MYTHICAL THINKING AND RATIONAL SPIRIT - AN INTERPRETATION OF LU XUN’S “OLD TALES RETOLD”

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Abstract: The great creativity of the myth itself provides a specific way for literature to develop plots and express themes. As a special way of thinking, mythical thinking has become an important component of the writer’s creative psychology, and the narrative language of myths is metaphorical and vivid. This article studies the mythical thinking and rational spirit reflected in the works of the modern writers who use ancient myths in their writing. Special attention should be paid to Lu Xun’s “Old Tales Retold”, a unique collection of novels. It helps to explore why Lu Xun has a special liking for ancient myths, and how he gave myths new content, form, meaning and function.

Material and methods. Based on the existing research results, this article attempts to use comparative research, narratology, and diachronic research methods, combined with the relevant theories of well-known literary theorists, literary critics, and mythologists to explore the usage of ancient myths in the “Old Tales Retold”. The works undergo in-depth analysis and detailed description.

Results and discussions. By tracing the origin of the myth and consciously reconstructing it, Lu Xun has injected the spirit of his own time into the spirit of the times in which he was in the special cultural context of the May Fourth Movement. Lu Xun took mythology as a tool to rebuild national spirit and literary enlightenment, and carried out a spiritual exploration of the cultural origin, promoting the unyielding spirit of resistance and struggle of the Chinese ancestors under the severe natural environment and complex social conditions, looking for the most buried and most forgotten. This spirit has become the longest great vitality of the Chinese nation.

Conclusions. Both mythological thinking and the narrative language of myths are metaphorical and figurative, which makes the relationship between mythology, literature, and art very close. Mythology is unconsciously artistic, and it can be said to be a spiritual force with rational characteristics. The study of mythology should focus on the comparison and historical analysis of mythology. For anthropologists and folklorists, mythology has empirical value. For writers, mythology has symbolic and metaphorical value. The plot or theme of the work suggests to us the universal pattern of motivation and behavior. In “Old Tales Retold”, we can see the continuation and vastness of the spirit of mythology, which has a far-reaching influence on the literature of later generations. The research in this article helps to grasp the spirit and value of Lu Xun's mythology, which itself is an important ideological heritage, which has reference and practical significance.
Keywords: mythology, mythical thinking, rational spirit, Old Tales Retold.

Introduction. In the history of Chinese literature, at the beginning of the 20th century, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Mao Dun were the first to introduce Western mythology theories to China and conducted research on Chinese mythology. Mythology not only directly provided a visual and metaphorical way of thinking for literary creation, but also rewarded writers with expression methods such as fantasy, exaggeration, and fiction. In the history of Western literature, after the 20th century, many literary schools have consciously absorbed and used mythology, following the traditions of Joyce's Ulysses, Kafka's Metamorphosis, and Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude. All adopt the myths of ancient Greece or of the Bible. For modern writers, the mythology not only presents the spiritual pursuit of human beings, explores people's questioning of the meaning of life, but also shows the national spirit of different cultures.

Lu Xun's “Old Tales Retold” truly reproduced the social status quo in the 1920s, with political corruption, warlords fighting, and retro thinking prevailed. Lu Xun shouted and hesitated repeatedly in the dark social reality. In order to awaken the feudal, superstition, ignorant and backward modern citizens, Lu Xun set his sights on the ancient times and gave the mythology new content, form, meaning and function, trying to learn from the ancient Chinese mythology. He could see the source of culture in searching for the vitality of life and the blood of the national spirit.

