

Original Paper

A Comparative Cross-Cultural Study of Soyinka and Mo Yan from the Perspective of Mythological Narrative —Also on the New Pathways of China-Africa People-to-People Exchange

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Abstract

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this study selects the works of Wole Soyinka, the 1986 Nobel laureate in Literature and representative writer of Yoruba culture, and Mo Yan, the Chinese Nobel laureate in Literature, as research objects. Taking mythological narrative as the analytical vehicle and employing mythological archetypal criticism, postcolonial criticism, comparative literary criticism, and cross-cultural communication theories, this paper systematically examines the narrative systems and communicative characteristics of Yoruba mythology and ancient Chinese mythology, comparing their commonalities and differences. The study reveals the internal logic and communicative advantages of mythological narrative as a unique vehicle for China-Africa cross-cultural communication, excavating the cross-cultural resonance points between Chinese and African cultures in terms of life cognition, views of nature, and collective values. On this basis, from the dimensions of literary creation and cultural communication, it constructs innovative pathways for China-Africa cross-cultural communication with mythological narrative as a bridge, providing literary theoretical references for deepening China-Africa people-to-people exchanges.

Keywords

Cross-cultural communication, China-Africa people-to-people exchanges, Mo Yan, Soyinka, Mythological narrative

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalisation, intercultural communication has become a core pathway to

building political mutual trust between nations and advancing the exchanges and mutual learning between civilisations. As important birthplaces of human civilisation and core components of the Global South, China and Africa have developed intercultural communication practices, which lay the humanistic foundation for the building of a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future, and serve as a vital sample of equal cultural dialogue among countries of the Global South. While both sides boast time-honoured cultural traditions and rich mythological systems, the current China-Africa intercultural communication is still plagued by issues such as the excessive dominance of political and economic narratives, the limited carriers of cultural narratives, and the insufficient international communication adaptability of local cultural symbols. Scholars have pointed out that throughout history, negative narratives about China such as “neo-colonialism”, “debt trap theory”, and “production capacity pollution theory” have invariably taken Africa as the origin and main battlefield, yet domestic scholars remain in a state of unclear research focus, narrow vision, and limited research investment in this regard. There is a stark contrast between the upsurge of practical China-Africa cooperation and the relative stagnation of research on China-oriented communication to Africa (Hu & Jing, 2025). In addition, domestic systematic intercultural research on African local culture is relatively weak, leaving the in-depth China-Africa cultural dialogue inadequate theoretical and practical support.

As the first Black African Nobel Laureate in Literature, Wole Soyinka constructs his works with Yoruba mythology as the core narrative carrier. Through the modern reconstruction of local mythology, he has realised the global dissemination of African indigenous culture. Mo Yan, China’s first Nobel Prize winner in Literature, roots his writing deeply in Chinese folk mythology, rural culture, and traditional philosophy. He integrates ancient Chinese mythological archetypes, folk beliefs, and modern narrative techniques to construct a literary narrative system with distinct Chinese characteristics (Zhang, 2022). Both writers take mythological narrative as the core creative approach and have realised the worldwide dissemination of local cultural symbols, making their works high-quality text samples for the study of China-Africa intercultural communication.

At present, foreign research on Soyinka mostly focuses on postcolonial and feminist perspectives, lacking an analysis of the intercultural communication mechanisms of his mythological narratives. Domestic research on Mo Yan has formed a complete system, but there are few intercultural communication studies that combine his mythological narratives with African literature, and even fewer explorations of China-Africa cultural communication paths using the two writers as samples. Based on this, this study takes intercultural communication theory as the framework, integrating research methods such as mythological archetypal criticism and narratology, systematically analysing the characteristics of Soyinka’s and Mo Yan’s mythological narratives, and exploring the intercultural communication advantages of mythological narrative, aiming to provide new narrative ideas and practical solutions for cultural dialogue between China and countries of the Global South.

2. Narrative Characteristics and Intercultural Communication Mechanisms of Yoruba Mythology in Wole Soyinka's Works

Wole Soyinka is an iconic writer who has brought African literature to the attention of the wider world. His works span numerous genres, including drama, poetry, novels and literary criticism, and he has developed a unique “mythic poetics” and “ritual theatre”, rooted in Yoruba culture. Deeply influenced by the legends, religious beliefs and traditional customs of the Yoruba tribe, Soyinka integrates Western dramatic art with indigenous African elements such as music, dance and rituals. This fusion not only opens up a new path for modern African theatre, but also enables the global dissemination of Yoruba mythology—a central cultural symbol of indigenous Africa—through the literary form.

