

Original Paper

Mythology: A Bridge for Civilizational DNA and Mutual Learning – A Comparative Study of Greek and Chinese Mythology

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Abstract

As foundational pillars of Western and Eastern civilizations, Greek and Chinese mythologies encapsulate the distinct cultural genes of maritime and agrarian societies, respectively. This study conducts a systematic comparative analysis of these two mythological traditions, focusing on deity portrayal, hero narratives, and core themes. Central to this analysis is a fundamental dichotomy: Greek mythology's "anthropomorphic and polytheistic" worldview, which celebrates individual agency and acknowledges tragic fate, stands in contrast to Chinese mythology's "spiritualized and ethical" paradigm, which prioritizes collective welfare and harmonious order. Going beyond a mere delineation of differences, this research delves into their socio-geographic roots and philosophical underpinnings. Ultimately, it argues that these divergent narrative logics are not mutually exclusive but are complementary. The paper proposes concrete pathways for civilizational mutual learning, demonstrating how the interplay between Greek individualism and Chinese collectivism, between tragic consciousness and pragmatic spirit, can offer profound insights for addressing contemporary global challenges and fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

Keywords

Greek Mythology, Chinese Mythology, comparative mythology, cross-cultural communication, civilizational mutual learning, deity portrayal, hero narratives

1. Research Background and Significance

1.1 Research Background

Mythology, as the spiritual crystallization of humanity's collective childhood, represents a primal projection of a people's collective consciousness, embodying the cognitive modes and value systems inherent to the dawn of civilization. Greek and Chinese mythologies, serving as representative spiritual legacies of maritime and agrarian civilizations respectively, encapsulate the core reflections of these two great civilizations on the nature of the world, human existence, and social order through their divergent generative logics and cultural characteristics.

Within academic discourse, the comparison of Greek and Chinese mythology has consistently remained a core topic in cross-cultural studies. Early research predominantly focused on superficial differences in textual form, such as the systematic nature of Greek mythology versus the fragmented characteristics of Chinese myths. However, with the deepening of global civilizational dialogue, scholarly attention has shifted towards a deeper excavation of the causes of these differences and their underlying spiritual cores—ranging from the influence of geographical environments on mythological narratives, to the cultural psychology behind the images of deities, and to the divergent values reflected in hero narratives. These investigations have provided foundational theoretical support for civilizational mutual learning. As the field has matured, Sino-Greek mythological comparison has moved beyond the level of morphological description, with many scholars now analyzing the essence of differences by considering the social context of civilizational genesis. In her comparative analysis of texts such as *Genesis*, *Theogony*, the Pangu myth, and *Meige*, Yuan Xiuping (2017) observes that Western creation myths are characterized by a rigorous systematicity and a narrative logic centered on power struggles. In contrast, Chinese creation myths exhibit fragmented and naturalized features, with a pervasive emphasis on the labor and spirit of sacrifice of the deities. Yuan argues that this divergence in systematicity and spiritual traits is ultimately a product of the distinct survival logics inherent to maritime and agrarian civilizations, thereby providing a crucial perspective for understanding the fundamental schism between Chinese and Greek cultural roots.

In a practical context, while globalization has facilitated cultural integration, it has also given rise to barriers in civilizational understanding. Some groups, unfamiliar with the roots of heterogeneous cultures, fall into the cognitive trap of civilizational superiority. Mythology, as a carrier of cultural genes, with its inherent universal human spirit and unique value concepts, provides a natural medium for breaking down these cognitive barriers. Applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Mo Ningyuan (2013) identifies a systematic divergence in value orientations between Chinese and Greek mythology. Chinese mythology reflects inclinations towards collectivism, high power distance, and long-term orientation. Conversely, Greek mythology exhibits characteristics of individualism, low power distance, and short-term orientation. This comparative framework, grounded in cultural values, provides crucial methodological support for understanding civilizational differences at a deeper level and for constructing a dialogue based on equality.

1.2 Research Significance

In terms of its academic value, this research, through a systematic review of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Greek mythology across dimensions such as deity portrayal, hero narratives, and thematic expression, combined with an analysis of the causes of divergence based on the geographical and social features of their civilizational cradles, seeks to address a gap in existing studies by moving beyond emphasizing description of differences to providing explanatory analysis of their roots. It aims to furnish an analytical sample possessing both detail and systematicity for the fields of mythology and cross-cultural studies. Simultaneously, by exploring the spiritual commonalities between the two traditions, it can enrich the empirical support for the theory of the “collective unconscious.”

