

Analysis of the Cultural Attributes of Polytheism in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign"

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Abstract: *As a type of polytheistic mythology, the polytheistic myths believed by the Russian people before the 12th century were rich in cultural attributes and had an important influence on the overall national character of the Russian people. Through the excavation of the text of The Tale of Igor's Expedition, the influence of polytheistic cultural attributes on the productive life of the Russian people can be analyzed in a more intuitive way. This paper will analyze the elements of polytheistic mythology in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign", focusing on the connection between mythological thinking and the real world, and providing ideas for the interpretation of the culture and character of East Slavic peoples such as Russia.*

Keywords: *Slavic peoples, polytheism, ethnic culture*

1. Introduction

As the indigenous mythology of the Russian people, polytheistic mythology embodies the spiritual core of many East Slavic peoples, including the Russian people. Unlike the monotheistic ideology of the Orthodox Church, polytheism has a complex mythological structure and a wide variety of mythological images. The Russian heroic epic "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" contains many details that reflect the cultural elements of polytheism, which is an important reference for the study of the cultural attributes of the Russian people in the transition period between polytheism and Orthodoxy. The Tale of the Tale This paper classifies the elements of polytheistic mythology in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" as positive deities, negative deities, and neutral nature deities, in order to interpret the significance of polytheistic mythology in the process of shaping the Russian national character.

2. "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" and Polytheism

The author of "The Tale of Igor's Campaign", written between 1185 and 1187, is still unknown, but some believe that it was Peter Borisovich, a high official of the Kievan Rus' principality in the 12th century. As a heroic epic, the book is divided into three parts: a prologue and an epilogue, in which Grand Duke Igor of Kievan Rus was defeated and captured after leading an expedition against the foreign enemy, the "golden words" of Grand Duke Sviatoslav of Kiev, who called for the unity of all Russians, and the prayers of the people of the Russian land, which helped Prince Igor to return to Kievan Rus. It is a film of the love of the Russian people. It is a great work of patriotic spirit of the Russian people.

Polytheism was formed during the separation of the ancient Slavs from the Indo-European peoples in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and spread among the Eastern Slavic peoples of Russia until the 12th century. There are no original mythological texts on polytheism, and the earliest fragmentary information on polytheism is found only in the 6th century AD in the Byzantine imperial missionary accounts. During its development, polytheism was not organized as a unified religious "church" but rather as a primitive ritual practice led by "shamans. These factors have led to the fact that polytheism is not yet a complete system in modern times and does not have a unified form of organization. The belief system of polytheism is complicated by the fact that the gods worshipped are mostly processed from natural things: not only the wind god Streiberg, the sun god Dzhigiberg, the thunder god Perun, but also the house god, the forest demon, the water demon, and other gods and spirits with different images. In the Principality of Kievan Rus', the first Eastern Slavic state founded by Rurik in the 9th century, polytheism was the dominant belief at that time. But because different regions of the principality honored different gods as their main deities, disputes and even wars over beliefs persisted in Kievan Rus' principality until Grand

Duke Vladimir established a unified belief system called "Pantheon", which strictly defined the superiority and inferiority of various deities. However, such a move still could not solve the problem of fragmentation and thus political division, which is why Grand Duke Vladimir was finally baptized in 988 AD and brought Orthodox Christianity to Kievan Rus. Thereafter, polytheism withdrew from the stage of history as a faith relatively unsuited to the development of social productivity. However, its influence on the character of the Slavic people remained, and in the future it had an impact on the spread of Orthodoxy in Russia, shaping the situation of "dual faith" and the "localization" of the Orthodox faith.

When "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" was written, more than 200 years had passed since Vladimir's baptism. The Orthodox Church had established a strong base of domination in Kievan Rus', but in some areas there was still a struggle between the polytheistic and Orthodox believers, and Kievan Rus' was in a transitional stage between the polytheistic and Orthodox faiths. The final stanza of the third part of the book reads: "Long live the princes and warriors who defend the Christians against the evil army! / Glory to the princes and warriors! Amen ^[1]." It is clear from the words "Amen" that the book was already influenced by Orthodox culture in its composition. However, many names of polytheistic deities still appear in the stanzas of the first and second parts of the poem, and the two distinct cultures are intermingled in the poem. The text with elements of polytheistic culture is more detailed. First, these stanzas make use of positive images of deities to enhance the greatness of the protagonist and his army of followers, or use images of deities representing the greatness of nature to reinforce positive or negative environmental descriptions. The second is to make the plot more epic by depicting the actions and words of widely known evil gods and spirits. In addition, there are also anthropomorphic descriptions of neutral nature spirits: mountains, rivers, flowers, birds, insects and fish.