As a pioneer in the reconstruction of African national culture, Soyinka has unearthed, restored and creatively transformed Yoruba mythology. His works, such as *A Dance of the Forests* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, incorporate the Yoruba conceptions of the origin of the world, the meaning of life and the order of the universe. Having grown up in Yoruba society under Western colonial rule and received a systematic Western education and literary training, Soyinka created literary work deeply influenced by traditional Yoruba culture, Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian civilisations, and modern Western culture, thus exhibiting a pluralistic character (Ghazoul, 2025).

For example, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, the ritual suicide of Elesin Oba is inextricably linked to the concept of the *Fourth Stage* in Yoruba mythology. This narrative not only illustrates the Yoruba people's respect for tradition and the cosmic order, but also reflects the clash between traditional African culture and modern civilisation (Gao, 2011). Through this artistic approach, Soyinka enables the cultural significance of Yoruba mythology to transcend geographical boundaries and become an essential window through which readers worldwide can understand African culture. His works are not only classics of African literature, but also texts of great value for the intercultural communication of Yoruba mythology; furthermore, his Nobel Prize has propelled this indigenous African cultural symbol into the heart of the dominant global cultural narrative.

Yoruba mythology is a central element of the traditional beliefs and culture of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Drawing on the traditional Yoruba cosmological division between the “ancestral world”, the “world of the living” and the “world of the unborn”, Soyinka creatively proposed the concept of the *Fourth Space*, emphasising that these three worlds can be connected by this dimension, thereby constructing a worldview based on reincarnation and animism (Chen, 2016). These cultural symbols are closely linked to the beliefs and values of the Yoruba people, as well as to their situations and reflections within modern society. His unique narrative not only enriches the landscape of world literature, but also offers a new perspective for Sino-African cultural exchanges.

Yoruba mythology is based on polytheism and centres on a distinctive pantheon comprising Ogun (god of iron, war and creation), Obatala (creator god), Eshu (god of destiny), Nanan Buluku (god of rain and death) and Yemanya (goddess of the sea and childbirth), each governing different aspects of nature, power and destiny. Among them, Ogun, as the first conqueror of the *Fourth Space*, occupies a central

place in Soyinka's theoretical system (Gao, 2011). Unlike the detached and transcendent deities of Western mythology, the gods of Yoruba mythology are not abstract supernatural beings, but closely linked to agricultural production, metalworking, tribal rituals and the collective values of the Yoruba people. This 'divinity in everyday life' lends Yoruba mythology a clarity in intercultural communication. Furthermore, Yoruba mythology is deeply embedded in rituals, which constitute the primary vehicle for its transmission. Through sacrifices, dances and masked processions, the cultural connotations of Yoruba mythology are passed down from generation to generation. This characteristic of *ritualised* communication transforms Yoruba mythology into an experiential and participatory cultural symbol, enabling the concrete transformation of its intercultural dissemination.

Soyinka's narrative transformation of Yoruba mythology is the key to its intercultural communication. The core of his strategy is to retain the cultural connotations of Yoruba mythology, adapt it to the narrative form of modern literature, and realise the cross-cultural communication empowerment of Yoruba mythology by reconstructing deity images, reproducing ritual scenes, and expressing cosmology literarily, thus elevating Yoruba mythology from African folk tradition to modern literature. The first strategy is the modern reconstruction of deity images, from folk belief symbols to carriers of cross-cultural identity expression. Soyinka integrates the deities in Yoruba mythology with the dilemmas of modernity and the anxiety of national identity of African society in the postcolonial era, transforming abstract deities into symbols of cultural resistance and identity expression. For example, Ogun is transformed from a mere god of iron and war into a symbol of traditional indigenous African culture in his works. In his rewriting, Soyinka emphasises Ogun's dual nature, destruction-creation attributes, and collective consciousness similar to Dionysus, as well as his purificatory and redemptive function similar to the scapegoat, which embodies the hope of new life (Tan, 2019). Elesin Oba's ritual suicide becomes an adherence to the traditional power represented by Ogun, reflecting the cultural identity anxiety of African nations under the impact of colonial culture. The Abiku, in turn, is transformed from an ominous spirit in folklore into a symbol of the uncertain fate of the African nation during colonial and modern transformation. Through this transformation, global readers can understand the social reality of Africa through these deity images.