Material and methods. At home and abroad, many famous scholars such as Lu Xun (1881-1936), Mao Dun (1896-1981), Zhong Jingwen (1903-2002), Yuan Ke (1916-2001), Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), James Frazer (1854-1941), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Carl Jung (1885-1961), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), Alan Dundes (1934-2005) left works related to myths. They may explore the essence of mythology and the relationship between mythology and other human cultural phenomena (such as religion, rituals, literature, etc.), or explore the evolution and development of human culture, or to explore the common psychological and thinking structure of mankind, thus making a significant contribution to world academics, to human society and to mankind itself. [14]

The term “myth” in Aristotle's “Poetics” means “plot”, “narrative structure” and “fable story”, and its antonym is “logos”. There is no word “myth” in ancient Chinese classics. Mythological phenomena are often referred to as “weird”, “false words”, and “gods and ghosts”. The “myth” was transported from Western Europe to Japan, and then transplanted to China at the end of the 19th century. Different scholars have different interpretations for this term.

When Lu Xun wrote “A Brief History of Chinese Fiction”, he tentatively explained the production of myths: “When primitive men observed natural phenomena and changes which could not be accomplished by any human power, they made up stories to explain them, and these explanations became myths. Myths usually centred round a group of gods: men described these gods and their feats and came to worship them, singing hymns in praise of their divine power and making offerings in their shrines.” [11, P. 9] Lu Xun believes that people in ancient times found it difficult to explain the strange and changeable natural phenomena, and they
humanized the forces of nature through imagination, thus possessing the myth of human logical thinking, thus affirming the rationality of the myth.

Lu Xun was influenced by the spread of Japanese and Western European mythology. He pointed out that Western mythology had a huge influence on Western literature and art. “The western art and literature, the thought and art, the solemn and beautiful, do not know the reason. If you want to study the culture of western countries and govern this, the first thing is to cover the myth. If you don't understand its art and literature, how can you get from the internal civilization.” [12, P. 32]. Lu Xun regarded mythology as a prerequisite for understanding the history and culture of a nation, and recognized the important role of “mythology”. “In ancient times, regardless of novels or poetry, its elements cannot be separated from mythology. India, Egypt, and Greece are the same. China is no different.” [12. P. 313]. “Old Tales Retold” has become a bridge between literature and myth.

There are 8 stories in “Old Tales Retold”, written from 1922 to 1935, and 13 years have passed while the book was written. It can be said that it is the product of Lu Xun's practice of mythological thought. Lu Xun used mythological metaphors to carry out a spiritual exploration of the cultural origin, trying to find a way to save the nation and the national crisis creating the image of the hero.

**Results.** Lu Xun was one of the few researchers who first dealt with mythological issues in the first decade of the 20th century. Lu Xun has his own views on myths. From a scientific point of view, myths have insufficient explanations of the origin of all things. However, from the perspective of the creation of human thinking, the spiritual value of myths is still necessary: “There are people in the world who regard myths as superstitious and denounce ancient religions as simple. People who treat mythology as superstitious should be pitied and persuaded.” [12. P. 26]

Lu Xun pointed out the reasons why ancient Chinese myths were not systematic: “First, the early dwellers in the Yellow River Valley were not an imaginative people, and since their life was hard and they devoted most of their energy to practical matters without indulging in flights of fancy, they did not combine all the old legends into one great epic. Secondly, Confucius appeared with his teaching about the way to cultivate morality, regulate the family, rule the state and bring peace to the world.” [11. P. 17]. “But a more fundamental reason was probably the absence of a strict division between gods and ghosts. In the earliest times though there was apparently some line of demarcation between the deities of heaven and earth and the ghosts of dead men, yet ghosts could become deities too. Since men and gods intermingled in this manner, the early religion was never fully developed, and as more new legends appeared the old ones died out, and the new legends lacked lustre.” [11. P. 18]

In academic thinking, Lu Xun attaches great importance to first-hand materials, and his ancient book collation work objectively played a role in the construction of basic mythological materials, mainly found in “Ancient Novels”, “Old News about Novels”, “Legend of Tang and Song Dynasties” and so on. From an academic perspective, Lu Xun not only paid attention to literature and archaeological materials, but also provided reference for the construction of mythological materials for later generations.
Discussions. While studying in Japan, during the period of transition from saving the country through science to saving the country through literature and art, Lu Xin showed a strong spirit of patriotism and democracy and represented the most advanced thinking among Chinese intellectuals at that time (before the spread of Marxism). Lu Xin wrote four essays “The History of Humans”[8] “Moro Shili Theory”[7] “Science History Teaching Articles” [9] “Evil Voice Theory” [10] These works are not only precious to the study of Lu Xin's early thoughts Documents, but also shows his early mythological view.