From a practical perspective, the study reveals the complementary value of the individual will in Greek mythology and the collective spirit in Chinese mythology, thereby offering a reservoir of diverse cultural wisdom for contemporary society. In the modern world, where awakened individual consciousness coexists with the need for collective cohesion, the spirit of resistance in Greek mythology and the concept of harmony in Chinese mythology can form a valuable complement. Furthermore, shared themes such as heroic sacrifice and disaster response provide cultural frameworks for addressing global public crises and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

2. Conceptual Definitions

2.1 Greek Mythology

Greek mythology refers to the systematic body of oral traditions and literary narratives nurtured by ancient Greek civilization, constituting a core component of Western cultural DNA. Born from maritime trade and the polis culture surrounding the Aegean Sea, it is imbued with characteristics of confrontation between humanity and nature and the exaltation of individual will, as exemplified by the resistant spirit epitomized in Prometheus stealing fire and the sense of adventure manifested in the Twelve Labours of Heracles.

The most distinctive feature of Greek mythology is its anthropomorphism. The Greek gods were not merely endowed with idealized human forms but were also imbued with a full spectrum of human emotions and desires. Lust for power, as seen in Zeus; jealousy, in Hera; and vanity, in Aphrodite—all represent concentrated projections of human sentiments, reflecting the ancient Greeks’ candid exploration of human nature. In her analysis, Gao Hongying (2003) points out that Greek mythology constitutes a world of personified deities, where the gods are modeled entirely after humans, possessing human shapes, genders, thoughts, and emotions. This characteristic of “anthropomorphism and theomorphism” is intrinsically linked to the national psychology of ancient Greece’s maritime civilization, which fostered the awakening of individual consciousness and the emphasis on self-actualization.

Furthermore, Greek mythology is distinguished by its comprehensive genealogical structure. The Olympian pantheon, centered on Zeus, encompasses the twelve major gods, interconnected by clear

bloodlines and functional divisions, forming a logically self-consistent divine cosmos. This systematic theogony was consolidated in foundational works from the Homeric epics (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and Hesiod's *Theogony* to the rich tradition of Athenian drama. The individualism and profound consciousness of fate inherent in this mythological system have subsequently exerted a profound and enduring influence, forming the spiritual bedrock of much of Western literature, art, and philosophy.

2.2 Chinese Mythology

Chinese mythology encompasses the crystallized collective imagination of early Chinese civilization, characterized by its fragmented nature and historicization. Unlike the systematic corpus of Greek myths, its narratives are dispersed across ancient texts such as *The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhai Jing)*, *Huainanzi*, and *Liezi*, as well as folk legends. Through textual analysis, Chen Mengying (2019) suggests that the fragmented nature of Chinese mythology is not accidental but a product of the dispersed tribal culture inherent to agrarian civilization—where early tribes developed independent mythological narratives, lacking the social conditions for unified integration. This stands in sharp contrast to the systematic theogony fostered by Greek polis culture of Greece.

The portrayal of deities in Chinese mythology exhibits traits of spiritualization and ethicization. While some early deities retain the primitive therianthropic (human-animal) form, a legacy of totemic worship—such as Fuxi with a human head and snake body, or Shennong (the Divine Farmer, often identified with the Flame Emperor) with an ox's head and human form—the more defining characteristic is their transcendence of personal desires. They are predominantly constructed as symbolic representations of moral virtues and collective missions. In her research, Chen Ruina (2004) emphasizes the distinct human-centric spirit of Chinese mythology. The deities do not stand aloof from humanity but rather exist in harmony with them, serving as moral exemplars dedicated to human welfare. For instance, Pangu's body transformed into all things of the world after he separated heaven and earth; Nüwa created humans and mended the sky to save the world from calamity; Yu the Great tamed the floods to deliver people from disaster. This ethical orientation of “deities serving humanity” resonates deeply with the cosmology of “harmony between heaven and humanity” (*tian ren he yi*) inherent to Chinese agrarian civilization, ultimately forming a cultural trait fundamentally distinct from the theocentric and anthropomorphic spirit of Greek mythology.