The second strategy is the literary reproduction of ritual scenes, from living folk customs to the core driving force of narrative construction. Soyinka integrates traditional Yoruba rituals into his literary creations, and presents the cultural connotation of Yoruba mythology in a scene-based way through detailed depictions of rituals such as the harvest festival, purification rituals, and Egungun mask parades. Scholars have pointed out that Soyinka's dramatic concept is not divorced from reality, but regards ritual as a dynamic way of viewing reality with revolutionary potential (Cheng, 2025). For example, the harvest festival ritual in *A Dance of the Forests* demonstrates the harmonious coexistence between the Yoruba people and nature through the sacrificial scene of singing and dancing; the purification ritual in *The Road* runs through the full text as a hidden line, centring on the street sacrifice of Ogun, the god of the road, to metaphorise the social crisis and spiritual dilemma of Africa nations in

the postcolonial era (Zhao, 2022). These ritual scenes not only become the core driving force of the narrative, but also allow global readers to perceive intuitively the spiritual core and realistic orientation of Yoruba culture.

The third strategy is the cross-cultural expression of cosmology, from tribal philosophy to universal time-space narratives. In his works, Soyinka creatively presents and universally expresses the *Fourth Space* cosmology of Yoruba mythology through literature, enabling dialogues between ancestors, the living, and the unborn in the *Fourth Space* and breaking the traditional linear temporal and spatial narrative. In his analysis of Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*, renowned Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah incisively explains the Yoruba temporal and spatial structure: "The African time structure described by Soyinka is not a bipolar opposition; it is not linear but cyclical... its direction is a reversible cycle." He further reveals the essence of the *Fourth Space*: the fourth dimension is the meeting place of the thoughts of the past and the dreams of the future, where the wisdom of the ancestors and the aspirations of the unborn converse, thus providing a basis for the actions of the living (Armah, 2021). This narrative innovation not only fully retains the core connotations of the life-death cycle and the interconnection of all things in Yoruba cosmology, but also conforms to the aesthetic paradigm of Western modernist and absurdist literature, transforming the indigenous philosophy originally limited to Yoruba tribes into a universal reflection on life that can be understood and empathised with by global audiences.

Soyinka's Yoruba mythological narrative provides an important textual paradigm and communication experience for the intercultural communication of indigenous African culture, and its value is reflected in the following three aspects.

First, it breaks the Western stereotypes of African culture. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka put forward the "outlook of civilisations equality", regarding Yoruba mythology and Greek mythology as equivalents—Ogun is shaped as "the combination of Dionysus, Apollo and Prometheus"—to counter the colonial prejudice that "Africa has no civilisation" (Song, 2024). Through the in-depth narrative of Yoruba mythology, he presents the complete philosophical system, profound thinking on life, and rich spiritual connotation of indigenous African culture to the world, replacing the backward and primitive image of African culture constructed by Western media, realising the independent expression of African culture, and providing a classic model for the Global South to break the Western discourse monopoly and construct an independent cultural narrative system.

Second, it constructs intercultural communication symbols for indigenous African culture. Yoruba mythological symbols such as the god Ogun, the Abiku, purification rituals, and the *Fourth Space* have been transformed from tribal religious images into important symbols for the world to understand African culture through Soyinka's literary adaptation. Ogun's mythopoesis and the *Fourth Space* theory have become important ideological resources for the Afrofuturism trend (Okoye, 2021), while the Abiku, as an intermediary between life and death, has been repeatedly cited as a symbolic symbol to interpret the postcolonial survival experience of Africa, providing identifiable and transmittable cultural

carriers for the intercultural communication of African culture.

Third, it explores the path of modern communication for indigenous culture. Scholars have conducted a comprehensive and systematic study of Soyinka's dramatic creation from the perspective of comparative literature and cross-cultural exchange, focusing on his inheritance and application of African religious mythology and traditional art, exploring his acceptance, rejection, resistance, and transcendence of Western religion, culture, and art, and clarifying his transcendence and innovation in the integration of African and European cultures (Chen, 2015). By combining Yoruba mythology with modern literature and drama, Soyinka realises the modern transformation of indigenous culture and the independent expression of cultural subjectivity in equal dialogue, providing a reference for the intercultural communication of indigenous culture in the Global South: when mythological narrative is transformed from "a spectacle to be watched" into "a perspective to view the world", indigenous culture gains the subjective power to participate in global dialogue.