3. The Tale of Igor's Campaign': images of deities representing positive cultural symbols

Before the establishment of the Principality of Kievan Rus', the East Slavic peoples of Russia and other countries were still in the stage of a classless primitive society, where the main mode of production was farming, growing rye, wheat and other crops. However, the backward productivity of primitive societies led to the extreme dependence of agricultural activities on nature. In the cold climate of the Eastern European plains, light and fertile soil were the most important factors affecting agricultural production. The desire of Eastern Slavs for good agricultural production evolved from the initial respect for the sun and soil to the worship of specific, personalized deities. For example, the sun god Dzhigiberg and Mother Earth Sela. Some stanzas of "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" are also related to personality gods: "Now the wind, O sons of Streiberg, is blowing a volley of arrows / from the sea to the brave army of Igor. " "Early in the morning, Yaroslavna is sobbing, / and lamenting on the fortress of Pudivl: / O wind, O mighty wind! / O God, why do you not blow according to my will? Why do you let the sharp arrows of the khanars / Take up your light wings / And shoot at the warriors of my husband?" ^[2] The wind is portrayed in the stanza as a personal god: a descendant of the wind god Striborg, constructing a kinship between natural things and gods. And a glimpse of the Slavs' consciousness of personifying the gods can also be seen in Yaroslavna's cry. As a positive image of the deity, the god of wind should appear as the protector of the army, and its perverse behavior of not giving protection to Igor's army directly causes Yaroslavna's discontent and sorrow. Under this episode, the personal feelings and ideology of the gods are emphasized.

In addition, the national and personal titles derived from the names of the polytheistic deities also embody the East Slavic people's desire for strength and the worship of heroic figures. Just as the Chinese people call themselves "children of Yanhuang". This history is recorded with elements of real historical facts as well as mythological elements. The Tale of Igor's Campaign", "Sons of Velez" and "Sons of Dzhigiburg" also reflect a sense of the blurring of the boundaries between history and mythology ^[3]. In addition to Russians, the descendants of Dzhigibergs in polytheistic mythology include Slovaks, Kosa, Scythians, and Kimmerians. For the creation of individual heroes, the epic of heroes of different peoples is mostly combined with the names of gods: the half-man, half-god Hou Yi in Chinese mythology and Hercules, the son of Zeus in Greek mythology, are representative figures of heroic mythology. And in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" there is a verse that reads: "Oh, Bao Yang, you ancient nightingale! /... /... you, son of Velez, / should sing such a song for Igor." ^[4] The praise and praise of Boyan, the people's poet of Kievan Rus, who often sang the praises of the princes, is also contained in the title of the son of Velez, the god of shepherds and poets, and the author's desire to become a people's singer like Boyan is also reflected in the text.

The connection between the deity and the name of the nation or individual is based on a sense of national self-identity and the worship of national heroes. In ancient human society, relatively ordinary,

weak individuals revered strong beings, who were always mortal in the eyes of their followers. And when the relatively strong mortals were unable to solve the difficulties and lead the nation out of suffering, the faith shifted to the supreme being of the secular society - the gods, even if these gods were ethereal. For the rulers of ancient clan and feudal societies, combining historical records with myths and legends was an ingenious narrative mode in order to leave their own mark on history and to have their achievements celebrated by future generations.