Systematically, Chinese mythology lacks a unified genealogical structure like that of its Greek counterpart. Its deities are primarily connected through sociopolitical relationships of leadership and subordination, and their narratives are often seamlessly blended with historical accounts. A prime example is the figures of the “Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors” (*San Huang Wu Di*), who function simultaneously as mythical heroes and as constructed historical personages, embodying the didactic function of promoting core virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, propriety, and righteousness (*zhong, xiao, li, yi*). This fragmentation and historicization are intimately related to the pluralistic and integrated process of tribal consolidation in early Chinese civilization.

2.3 Civilizational Mutual Learning

Civilizational mutual learning refers to the process through which different civilizations, based on principles of equality and inclusiveness, achieve mutual understanding, draw lessons from one another, and develop synergistically through dialogue and exchange. Its core lies in acknowledging cultural differences while simultaneously discovering commonalities of the human spirit. Based on the general trend of the development of human civilization, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Xi Jinping has put forward the major proposition of “promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations”, emphasized the need to “foster a vision of civilizations that features equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness”, and made a series of important remarks such as “Civilizations are diversified, so they need to communicate; through communication, they learn from each other; and by learning from each other, they achieve development”. Following this principle, civilizational mutual learning is not simple cultural transplantation but rather a profound dialogue based on civilizational roots—one that respects the individual values of the West, represented by Greek mythology, while also cherishing the collective wisdom of the East, carried by Chinese mythology, thereby forming a complementary and symbiotic cultural ecology in the spirit of “harmony in diversity” (*he er bu tong*). As foundational texts of Eastern and Western civilizations, the comparative study of Chinese and Greek myths is a practice of civilizational mutual learning. By analyzing their similarities and differences, we can not only clarify the specific characteristics of each cultural DNA but also discover the universal wisdom inherent in the human response to existential challenges, thereby providing a tangible spiritual vehicle for cross-civilizational communication.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.1 Portrayal of Deities: Anthropomorphism vs. Spiritualization

Anthropomorphism stands as the most defining characteristic of Greek mythology, a creative logic that thoroughly humanizes the gods. In form, the Greek deities were endowed with perfect human appearances, establishing the fundamental perception that a god is the most beautiful human. The majesty of Zeus and the grace of Athena are extreme projections of human qualities. In emotion and behavior, the gods fully possess the entire spectrum of human passions and desires: Zeus frequently descended to earth in various disguises driven by lust, Hera persecuted Zeus’ lovers and illegitimate children out of jealousy, and the competition for the title of “the fairest goddess” among Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite directly ignited the Trojan War. The deities in Greek mythology “indulge in primal desires and revel unrestrainedly in the pleasures of the mortal world” (Gao, 2003, p. 193). Their actions are frequently driven by personal emotions and self-interest. This acknowledgment and exaltation of individual desires represent an early manifestation of the Greek principle of individuality and the embryonic concept of natural rights. Consequently, while possessing supernatural powers, the gods simultaneously exhibit human flaws, forming imperfect divine beings that reflect the ancient Greeks’ forthright engagement with the complexity of human nature.

In stark contrast to its Greek counterpart, the portrayal of deities in Chinese mythology exhibits distinct characteristics of spiritualization and symbolization. Morphologically, early deities often manifested as therianthropic, totemic beings. As Chen Ruina (2004) points out, the prominent feature of human-animal hybridity in Chinese mythology stems from its early origins and was “significantly influenced by totemic worship” (p. 78-79). This is exemplified by Fuxi and Nüwa, both depicted with human heads and serpent bodies, and Shennong, portrayed with an ox’s head and human form. This blended morphology reflects both the ancestors’ reverence for natural beings and an implicit connection between the divine and the natural world.

Fundamentally, these Chinese deities are constructed as incarnations of morality and mission on a spiritual level. The portrayal of divine figures carries a marked ethical inclination. These deities “do not consume earthly sustenance nor harbor mundane desires,” but are instead “sublime and sacred.” They “highly value the cultivation of moral character and virtuous conduct” (Chen, 2019, p. 241). This is evidenced by Pangu’s self-sacrifice in transforming his body into all things after separating heaven and earth, Shennong’s repeated brushes with death while tasting hundreds of herbs, and Yu the Great’s single-minded dedication to taming the floods, passing his own home three times without entering. In essence, Chinese deities are stripped of personal desires, becoming embodiments of morality and mission. Yu the Great’s action of bypassing his home entirely negates any personal familial obligation, while Shennong’s daily encounter with numerous poisons is driven purely by the motive of collective survival, devoid of any personal utilitarian consideration. The underlying logic of this portrayal equates divinity with virtue, transforming the deities into ethical exemplars for humanity to emulate, rather than serving as a mirror reflecting human nature itself.