I. Lu Xun's View of Mythology

Lu Xun was the pioneer of the study of mythology in modern China. Lu Xun recognized the important role of mythology and re-evaluated the historical status of mythology, not only taking mythology as the source of literature, but also as the source of human culture. He said: “Mythology generally takes a "divine" as the center, and deduces it as narrative, and then believes in awe of the gods and things that are narrated, so he sings its mighty spirit and makes it beautiful in altars and temples. The cultural relics became more and more numerous.” [12. P. 19]. The transformation of characters from “divine personality” to “personality” in mythology is precisely the weakening of divine nature and the awakening of human nature.

1. Praise and Rebel God

The story of Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit under the temptation of the serpent (demon), and was punished by God and driven out of the Garden of Eden, was originally well known in the Christian world. The British poet John Milton boldly borrowed this story as the subject matter, and made the immortal poem “Paradise Lost” by virtue of his outstanding poetry and the unique spiritual power of a revolutionary who dedicated himself to a noble cause. Satan (demon) has always been a symbol of evil in the Christian tradition, a representative of evil and ugliness, but in “Paradise Lost”, Milton portrayed Satan as an unprecedented rebel image.

During his study in Japan, influenced by the “slide event”, Lu Xun decided to abandon medicine and learn from literature, toss and turn, “don't seek new life in a foreign country”, and praise the “Moro poetry school”. “Moro” is the devil, “fake from Tianzhu, this cloud devil, which is called Satan by European people”. It is originally a traitor to the authority represented by Tianting and Tiandi; Moroccan poets refer to romantic poets who “intend to resist and refer to action”. Most of them are not the voice of conforming to the world and music”. They are human spiritual fighters who “fight for heaven and reject customs”. Lu Xun regarded Byron as the "patriarch" of Moro poetry school and took his rebellious spirit of “emphasizing independence and loving freedom”.

Lu Xun praised Satan's rebellious spirit in the theory of Moro poetic power, looked around the country and sighed that “he is safe for the soldiers in the spiritual world”. On the one hand, he expected the Chinese people to “listen to the voice of enthusiasm and feel it immediately”. On the other hand, he was worried about the inevitability of reality: “therefore, if there is no bleeding in the public, the group will suffer; Although there are people who don't see it, or even kill it, it will become more and more dangerous and can't be saved!” [15]. So how to keep the “warrior of the
spiritual world” never tired and never subside? “Forging the Swords” in the new story is a further development of the rebellious spirit in this myth.

2. Put forward the idea of mythology

In 1908, Lu Xun wrote in the article “Dispelling the Evil Voice”: “The myth of husband is based on the ancient people. When they see the strange Gu of natural things, they show their divine thoughts and humanize them. They think of ancient differences. They are beautiful, strange and considerable. Although they believe it improperly, they are confused when they ridicule it. People of ancient times think so. For future generations, how should they be surprised by the magnificent…” [12. P. 32]. Lu Xun believed that the primitive people were curious about the world, the unique imagination beyond time and space, and the energetic true feelings, these are the conditions for the production of myths. Lu Xun creatively used the term “spiritual thinking” and believed that spiritual thinking was the thinking basis on which myths were formed.