3. Narrative Characteristics and Intercultural Communication Practices in Chinese Mythology within the Works of Mo Yan

As the first Chinese winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Mo Yan grounds his writing deeply in Chinese folk mythology, rural culture and traditional philosophy. Taking his hometown as his geographical setting, he integrates Chinese mythological elements such as the retelling of the flood, the transformation of life and the cult of reproduction with indigenous cultural symbols, notably the Six Realms of Existence and folk legends about ghosts. This integration achieves a modern narrative transformation of Chinese mythology and constructs a literary narrative system with distinct Chinese characteristics, making his works a classic example for the international communication of Chinese mythology and popular culture.

Furthermore, Mo Yan's works blend traditional Chinese culture with elements of Western magical realism, thereby facilitating the modernisation of local traditional literature and the localisation of foreign literature (Qi, 2017). In the speech delivered at the award ceremony for the Nobel Prize in Literature to Mo Yan in 2012, the term *Hallucinatory Realism* was used to summarise his creative style, thereby demonstrating the unique value of his literary work (Qi, 2020). An Armenian researcher examines Mo Yan's poetics within the context of the transnational dissemination of magical realism, proposing that his hallucinatory realism be interpreted as a localised form of magical realism rooted in corporeality and sensory experience, thereby extending magical realism beyond its Latin American origins and highlighting Mo Yan's contribution to world literature as well as the importance of the Chinese narrative experience for contemporary comparative literary studies (Gonchar-Khanjyan, 2025). In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, Mo Yan uses the "Six Realms of Existence" as a narrative framework, depicting the changes in Chinese society through the reincarnation of Ximen Nao, whilst incorporating traditional Chinese concepts of the cycle of life and karma. *The Floods of Autumn* draws inspiration from flood mythology, using the image of "the blind white girl arriving in a clay pot" to

echo the symbol of the “gourd” in Chinese flood mythology, suggesting the rebirth of life after disaster. *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* incorporates folk legends about ghosts to present the unique imagination of Chinese popular culture concerning life, death and the soul. Mo Yan’s works are not only representative of contemporary Chinese literature in China, but have also been widely translated and disseminated across the globe, with versions in over 50 languages. Their publication and circulation in many African countries have made Chinese mythology and popular culture important cultural symbols that enable Africans to understand China, thereby providing an essential textual foundation for Sino-African intercultural communication.

Ancient Chinese mythology has a long history and diverse contexts, encompassing a wide range of themes, including the origin of the universe, the birth of humanity, heroic struggles and the worship of nature. Its essence lies in the cosmological concept of the unity between humanity and nature, the social ideal of a world dedicated to the common good, a human-centred value system, and the spiritual pursuit of ceaseless self-improvement. These elements constitute an important cultural foundation and spiritual resource for strengthening cultural confidence, promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of China’s excellent traditional culture, building the Chinese narrative system, and telling Chinese stories to the world (Su & Wen, 2026).

Rather than forming a monolithic system, the myths and legends of ancient China incorporate primordial, folk, religious and literary myths, and are characterised by a diversity and open-mindedness that enable them to adapt to different contexts of intercultural communication. Furthermore, the heart of their narrative lies in the value of humanity, emphasising man’s subjective initiative and the struggle against fate. Myths such as *Hou Yi Shooting the Suns*, *Yu the Great Controlling the Floods*, and *Jingwei Filling the Sea* all illustrate the human spirit of struggle in the face of nature and adversity. This humanistic narrative core aligns with the universal values of humanity, thus becoming the major asset in the intercultural communication of Chinese myths and legends.

The myths and legends of ancient China were passed down to the people mainly through written texts and oral tradition, their mythological elements becoming woven into everyday life, folk traditions and the oral literature of the people. Mo Yan himself has stated that he “read with his ears” from a very young age, listening to the countless fairy tales and ghost stories circulating amongst the people. The coastal geography of the Qi region and its vast natural landscapes have stimulated a rich local imagination, with numerous myths and legends circulating amongst the people for thousands of years (Li, 2024). This folkloric character gives Chinese myths and legends a broad popular base and enables the concrete transformation of their intercultural communication.

Mo Yan’s narrative reinterpretation of Chinese mythology represents a major exploration of its modernisation and intercultural communication. At the heart of his strategy lies the integration of classical Chinese mythological archetypes with China’s historical reality and rural life, and the transformation of Chinese mythology from traditional classics into contemporary literature, through the creation of mythological characters, the development of mythological plots and the modern use of

mythological imagery, making it a high-quality vehicle for the intercultural communication of Chinese culture.