4. The Tale of Igor's Campaign", which represents negative cultural symbols of gods and demons

Similarly, in the primitive society with low productivity and poor medical and sanitary conditions, the East Slavs were often helpless to deal with death, plague and other negative things that endangered human life. The most direct fear of these things was often reflected in the spiritual world, and gradually these negative things were visualized as mythological demons. In their narratives, the gods representing these negative things are mostly portrayed as ugly and dark. This stigmatization contrasts sharply with the praise of the gods representing life and hope. Among the many negative images of gods in polytheistic mythology, the demonization of Chernobyl, the god of death, is the most popular. Chernobyl is "the god of cold, the god of destruction, the god of death, served by black sorcerers and warlocks. Around him crawled demons and snake spirits, and in the dark woods under his jurisdiction lived evil tree spirits". In the Book of Kolodar, a later compilation of East Slavic folklore, there is even more: "Dark clouds hovered in his dark kingdom, / And crows flew in flocks, / Where Chernobyl roared, / And sorcerers and witches gathered / All Chernobyl's followers." [5] Among a host of heroic epics with mythological settings, there are few interactions between the negative deities and the protagonists. Positive interactions such as "blessings and blessings" are basically done by positive deities. Negative deities, including the god of death, are mostly obstacles to the hero's progress and powerful enemies to be fought in the end. The demonized gods are one of the key components of the mythology.

"The Tale of Igor's Campaign" does not directly mention Chernobyl, the god of death, but it does select two goddesses who are demonized in folklore and include them in the stanzas related to the tragedy: "Igor's brave army will never awaken again! / Karna and Zelia cry aloud to the sacrificed army, / And scatter with horns of fire a pillar of blazing flame that runs over the Russian land." [6] In polytheistic mythology, Karna and Zelia are the daughters of the goddess of death, Malena, and the shepherd god, Velez, whose names also derive from the Russian word for "cry" as well as "lament." In folklore they are often depicted as women with pale faces and long black hair, weeping for the dead at funerals and extricating their souls to the polytheistic myth of hell. In primitive matriarchal societies, the female gods were mostly portrayed as magnificent and inclusive. And into the patriarchal society, the discourse of the mythological system also gradually entered into the male deities. The distorted female images of Karna and Geria are the product of demonization in the context of the time, and their appearance in this work is a reflection of the deep-rooted polytheistic thinking in the author's creative process.

In addition to the above-mentioned negative deities with human characteristics, the passage "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" also mentions some figures of folklore spirits and monsters. "At this time Lord Igor stepped into the golden stirrup /... / The lord demon fluffed up his feathers - / And commanded the - unknown land, Volga, / Pomorje, / Bosulje, / Surosh, / Curzon, / And you, the idol of Temutrokon, to come and listen!" [7] This stanza is found in the episode of the change of the sky before the departure of the Igorian princes and the announcement of bad omens by the beasts. The lord demon is a folklore creature with a human head and a bird god, also known in some regions as the "prophet bird". They appear in wars and hover over the heads of the losing side. In addition to the demonized depiction of knowable negative things, primitive ancestors also often emotionally processed natural phenomena that gave them unknown fears. In a primitive society with an extreme lack of scientific and theoretical knowledge, these natural phenomena, which seem normal to modern people, profoundly influenced the spiritual world of primitive ancestors, and the blind fear of these phenomena gradually developed into national customs and traditions later.

5. Nature spirits representing neutral cultural symbols in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign"

According to the mythological staging theory of the Chinese mythologist Xie Liuyi, the myths of most peoples in the world can be divided into five stages. These are pantheistic mythology, material god worship, totemism, polytheistic mythology, and monotheistic mythology. Although polytheism is characterized as the "myth of many gods" in the mythological phasing, it has a primitive cultural

expression of "pantheism and material gods", i.e., nature spirits.

The concept of nature spirits refers to the divine plant and animal and inanimate images that were established during primitive societies. These nature spirits are often relied upon by the peoples who believe in them, and a series of customs related to nature spirits have emerged from them. For example, the Russian festival of meat thanking has its roots in polytheistic mythology. Eastern Slavs believe that the Winter Festival, held in late February or early March, is a day when the sun drives away the darkness and cold, and is a "welcome to spring and winter" festival in which people burn scarecrows, dance around bonfires, and eat sun-like pancakes for seven days to welcome the sun's arrival. Nature spirits are not usually personified, but exist in their original, untouched form. Today, most of the world's peoples no longer regard nature spirits as objects of religious belief, but rather as cultural symbols representing national character.