“Shensi” is a unique category of classical aesthetics in China, which has important theoretical value, and is also regarded as the core category of artistic creative thinking. The term “shensi” contains the intuition-based thinking unique to ancient China, and also shows the cosmic integrity and integrity of “the unity of nature and man” in the ancient Chinese thinking. Chinese classical literary circles have different understandings of “spiritual thinking”, some are translated as “mind”, some are translated as “spiritual activity”, some believe that “spiritual thinking” is “imagination”, and some consider it as artistic conception. Some hold different opinions and believe that “spiritual thinking is not equal to imagination, nor is it equivalent to artistic conception. Spiritual thinking is only an important content of artistic conception and is at the core of aesthetic experience” [5]. All of these regard spiritual thinking or imagination as the aesthetic category of literary creation.

“Spiritual thinking” and “imagination” are produced in different cultures and contexts, and they belong to two different categories of Chinese and Western literary theory and aesthetics. There are differences and fusions between the two. The difference is manifested in the psychological feature of “spiritual thinking” is emptiness and quietness, the psychological feature of “imagination” is memory; the thinking feature of “spiritual thinking” is transcending time and space, and the thinking feature of “imagination” is resolution and synthesis. Fusion is mainly reflected in the fact that both “spiritual thinking” and “imagination” are both intuitive thinking. They are accompanied by emotions and both pursue fiction.

Influenced by the theory of evolution, Lu Xun maintained a sober and rational understanding while accepting Western culture. Mythological images can awaken the ancient memories in people's hearts. Through mythological thinking, people can achieve the transcendence of the present world and reach the ideal state, which is also a kind of instinctive spiritual pursuit of people. The characteristics of integrity and vividness of mythical thinking have transcendence and aesthetics.

II. Mythological metaphor and rational spirit in Old Tales Retold

“Old Tales Retold” is considered by many to be historical novels. Looking back on the process of writing the book, Lu Xun said: There are two ways of writing historical novels: one is a doc-test document, and the words must be well-founded.
The other is to take only a little cause, dye it at will, and spread it out. The main characters and main events in each chapter of “Old Tales Retold” are all based on historical documents. Therefore, “Old Tales Retold” is a collection of “the Romance of Myths, Legends, and Historical Facts”.

1. Mythical metaphor

In terms of writing, Lu Xun makes full use of mythological thinking, and “spots” them at will. Structure, through the conversion and combination of cognition such as “interpenetration”, “original logic” and “animity” of mythical thinking, and fusion of “collective unconsciousness”, unifying the binary opposition between ancient and modern, life and death. It is the so-called “slick” application, but the metaphor is Lu Xun's enlightenment thought.

E.g: “Mending Heaven” opening:

“Nu-wa woke with a start. She was frightened out of a dream, yet unable to remember what she had dreamed; conscious only, rather crossly, of something missing as well as of a surfeit of some kind. Ardently, the quickening breeze wafted her energy over the universe.” [6. P. 8]

This kind of artistic depiction that breaks the boundaries of ancient and modern is Lu Xun’s perception and perception of the reflections and his emotions, or the events he imagined, to connect with the mysterious power (of mythical way of thinking), the characteristics of witchcraft, and certain. Something similar to the original soul or life is associated [1]. The word “waking up” is both the awakening of God and the awakening of man. After Nuwa regained consciousness, she saw the humans she had created so painstakingly and solitarily killing each other, fighting for power and gain, and the world collapsed. Nu-wa had no choice but to “practice the stone to repair the sky” and continue to work hard to repair the world until she sacrificed herself. At the end of the novel “Utterly spent, Nu-wa fell back between them, no longer breathing”.

The death of Nuwa shows that the value of God is destroyed, and it is also a metaphor for the weakening of God's nature. Lu Xun turned grief and anger into strength. Nuwa has become the embodiment of continuous creation and continuous improvement, not afraid of hardships, and sacrificed his own spirit. It embodies Lu Xun’s “creative attitude for life” and “improving life”, which he found from Nuwa the “interpenetration” of tradition and reality, tradition and Western spirit. Lu Xun returned to the existence of human beings, pondered the development of human beings themselves and human history, and explored the modern meaning of the national spirit in order to carry forward the spirit of ancient mythology.