3.2 Structure of Mythology: Systematic Genealogy vs. Fragmented Integration

From a systematic perspective, Greek mythology constructed a rigorous theogonic system: The Greek pantheon, as detailed in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, is a tightly-knit, hierarchical family with a clear genealogy stretching from primordial chaos (Chaos) through successive generations (Gaia, Uranus, the Titans) to the triumphant Olympians under Zeus. The gods are connected by clear bloodlines, forming distinct generational successions and divisions of function, constituting a self-consistent mythological world.

In contrast, Chinese mythology lacks a unified system, with deities scattered across disparate classical texts. For instance, the creation myth of Pangu recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* bears no direct narrative connection to the story of Nüwa mending the heavens in the *Huainanzi*. Similarly, the relationships between deities like the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) and the Flame Emperor (Yandi) vary significantly across different sources, presenting a distinctly fragmented, multi-sourced and core-less characteristic, which is intimately related to the pluralistic and integrated process of tribal consolidation in early Chinese civilization.

3.3 Hero Narratives: Divergent Value Orientations and Their Origins

3.3.1 Heroic Identity and Motivation

In Greek mythology, heroes are predominantly demi-gods, where divine lineage is the prerequisite for

their heroic status. For example, Heracles was the son of Zeus, King of the gods, and the mortal woman Alcmena, Queen of Thebes, which granted him innate superhuman strength. Achilles was the offspring of the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal king Peleus, his invulnerability forged by the waters of the River Styx. This identity intrinsically entwines the hero's actions with the will and conflicts of the gods: Heracles's Twelve Labours originated from Hera's jealousy, and Achilles's death in battle was foretold by prophecy. "Although the Greeks ostensibly emphasized the concept of the state and their society was superficially structured around the city-state, at their core, they prioritized individualism, pursuing personal worth, personal meaning, and personal dignity. Consequently, their heroes predominantly fought for individual glory and personal interests" (Ding, 2002, p. 89). Heracles undertook his labours to atone for a crime and prove his individual worth; Achilles's primary motive for joining the Trojan War was to secure eternal glory, even to the extent of endangering the entire Greek army by withdrawing over the loss of his personal war prize, Briseis, which he perceived as a profound public insult to his honor and status. This primacy of individual honor permeates the logic of Greek heroic narratives.

In contrast, heroes in Chinese mythology are entirely freed from the bonds of special bloodlines. Virtue and responsibility constitute their core identity. Heroes like Yu the Great, Houyi, and Shennong are fundamentally mortal. Their heroism stems from their voluntary assumption of collective suffering. Houyi shot down the suns not due to a divine oracle, but in response to the existential crisis of "ten suns scorching the earth, bringing calamity upon the people." Shennong's tasting of hundreds of herbs arose from the dire circumstances where "the people, starving, ate indiscriminately and were poisoned by toxic plants." Through a comparative analysis of heroes in Chinese and Greek mythology, Ding Shizhong (2002) indicates that the motivations of Chinese heroes are wholly directed towards collective benefit. Personal value is realized exclusively through contribution to the community: Yu the Great's flood control not only tamed the waters but also, by "demarcating the Nine Provinces," established an early social order; Shennong's self-sacrifice in tasting the herbs provided humanity with edible crops and medicinal plants, making him a spiritual symbol of devotion to the people.

3.3.2 Perception of Fate and Narrative Resolution

Greek heroic narratives are imbued with a tragic essence. This tragedy stems not from inadequacy, but from the inevitability of fate (*moira*). Oedipus actively fled his homeland to avoid the prophecy of patricide and incest, yet unknowingly fulfilled his destiny completely. Heracles, despite successfully completing his twelve labours, met a painful death caused by a poisoned robe, a trap set by Hera. This narrative logic of struggle inevitably ending in failure reflects the profound Greek recognition of the uncertainty of fate—even those possessing extraordinary power cannot escape their predetermined destiny, and the value of resistance lies solely in the struggle itself.