The first strategy is the localised shaping of mythological characters. Mo Yan combines the archetypes of Chinese mythological characters with ordinary individuals in rural society, creating characters with mythological overtones that are close to reality. For example, Ximen Nao in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, who lived a thrifty and charitable life, was wrongfully killed in a special historical period. Unconvinced, he went to hell to appeal his case, and experienced the “The Six Realms of Existence”, his memories faded and his hatred dissipated through lifetimes of practice (Chu, 2019).

His reincarnation from a landlord to animals and finally to a human being not only relies on the Buddhist mythological archetype of reincarnation, but also makes him a witness to the changes in China’s rural society. Yan Yan in *The Soaring One* breaks the male-centred tradition of the “winged man” myth in China through the magical image of “a cotton-padded jacket turning into wings”, becoming a new mythological symbol of female awakening, enabling global readers to understand the social changes and the evolution of folk humanistic spirit in China through these characters.

The second strategy is the realistic construction of mythological plots. Mo Yan combines the plot archetypes of Chinese mythology with the historical memory and rural reality of China, constructing “fantastic yet realistic” narrative plots, through which the cultural connotation of Chinese mythology is expressed via historical reality. For example, in *Radish*, the boy Hei Hai’s synaesthetic experience of the “transparent carrot” corresponds to the mythological thinking of “interaction between subject and object” in *Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas*. Mo Yan combines the harsh reality of the construction site with the mythical spiritual pursuit, making natural divinity a spiritual redemption for individual suffering (Li, 2024), allowing readers to understand the realistic dilemma of rural China through the magical plot. The image of the Bird Immortal in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* originates from the Land of the birdmen in *Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas* and the folk legend of “souls transforming into birds after death” The plot of the third sister turning into the Bird Immortal to heal the sick reflects the spiritual struggle of Chinese women in historical turmoil, making the mythological plot an important carrier of historical narrative.

The third strategy is the symbolic application of mythological images. Mo Yan carries out modern transformation of the core images in Chinese mythology, turning them into intercultural communication symbols of Chinese culture. For example, the clay doll worship ritual in *Frog* corresponds to the mythological archetype of “Nuwa kneading clay to create human beings”—Aunt, overwhelmed by guilt for inducing abortions on 2,800 babies, asks her husband Hao Dashou to mould 2,800 clay dolls, which she worships with incense every day in the hope that they can be reincarnated as soon as possible (Li, 2024). The plot in *The Floods of Autumn* where “the flood destroys the homeland, and the blind white girl arrives in an earthen jar” echoes the original image of “gourd or earthen jar carrying life to avoid flood” in Chinese flood mythology, and the core of “disaster and rebirth” is a universal human experience, making this image a cross-cultural metaphor that can be understood by readers

around the world, breaking through cultural barriers.

Mo Yan's literary creation with mythological narrative as the core provides a highly representative practical model for the intercultural communication of Chinese mythology and folk culture. His Nobel Prize win not only pushed Chinese mythology into the global mainstream cultural vision, but also achieved an important breakthrough in the intercultural communication of Chinese culture.

In terms of communication practice, Mo Yan's works have been translated into more than 50 languages and published in many African countries including Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, becoming important texts for African people to understand Chinese folk culture. Egyptian sinologist Hassanen Fahimi Housain stated that his Arabic translation of Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum* has had a wide impact in the Arab world, setting off a new upsurge in the dissemination of Chinese literature. In recent years, a large number of young scholars have been actively engaged in the translation of Chinese literature into Arabic, enabling readers in Arab countries to understand Chinese culture and society more truly and deeply (Li, 2025). Meanwhile, Mo Yan himself has made many trips to Africa for cultural exchanges. During his visit to Kenya in 2023, he said, "In literature, people's hearts are also connected. There is great potential for China-Africa cooperation in the literary field waiting to be tapped."

In terms of communication effect, Mo Yan's mythological narrative works have transformed the communication of Chinese culture from "symbol display" to "connotation interpretation", allowing African readers to understand Chinese folk beliefs, rural culture, and national spirit through the mythological elements in his works, and breaking stereotypes about China. As Mo Yan said in his dialogue with Abdulrazak Gurnah, writers should "seek irreplaceable resources from the traditions of their own nation, and on the basis of inheriting and carrying forward the literary traditions of their own nation, make literature truly go to the world" (Zu, 2024). Mo Yan's creative method provides important experience for the intercultural communication of Chinese culture: rooting in the core of local culture, combining universal themes, and adapting to modern narrative forms. This experience has become an important reference for China-Africa intercultural communication.