2. Enlightenment

Horkheimer and Adorno pointed out: “Enlightenment always regards the theory of divine and human identity as the basis of mythology, that is, the subject is used to refract the natural world. From this point of view, supernatural objects, such as spirits and gods, are feared by people themselves. A mirror image of natural phenomena” [4]. As the main character of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, Lu Xun draws materials from ancient myths to create on the basis of enlightening the masses. The New Culture Movement is essentially an ideological enlightenment movement under
the influence of Western thoughts, with the promotion of science and democracy as its main content and "new youth" as its main goal. The May Fourth Enlightenment discourse has a strong rational spirit, which is mainly manifested in the discourse of individualism, scientism, and the discourse of nation-states established on this basis [16].

Ernst Cassirer summarized mythological thinking as metaphorical thinking [2]. Metaphorical thinking is the most basic way of thinking for human beings. Frye said: "The world full of mythological images is usually embodied in the concept of heaven or paradise in religion; this world is oracle apocalyptic, and it is a complete metaphor in itself. Anything in it can be equal to other things. It seems that everything is in an infinite whole. [3] “It can be seen that the characters in myths are metaphorical. The characters in “Old Tales Retold” are all heroes and so-called sages in Chinese myths and legends, but these characters can be divided into two categories: one is such as Nuwa, Houyi, Dayu, Mejianchi and Man in Black, Mozi is the backbone of China who is not hypocritical and down-to-earth; the other types are like Bo Yi and Shuqi, Lao Zi, and Zhuang Zi, who are probably pedantic but self-righteous or trying to conceal their images. To understand them better we need to analyze the character metaphors in mythology.

3. Character metaphor

In mending the sky, Lu Xun metaphors two forms of Chinese people with Nuwa's "great creation" and her crotch's "shameless destruction". Lu Xun was “sad for his misfortune and angry for his people”. Can the cultural spirit of myth, as an effective spiritual and cultural resource, become the sustainable spiritual driving force for national survival and development? We can find the answer from running to the moon and managing water by Hou Yi. In his “running to the moon”, he is no longer a hero who shoots nine days, kills all wild animals and eliminates harm for the people. Whatever he does, he does in order just to meet the needs of life. Therefore, Yi's image has been transformed from "divine personality" to "personality". Heroes have no longer the place to play and metaphor social reality. Yi's sorrow represents the sorrow of society.

“Dayu” is the heroic image of the Chinese backbone. “Lishui” praises the image of Dayu and has a positive guiding role. Dayu was ordered to control the water in a severe situation, when “the Great Flood brought devastation, encircling mountains and engulfing hills”. “When the investigators returned to Beijing to celebrate with feasts, only Yu was still outside”. Yu spent 13 years in the field of water management, but he did not enter the house three times. He found a solution to the flood in a down-to-earth manner and succeeded in water control. In the novel, Yu is portrayed as a hero who is willing to contribute, leads by example, and is unknown. Yu is used as a metaphor for people with practical consciousness and innovative spirit. Such talents are the backbone of China, reflecting that the images of other masters have gradually become hypocritical, intoxicated, and corrupted image with the meaning of selfishness, self-interest, negativity, evasion, etc.

Lu Xun experienced the bloody events of the Chinese and foreign reactionaries' cruel suppression of the Chinese people, such as the “women's Normal University School tide”, “May 30 Movement” and “March 18 Massacre”. In order to encourage
the general public to repay their blood debts to the reactionary rulers, he created the novel “casting the sword” in 1926, which is full of revenge consciousness. Revenge has become a stable collective unconsciousness formed by the accumulation of primitive beliefs over the years. The novel is mainly about the fact that in order to help his father to take revenge, Mei Chien Chih willingly handed his head and sword to the man in black Yen-chih-Ao-Che. Yan Zhiao is a fighter who has gone through many vicissitudes. His whole energy is focused on one goal, that is, to avenge and uphold justice for all the suffering people. As Lu Xun said, “literature close to the era of revolution often has the sound of anger; He wants to resist, he wants revenge”[12. P. 438]

Lu Xun used the mythical "animism" thinking and cognition to describe the scene of revenge. The man in black put the head of Mei Chien Chih into the cauldron for the king to watch, and took the opportunity to swing the sword and chop down the king's head into the cauldron.