Chinese heroic narratives, conversely, follow a logic of moral causality, where the outcome is directly tied to virtue. Gun's failure in controlling the floods was not due to malevolent fate, but rather because his act of "stealing the swelling earth to block the waters" defied the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*) and was thus deemed a lack of virtue. His son, Yu, succeeded by adopting a strategy of channeling, aligning

his methods with the natural order and the Mandate, ultimately becoming a paradigm of virtue matching position. Even when tragic elements are present, they predominantly refer to personal sacrifice for the collective: Yu the Great's "thrice passing his home without entering" involved the sacrifice of familial bonds, but it resulted in the stability of the world. This form of tragedy is not perceived as the cruelty of fate but is transformed into a vehicle that highlights the sublimity of moral virtue.

3.3.3 Civilizational Roots of Divergence

The differences in these heroic narratives are fundamentally products of distinct civilizational environments and philosophical cognitions. Yin Xiaoyu (2007) provides an in-depth analysis of the civilizational roots underlying Chinese and Greek mythology from the perspective of cultural differences. She notes that China, "an ancient inland nation founded on agriculture, developed a national character that is insular, introspective, disciplined, and pragmatic. This inland civilization character shaped Chinese mythology to emphasize ethical order and collective harmony. In contrast, Greece, as a seafaring commercial society, possessed a national character that is passionate, unrestrained, and unconventional" (p. 278). This maritime civilization trait led Greek mythology to celebrate strength and pursue individuality.

This civilizational schism fundamentally molded the distinct identities, value orientations, and behavioral patterns of Chinese and Greek heroes. Within the competitive polis system, personal prowess and honor were directly linked to the city-state's standing. This environment led Greek mythology to emphasize both individual will and the unpredictable nature of fate. Yuan Xiuping (2017) supplements the analysis from the perspective of creation myths: Greek cosmogony centers on "dignity and authority" (as seen in Chaos giving birth to the gods and Zeus seizing power by overthrowing his father). This "individual authority-first" logic of creation directly shaped the value orientation of "struggling for personal honor" in the heroic narratives. The actions of Heracles and Achilles are, in essence, pursuits of individual authority and honor, a legacy directly inherited from the logic of gods contending for power in the creation myths.

Nevertheless, Chinese civilization originated in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins, where agricultural production depended on collective cooperation. Managing floods required unified, cross-tribal action, and land reclamation relied on communal labor. These survival needs shaped a collective-first value orientation. This collective spirit in Chinese mythology is deeply bound to the concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity" (*tian ren he yi*). Humans are not independent entities separate from nature but are organic components of both the natural and social worlds. The hero's mission is to maintain this harmonious order, not to break through it. This narrative of "collective interest superseding individual need" in Chinese mythology is essentially a dual manifestation of the agrarian civilization's survival logic and philosophical cognition, standing in sharp contrast to the Greek narrative of the individual breaking group constraints.

3.4 Core Themes: Universal Concerns, Divergent Expressions

Despite their significant differences, both Chinese and Greek mythologies grapple with fundamental

questions concerning human existence. A comparative analysis of their creation, flood, and sacrifice myths reveals a pattern of shared concerns addressed through divergent cultural logics.

The creation theme begins with a similar premise of primordial chaos. In Greek mythology, order emerges through a series of conflicts and power struggles, such as the castration of Uranus by Cronus and the patricide of Cronus by Zeus, reflecting a perception that struggle begets order. In contrast, the Chinese narrative, exemplified by Pangu separating heaven and earth and then transforming his body into the world, emphasizes creation through devotion and self-sacrifice, embodying an ideal of harmonious coexistence from the very beginning.

This pattern of divergent expression is equally evident in flood myths. The Greek deluge, faced by Deucalion, is a divine punishment, and survival depends on seeking refuge in an ark and Zeus's mercy, highlighting a theme of passive survival. Conversely, the flood in Chinese mythology, confronted by Yu the Great, is presented as a natural catastrophe. Yu's success stems from his thirteen-year labor of dredging and channeling the waters, manifesting an early belief in "human mastery over heaven" (*ren ding sheng tian*) and active transformation of the environment.

Finally, on the theme of sacrifice, both traditions revere self-sacrifice for the community's welfare. However, the nature of the sacrifice differs. The Greek Prometheus is passionately defiant, stealing fire from the gods and suffering eternal punishment, his act a rebellion against divine authority. The Chinese Shennong, by comparison, is pragmatically devoted, systematically tasting hundreds of herbs and dying from poisoning to provide humanity with agriculture and medicine, his act one of quiet, empirical dedication.

