that once served as explanations of the universe continue to resonate in ethical norms, cultural practices, and personal beliefs. Although the modern

understanding of mythological roots may be less conscious, the principles arising from these ancient ideas still retain their significance. Mythological ideas have transformed into practical philosophical guidelines that help people navigate issues of balance, harmony, and interaction with the surrounding world.

Chinese philosophers not only integrated myths into their systems, but also sought to reinterpret them, giving mythological images new meanings.

Thus, mythology was not only a source for the creation of philosophical concepts, but also served as a symbolic field on which complex reflections on the nature of the world, man, and his place in the cosmos were developed. This process of reinterpretation became a powerful stimulus for the development of Chinese thought, which led to the emergence of such major schools as Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism. Moreover, in Chinese mythology, one can see a deep connection with the ideas of power and the moral responsibility of the ruler. This mythological principle was of great significance for Chinese political thought and led to the emergence of the concept of government's responsibility to the people, which influenced many aspects of Chinese statehood.

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