E.g: “The king's head fell with a splash into the cauldron. When enemies meet they know each other at a glance, particularly at close quarters. The moment the king's head touched the water, Mei Chien Chih's head came up to meet it and savagely bit its ear. The water in the cauldron boiled and bubbled as the two heads engaged upon a fight to the death. After about twenty encounters, the king was wounded in five places, Mei Chien Chih in seven. The crafty king contrived to slip behind his enemy, and in an unguarded moment Mei Chien Chih let himself be caught by the back of his neck, so that he could not turn round” [6. P. 90].

In order to help Mei Chien Chih, the man in black swung his sword to cut off his head in the cauldron, so the three heads in the cauldron went to war until the king died. This kind of description shows a strong mythological color. Both its purpose and actual effect are more prominent in exposing the influence of the feudal hierarchy with Confucianism as the connotation on the people. At the same time, this not only shows the transcendence of the limitations of reality, but also means the intention to break through the spiritual shackles of Confucianism. From myth to enlightenment, from sacredness, fantasy, imagination, and abstraction to practical, realistic, figurative, and symbolic “mastery of the world” theoretical thinking, it is also a “practical spirit” type of mythological metaphor. The consciousness of revenge contained in “Forging the Swards” just reflects Lu Xun's eagerness to join the revolutionary battle, as well as the spirit of resisting the brutal dictatorship and fighting to the end.

From “Menging Heaven”, “The Flight to the Moon”, “Curbing the flood” to “Forging the Swards”, Lu Xun's distinctive and strong rational spirit is embodied. Lu Xun wrote the heavy and mysterious spiritual power of the myth itself.

Conclusions. The philosopher Nietzsche believed: “Without myths, all cultures will lose their healthy natural creativity. Only a vision adjusted by myths can consolidate cultural movements into a unity. All imagination and the dream power of Apollo can only be prevented from wandering boundlessly only by virtue of mythology. [13]"

Mythology is unconsciously artistic, and it can be said to be a spiritual force with rational characteristics. Both mythical thinking and the narrative language of
myths are metaphorical and figurative, which makes mythology and literature and art have a very close relationship. In “Old Tales Retold”, we can see the continuation and vastness of the spirit of mythology, which has a far-reaching influence on the literature of later generations.

Lu Xun hoped to find the key to the various problems of civilized society from the spiritual heritage of the ancients. As a spiritual force of mankind, mythology can make up for the lack of morality and spirit in modern society, allowing people to find a way of hope in difficulties and strengthen their ideals and beliefs.

Lu Xun took mythology as a tool for rebuilding national spirit and literary enlightenment, looking for ways to renew national culture from myth writing, paying attention to human survival, and promoting the Chinese people's spirit of sacrifice under severe natural environment and complicated social conditions. The tenacious spirit of fighting against difficulties and setbacks, the unyielding spirit of resistance and struggle, these spirits inspire and encourage people to never lose their ideals and beliefs. This is also the portrayal of the Chinese national spirit for thousands of years.

Lu Xun and myths have become topics that scholars continue to discuss. Lu Xun uses myths to express his understanding of people and the spirit of revolutionary fighters. On the other hand, the myths used by Lu Xun present a unique charm in the reconstruction of Chinese culture. Since, Lu Xun's mythology in itself is an important ideological heritage, which has reference and practical significance, it is crucially important to grasp its spirit and value.

REFERENCES