In summary, the parallel narrative frameworks of Chinese and Greek mythology serve as vehicles for expressing deeply ingrained cultural values. Their shared questions about origins, survival, and morality are answered through distinctly different logics—confrontation versus harmony, passivity versus agency, and rebellion versus devotion. It is precisely these different answers to the same questions that make their comparative study a crucial key to understanding the unique genes of their respective civilizations.

4. Pathways for Civilizational Mutual Learning Based on Mythological Comparison

4.1 Foundation for Mutual Learning: Commonality of the Human Spirit

Although nurtured within distinct civilizations, Chinese and Greek mythologies contain a shared spiritual core, which forms the fundamental premise for civilizational mutual learning. This common ground can be examined through three universal concerns: the will to survive, the duty to sacrifice, and the drive to explore.

First, both traditions exhibit a profound preoccupation with survival, albeit expressed differently. The Greek heroes' pursuit of honor constitutes a quest for the endurance of life's value through personal glory, while the dedication of Chinese heroes to their community represents a guardianship of racial continuity. Both ultimately affirm the ultimate concern for human perpetuation.

Second, both mythologies revere the sublime character of self-sacrifice for the greater good. This is

powerfully exemplified by Prometheus in Greek mythology, who willingly endured eternal torment for stealing fire for humanity, and Shennong in Chinese mythology, who sacrificed his own life by tasting hundreds of herbs to ensure his people's survival. As highlighted by Mo Ningyuan (2013), this shared spirit of sacrifice for the value of life, the continuity of the community, and the pursuit of moral sublimity constitutes a spiritual legacy that transcends cultural boundaries.

Finally, the exploration of the unknown is another shared impetus. The perilous journeys of Heracles into the Underworld and Odysseus across the oceans find their counterpart in the Chinese tales of Kua Fu chasing the sun and Chang'e flying to the moon. These narratives all embody a universal human curiosity and the courage to challenge the limits of the known world.

In summary, the convergent attention to survival, sacrifice, and exploration in both mythological traditions provides a robust affective and axiological foundation for dialogue. This common spiritual core ensures that mutual learning is not a mere intellectual exercise but is rooted in the shared existential experiences of humankind.

4.2 The Core of Mutual Learning: Complementarity of Divergent Values

4.2.1 Complementarity of Individual and Collective

The individual heroism of Greek mythology and the collective spirit of Chinese mythology can form a constructive complement. In modern Western societies, against the backdrop of an overemphasis on individual consciousness, issues such as weakened social bonds and a deficit of public responsibility have emerged. Phenomena like refined self-interest in workplace competition and the bystander effect in public affairs essentially stem from a neglect of collective values. In contrast, Chinese mythology embodies a distinct collectivist spirit and a profound sense of hardship consciousness. Confronted with a hostile environment of collapsing heavens, shattered earth, and cataclysmic floods, Chinese deities overcome nature through persistent labor and struggle. Moreover, "Yu the Great Taming the Floods" and "Shennong Tasting the Herbs" from Chinese mythology highlight the cooperative spirit and the consciousness of sacrifice. The core of their actions is to benefit the people, not personal gratification. This mythological ethos, which emphasizes collective collaboration and selfless dedication, can serve as a crucial cultural corrective for Western societies grappling with the excesses of individualism. It reveals that personal worth can be more fully realized through participation in collective endeavors and service to the public good.

Conversely, within Chinese society, the process of emphasizing collective interests has occasionally led to the suppression of individual will. The individual consciousness demonstrated by Heracles' defying his fate and Achilles' fighting for honor in Greek mythology can inspire contemporary individuals to focus on the realization of personal value. Thus, an ideal value system should be a symbiosis of the individual and the collective—one that respects individual needs within the collective framework and confirms self-meaning through contribution to society. The value differences inherent in Chinese and Greek myths provide precisely this two-way reference for such symbiosis.

4.2.2 Complementarity of Tragic Consciousness and Pragmatic Spirit

The tragic spirit of Greek mythology can provide a new cognitive dimension for Chinese culture. The Chinese cultural tradition often emphasizes a culture of optimism and the expectation of harmonious endings, leading to a relatively underdeveloped awareness of risk and uncertainty. The Greek narrative that fate is irresistible, yet one must still struggle against it—exemplified by Oedipus striving to do good despite knowing the prophecy—can inspire people to confront adversity with a more rational attitude. It fosters the recognition that uncertainty is a constant in life and that the very process of struggle embodies the value of existence. This awareness can enhance psychological resilience in coping with the risks of modern society.