4. Cross-Cultural Comparison of the Mythological Narratives of Wole Soyinka and Mo Yan

The mythological narrative works of Wole Soyinka and Mo Yan have both realised the worldwide dissemination of local cultural symbols, making them high-quality local texts for China-Africa intercultural communication. The two show significant commonalities in the intercultural communication characteristics of their mythological narratives, while there are also obvious differences due to their different cultural backgrounds and communication contexts. This "harmony in diversity" provides an important reference for the path design of China-Africa intercultural communication.

4.1 Cross-Cultural Resonance of Mythological Narrative Themes

The mythological narratives of Soyinka and Mo Yan show a deep spiritual resonance at the thematic level. In *Studies on Oriental Nobel Literature*, Hou Chuanwen and Wang Ruliang point out that as the "Shakespeare of Africa", Soyinka's creation is always permeated with "metaphysical care and

reflection on human nature”. This care echoes in four dimensions with Mo Yan’s life philosophy rooted in the folk land, using mythological elements to inquire into individual existence and national destiny. The first point of resonance concerns the view of life, death and reincarnation. Soyinka’s Yoruba mythological narrative emphasises the cycle of the *Three Worlds*, whilst Mo Yan constructs his narrative in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* around the “Six Realms of Existence”. Both engage in a profound reflection on life, death and rebirth, thus illustrating the shared quest for the continuity of life among the Chinese and African peoples.

The second point of resonance concerns the ecological vision of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The *animism* of Yoruba mythology and the concept of “harmony between humanity and nature” in Chinese mythology both emphasise that human beings are part of nature. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the forest is the dwelling place of the gods, and the harvest festival sacrifice must be performed at the forest’s edge to fulfil the offering to the gods and the consolation of the ancestors; Mo Yan, for his part, portrays the red sorghum field in *Red Sorghum* as a sacred space endowed with its own consciousness and vitality (Song, 2025). Both writers express humanity’s respect for nature through mythological narratives, which aligns with the universal value of global ecological governance. The third theme concerns the relationship between collective values and individual destiny. In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Soyinka highlights the importance of individual sacrifice for the survival of the group through the funeral ritual of Elesin Oba (Yin, 2021). Mo Yan, in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, links the vicissitudes of the Shangguan family over more than a century to the broader historical trajectory of the Chinese nation in the modern era, thereby intertwining individual destiny with national history (Wang, 2024). Both demonstrate the importance attached to collective values in Chinese and African societies, and this dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective has become a valuable link for Sino-African intercultural communication.

The fourth resonance is critical engagement with social reality. In his poem *Idanre*, Soyinka draws on Yoruba mythology, taking Ogun as a patron saint to attempt a reconstruction of the self and a construction of the nation, translating the traits and symbols of Ogun in Yoruba mythology into an interpretation of the political status quo of postcolonial African society (Ndaba, 2003). Mo Yan reflects on historical changes and the individual fate of rural Chinese society through mythological narratives, addresses the various dilemmas of modern China through the world of folklore, and ceaselessly explores the trend towards modernity in Chinese society and history. This narrative characteristic, which integrates indigeneity, contemporaneity and criticism, liberates the mythological narrative from the niche category of folk legends and transforms it into a text of intercultural communication capable of resonating with a global audience.

4.2 Cross-Cultural Adaptability of Mythological Narrative Art

Soyinka and Mo Yan present the characteristic of “harmony in diversity” in their narrative forms: the “harmony” lies in their common breakthrough of linear narrative and widespread use of symbolism and metaphor, while the “diversity” is rooted in the differences in their respective cultural genes and

creative media. This difference is not a barrier to communication, but precisely provides diverse formal choices for China-Africa intercultural communication.

Both writers break through the linear narrative model. Soyinka constructs a transcendental temporal and spatial structure through “ritual”, enabling dialogues between ancestors, the living, and the unborn in the *Fourth Space in A Dance of the Forests*, breaking the temporal boundary between past, present, and future. Mo Yan uses the “The Six Realms of Existence” narrative in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, allowing Ximen Nao’s soul to travel between different life forms and view the human world from the perspective of animals (Chen & Xiong, 2019). This non-linear narrative method not only conforms to the aesthetic consensus of global modern literature since the 20th century, but also breaks the language and cultural barriers in China-Africa intercultural communication.