The pragmatic spirit of Chinese mythology, in turn, can offer lessons for the West. While the tragic consciousness in Greek mythology is profound, it can easily lead to a sense of bewilderment towards fate. Chinese mythology, however, consistently points towards problem-solving: after Gun's failure in controlling the floods, Yu the Great immediately adjusted his strategy and switched to dredging and channeling. This pragmatic logic of "trial, error, and improvement" holds instructive significance for Western societies facing practical challenges such as environmental issues and social governance. It suggests the importance of focusing on action and solutions while acknowledging difficulties, thereby avoiding purely speculative dilemmas.

4.2.3 Complementarity of Confrontation and Harmonious Wisdom

The Greek concept of humanity contending with nature and the Chinese wisdom of harmony between heaven and humanity (*tian ren he yi*) represent fundamentally complementary worldviews. This divergence is rooted in their foundational narratives. As Yuan Xiuping (2017) observes, Western creation myths, centered on divine power struggles, establish a logic where order is born from confrontation. In contrast, Chinese creation myths, depicting deities unifying with nature and self-sacrificing to create the world, emphasize that order arises from harmonious devotion.

These core narratives gave rise to profoundly different civilizational drives. The Greek spirit, characterized by a worship of "power" (Yin, 2007), fostered a paradigm of conquering and contending with nature. In stark contrast, the Chinese tradition, guided by the wisdom of harmony between heaven and humanity, cultivated a paradigm of symbiotic coexistence and ethical order.

In the modern context, the limitations and strengths of both paradigms have become evident. The power-oriented outlook, manifest in Western industrial civilization, has driven monumental technological progress. Yet, this very impulse has triggered global crises such as environmental pollution and ecological imbalance, revealing the perils of a worldview predicated solely on confrontation. Conversely, while the Chinese harmonious wisdom provides a crucial cultural corrective—guiding innovation to remain aligned with the principle of human-nature symbiosis—a sole reliance on accommodation may lack the transformative drive needed for radical innovation.

Therefore, a synthesis is not only possible but necessary. The defiant spirit of Greek mythology provides the essential engine for innovation, driving the breakthroughs needed to tackle intractable global

challenges like climate change and technological bottlenecks. Simultaneously, the harmonious wisdom of Chinese mythology provides the indispensable ethical steering wheel, ensuring that this innovative power is directed toward sustainable and ecologically responsible outcomes.

Together, the dynamic interplay between the Greek “engine” of confrontation and the Chinese “steering wheel” of harmony provides a profound cultural blueprint for constructing a sustainable model of civilizational development.

4.3 Practical Application of Mutual Learning: From Text to Contemporary Transformation

The theoretical framework of mutual learning, derived from the comparison of Chinese and Greek mythologies, is not confined to academic discourse but is being dynamically enacted and validated in contemporary cultural and educational practices. This translation from ancient text to modern context demonstrates the enduring relevance and adaptive power of these mythological archetypes.

4.3.1 In Cultural Production: Syncretic Creation as a New Paradigm

The global cultural market has become a primary site for mythological mutual learning, moving beyond simple adaptation to achieve creative syncretism. A salient example is Marvel’s Thor franchise. While rooted in Norse mythology, its narrative core—the transformation of Thor from an arrogant god to a responsible hero—resonates deeply with the universal heroic journey while subtly incorporating a modern re-interpretation of values. This demonstrates how ancient mythological frameworks can be repurposed to explore contemporary themes of duty, sacrifice, and redemption, achieving global resonance.

More indicative of deep mutual learning is the Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong*. It does not merely present Chinese mythology statically; it actively integrates the narrative structure of individual adventure prevalent in Western gaming traditions with the quintessential Chinese mytho-hero, the Monkey King. This synthesis goes beyond aesthetics, creating a protagonist who embodies both the rebellious individuality of a Greek hero and the spiritual journey towards enlightenment and collective responsibility central to the Chinese narrative. It is a prime example of mutual learning in action, synthesizing narrative forms to create a hybrid hero for a global audience. This syncretic creation does not dilute cultural specificity but enriches it, offering a hybrid narrative that facilitates cross-cultural empathy and understanding, making it a powerful vehicle for genuine cultural dialogue.