Symbolism and metaphor are common artistic techniques used by both writers. The god Ogun is the embodiment of iron and the road, as well as the unity of creation and war, bearing the African nation’s complex imagination of power and destiny; the Abiku, as a wanderer between life and death, is endowed with a metaphorical function of national fate in the postcolonial context (Song, 2019). Mo Yan’s symbolic images are rooted in the collective memory of rural China: “red sorghum” evolves from a crop into a metaphorical space for the Chinese nation's spirit of resistance; the “clay dolls”, originally bearing the function of reproduction worship and childbirth blessing, become a spiritual medium carrying individual confession, life redemption, and reflection on historical trauma.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Dialogue of the Cultural Connotation of Mythological Narrative

The essence of Soyinka’s and Mo Yan’s mythological narratives is the independent expression of the indigenous culture of the Chinese and African nations.

Soyinka’s creation is always permeated with a sense of cultural resistance. His works reflect both the “adherence to national artistic forms” and the “confusion in cultural choice”, which is the spiritual portrayal of African intellectuals in the postcolonial context. He integrates Yoruba mythology with modern drama, and carries out “reverse writing” of Western classics based on the indigenous cosmology—Ogun is shaped as “the combination of Dionysus, Apollo and Prometheus”, enabling Yoruba culture and Greek culture to illuminate each other in equal dialogue. Mo Yan also seeks a balance between tradition and modernity. He frankly stated that “the maturity of a writer should be when he has developed his own unique narrative tone that is indistinguishable from others” (Qi, 2023), and the root of this tone lies in folk myths and legends and rural culture.

Intercultural communication is by no means a simple retro and symbolic display of indigenous traditional culture, but requires the in-depth integration of the core of local culture with modern narrative forms, as well as the dialogue and connection between local cultural values and the universal values of the world. Soyinka combined Yoruba mythology with modern Western dramatic forms and creatively pioneered a new form of “ritual theatre”; Mo Yan combined magical realism with Chinese mythology and folk legends to create a literary style with Chinese characteristics (Li, 2025). The creative practices of both writers prove that only by rooting in the spiritual core of local culture and

responding to the universal propositions common to all mankind can indigenous culture truly break through geographical and linguistic barriers and realise effective intercultural communication.

4.4 Differences between Cultural Traditions and Modes of Communication

There are significant cultural differences between the two in terms of mythological systems and cosmology. Soyinka's narrative draws on the Yoruba mythological cosmology of the "Three Worlds + Fourth Space", emphasising the cycle of the ancestral world, the world of the living and the world of the unborn, as well as the dimensional connection achieved through rituals, the heart of which lies in the cultural connotations of *animism* and *collective sacrifice*. Mo Yan's narrative incorporates ancient Chinese mythology, Buddhist reincarnation and rural folk beliefs, with a central cosmology of "harmony between humanity and nature" and "life and death", emphasising secular ethics and the primal force of life. This difference in cultural DNA means that the intercultural communication of their mythological narratives must adapt to different cultural contexts.

The two authors have different approaches in terms of narrative style and medium of communication. Soyinka focuses on dramatic creation, and his mythological narrative has a ritualised character. Rituals of purification and atonement form the fundamental elements of Soyinka's "ritual theatre", symbolising the moral salvation and religious redemption of the ethnic group (Song, 2019). This ritualised narrative is conveyed through stage performances, making it more suited to offline cultural exchanges and artistic performances. Mo Yan focuses on fictional writing, and his mythological narrative has a magical quality. An Italian researcher has examined the supernatural dimension of Mo Yan's short stories, noting that Mo Yan borrows themes from the *Strange Tales from Liao-zhai* whilst demonstrating stylistic innovation (Tizzano, 2024). This method of textual communication is better suited to interlingual translation, publishing and digital communication.

The two have different orientations in terms of communication themes and cultural appeals. The core of Soyinka's mythological narrative is the identity reconstruction and resistance of indigenous African culture, and his appeal in intercultural communication is to break the Western imagination of Africa, spread the unique value of indigenous Africa to the world, and realise the independent global expression of African culture. The core of Mo Yan's mythological narrative is the historical memory and life ontology writing of Chinese folk society, and his appeal in intercultural communication is to establish a contemporary Chinese narratology tradition that transcends Western narratology theories, show the richness and diversity of Chinese folk culture to the world, break the one-dimensional narrative of China in the West, and construct a three-dimensional and vivid international image of Chinese culture.