4.3.2 In Educational Innovation: Cultivating Cognitive Flexibility

The educational potential of comparative mythology extends far beyond knowledge transmission; it is a powerful tool for fostering cognitive flexibility and intercultural competence in younger generations. Systematically integrating the Chinese-Greek mythological comparison into curricula can transform learning in several key ways:

Deconstructing Archetypes: By contrasting the sacrifices of Prometheus (for knowledge/technology) and Shennong (for public health/sustenance), students can deconstruct the very concept of a “hero.” This moves beyond a single cultural script, revealing the spectrum of motivations from individual defiance to collective service, thereby illuminating the dialectical relationship between the individual and the

collective.

Analyzing Problem-Solving Models: A comparative analysis of flood myths—contrasting Deucalion’s passive survival through divine mercy with Yu the Great’s active, thirteen-year masterful engineering of the environment—teaches more than just stories. It exposes students to foundational cultural paradigms: one emphasizing adaptation to external forces, the other championing proactive transformation through human effort and wisdom. This cultivates an appreciation for the complementary value of different approaches to crisis.

This pedagogical practice aims to instill a rooted cosmopolitan mindset—one that is firmly grounded in one’s own cultural heritage while being open and appreciative of others. This foundational social consciousness is indispensable for sustainable civilizational mutual learning.

4.3.3 In Social Governance: Mythological Wisdom as a Cultural Reference

The complementary values extracted from these myths can also inform contemporary social governance. The Greek emphasis on individual agency and critical questioning (as seen in Prometheus’ defiance) can serve as a cultural reference for fostering innovation and civic engagement within systems that traditionally prioritize harmony. Conversely, the Chinese emphasis on collective responsibility, long-term planning, and harmonious order (as embodied by Yu the Great’s collaborative flood control) offers a crucial cultural corrective to societies grappling with the excesses of individualism, such as social fragmentation and short-termism. The narratives provide a shared symbolic language to discuss and navigate the perennial tension between individual rights and collective well-being.

5. Conclusion

This study has systematically delineated the contrasting narrative logics and worldviews of Greek and Chinese mythologies, arguing that their differences are deeply rooted in their distinct civilizational matrices—the maritime, polis-based, agonistic culture of Greece versus the agrarian, clan-based, harmonizing culture of China. Through a comparative analysis of deity portrayal, hero narratives, and core themes, we have demonstrated that Greek mythology’s “anthropomorphic and polytheistic” paradigm, which celebrates individual agency and acknowledges tragic fate, and Chinese mythology’s “spiritualized and ethical” paradigm, which prioritizes collective welfare and harmonious order, are not merely different but are fundamentally complementary. The proposed framework for civilizational mutual learning reveals how the creative tension between individualism and collectivism, tragic consciousness and pragmatic spirit, and confrontation and harmony can offer profound wisdom for navigating contemporary global challenges, from social fragmentation to the ecological crisis.

Notwithstanding these contributions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, which also point toward fruitful directions for future inquiry. The textual interpretations herein are inevitably constrained by layers of translation and historical transmission; the profound Greek concept of *theomorphia* (the divine form) may be inadequately captured by the common term “anthropomorphism”, and the received versions of Chinese myths are often filtered through the

philosophical lenses of later eras. Furthermore, the focused Greco-Chinese comparison, while revealing, inherently reinforces an East-West binary and overlooks the rich tapestry of other mythological traditions (e.g., Mesopotamian, Indian, Indigenous Americas). Future research should, therefore, build upon this foundation in several key areas.

First, interdisciplinary synthesis is crucial. Collaborations between philologists, archaeologists, and data scientists could use semantic analysis and GIS mapping to correlate mythological motifs with geographic and archaeological data, moving beyond literary and philosophical analysis to provide a more robust, materialist grounding for comparative studies.

Second, scholars can endeavor to construct a truly global comparative mythology. This involves partnering with experts on African, Indigenous American, and Oceanic mythologies to move beyond the Greco-Chinese axis and work towards a more inclusive understanding of human myth-making. Such an endeavor would help identify both universal archetypes and the vast spectrum of unique cultural expressions, thereby deconstructing simplistic civilizational binaries.

Finally, the practical application and dissemination of mythological wisdom must be amplified. This can be achieved by developing open-access, multilingual digital repositories of world mythology and actively supporting cross-cultural co-creations in film, gaming, and immersive media. By transforming myths from static texts into living, shared experiences for the digital age, we can ensure they fulfill their timeless role as vital bridges for civilizational dialogue, helping to foster a global ethos of understanding and mutual respect in the 21st century.

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