5. Path Enlightenment for China-Africa Intercultural Communication from the Perspective of Mythological Narrative

Based on the comparative study of the mythological narratives of Soyinka and Mo Yan, the following three enlightenments for China-Africa intercultural communication can be extracted.

First, mythological narrative is an effective carrier to awaken the modern vitality of indigenous culture. Soyinka combines Yoruba mythology with modern Western dramatic forms, and Mo Yan integrates Chinese folk mythology with the magical realism narrative paradigm. Their creative practices show that mythological narrative is by no means a simple cultural retro, but the in-depth integration of the core of local culture with modern narrative forms. China-Africa intercultural communication should learn from this experience, promote the modern transformation of local mythology, and organise joint creation by writers and artists from both sides with mythology as the material, so that ancient mythology can become a cultural resource to observe reality, rather than an exhibit in a museum.

Second, the expression of universal themes is the key to breaking down the barriers to intercultural communication. The Abiku in Soyinka's works symbolises the memory of national trauma, and the Six Paths of Reincarnation in Mo Yan's works metaphorise the symbiotic relationship between human beings and the land—both touch upon the universal propositions faced by all mankind, such as life, death, and fate, through mythological elements. China-Africa intercultural communication should focus on exploring the universal values in the cultures of both sides, taking the common emotions of mankind as the link, rather than staying at the level of displaying exotic customs. Intercultural communication truly achieves spiritual arrival only when African readers read the inquiry into life itself in Chinese mythology, and Chinese readers touch the depth of the African spirit in the lines of Yoruba mythology.

Third, diverse narrative forms adapt to diverse communication scenarios. Soyinka's "ritualised narrative" relies on the on-site appeal of the stage, suitable for offline cultural exchanges and art performances; Mo Yan's "magical narrative" realises cross-temporal communication through words, with more advantages in translation, publishing, and digital communication. China-Africa intercultural communication needs both Soyinka's "ritual" and Mo Yan's "words". The former allows African people to feel the warmth of Chinese culture in drum beats and dances, while the latter allows Chinese readers to touch the depth of the African spirit in the lines of Yoruba mythology. This is the true enlightenment of "harmony in diversity" for intercultural communication: difference is not a barrier, but the foundation for dialogue to unfold.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

From the core perspective of intercultural communication, this study takes the mythological narrative works of Wole Soyinka and Mo Yan as research samples, systematically analyses the narrative characteristics and intercultural communication mechanisms of Yoruba mythology and ancient Chinese mythology, compares the cross-cultural resonance points and differences between their mythological narratives, and explores the inherent logic and advantages of mythological narrative as a carrier for China-Africa intercultural communication. The study finds that both Soyinka and Mo Yan have realised the modern transformation and worldwide dissemination of indigenous culture through mythological narrative, and their creative practices reveal the inherent logic of mythology as a unique carrier for intercultural communication. On this basis, this study extracts three enlightenments: mythological

narrative activates the vitality of indigenous culture, universal themes break through communication barriers, and diverse narrative forms adapt to diverse scenarios, providing a reference for the deepening of China-Africa intercultural communication.

The innovation of this study lies in the combination of mythological narrative research in the field of literature and intercultural communication research in the field of communication studies, filling the gap in domestic research on the intercultural communication of Wole Soyinka's Yoruba mythological narrative, and providing a new narrative perspective for China-Africa intercultural communication. Future research can be further deepened in three aspects: first, expanding the research samples to explore more mythological narrative works of Chinese and African writers for a broader comparative study; second, strengthening empirical research through questionnaires and in-depth interviews to examine the cognitive status and communication effect of Chinese and African people on each other's mythological culture, to provide empirical support for the optimisation of communication strategies; third, focusing on technological integration to explore new paths of intelligent and immersive communication of China-Africa mythological narratives combined with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the metaverse, to promote the innovative development of China-Africa intercultural communication in the digital age.

The core of China-Africa intercultural communication is equal mutual trust and mutual learning between civilisations, and mythological narrative, as a common treasure of Chinese and African national cultures, will serve as an important bridge for China-Africa intercultural communication. Taking mythological narrative as the starting point to promote the in-depth dialogue between Chinese and African cultures can not only deepen China-Africa people-to-people and cultural exchanges, but also provide a paradigm for cultural dialogue among the Global South, and offer cultural support for the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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