In the eyes of the primitive ancestors, neutral nature spirits were the unit that constituted the initial myth. The deification of natural things as nature spirits was a manifestation of a sense of animism. British culturalists Taylor and Marx, as well as some Chinese scholars, consider nature myths with an animistic view (i.e., pantheistic ideas) as the origin of mythology. These myths focus on the sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, and other inanimate objects in the natural world and use them as the backdrop for a mythological narrative.

In the work "The Tale of Igor's Campaign," there are a large number of additional nature deities, in addition to the personified and demonized deities with specific images. For example, there are rivers and mountains that are anthropomorphized and modified in the plot. For example, the Dnieper River, which is called "Dnieper-Slovutich" to express its greatness. The anthropomorphic modification of the river is particularly numerous in this work, showing the importance of water for a range of activities of the Eastern Slavs, including leading military expeditions and farming. For example, "Know that the Sula no longer flows its own silvery waters / for the city of Poryaslavl, / while the Dvina, with the cry of the wicked / is flowing like a puddle of water / for the fearful Polotskians." "But, O Igor male, / the sun's light is dimmed, / and the trees ominously shake off their leaves; / they have divided the city on the Ross River Sula." [8] The above passage's description of nature's inanimate objects highlights the anthropomorphic character. Unlike the personification mentioned in the first chapter, the anthropomorphic narrative approach does not emphasize the human characteristics of natural things. They always maintain a primitive image of reality. These stanzas depict the ominous signs of natural things after the defeat of the Igorian princes, with the broken river signifying the drying up of the water of life and the dimming of the sun signifying the coming of darkness. The fear of negative things such as "hunger, thirst and darkness" is the nature of any living being, and the close combination of this bad omen manifested by the nature spirits and the fate of the main character reflects the important position occupied by the nature spirits in the worldview of the Eastern Slavs. Besides, in the episode of the return of the Igorian princes, the nature spirits can also show an auspicious sign, i.e. their positive side. This reflects the East Slavic interpretation of the beauty of nature: "The woodpecker guides the path to the river with its own knocking, / and the nightingale announces the dawn with its own cheerful song." "The sun shines in the sky, / And Igor has returned to the land of Russia." [9] The existence of these nature spirits is the most primitive form of expression of the East Slavs' expectations and prayers for nature, more ancient than the personified processing mentioned above. In the present day, Russians are also very close to nature. In the field of art, the famous Russian painter Shishkin, known as the "Singer of the Forest", is famous for his landscape paintings. The Soviet lyricist Astafyev excelled in describing natural landscapes and wrote excellent literary works about Siberian forests, such as "The Fish King". In terms of nature conservation, Russia has established a comprehensive system of nature reserves and adopted laws such as the Law of the Russian Federation "On Special Nature Reserves". [10] These outstanding achievements are based on the cultural traditions of the Eastern Slavs.

6. Conclusion

The polytheism embodied in "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" has its roots, i.e. it is rooted in the solidity of the faith of the people. According to Russian ethnoculturalist V.C.Solovyov, "polytheism is a product of a particular time, and it is closely connected with the entire national culture. The spirit of polytheism permeates the entire Russian national culture in a given epoch." [11] Polytheism gave the Russian people a sense of self-identity on a cultural and historical level, and in the development of Russian national culture, the positive feedback given to the people by polytheistic mythology in the spiritual world was a solid pillar of productive life in the real world. Against the backdrop of a complex mythological system, the subsequent development of polytheism in Kievan Rus has gradually moved away from the strictly

religious sphere and has gradually been integrated into the Russian worldview, shaping the national character of the Russian people as a people who are friendly to nature and eager to survive. The values of polytheism also emphasize patriotism, national unity and respect for the strong. Today, Russia's patriotic education and love for national heroes also derive from the best traditions of that time. For example, the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, commemorating the establishment of the Soviet Red Army, the Day of National Unity, commemorating the liberation of Moscow from the Polish invaders in 1612, the tradition of paying tribute to veterans and visiting the graves of unknown martyrs on the anniversary of the Great Patriotic War, etc. The Tale of Igor's Campaign" was described by the Russian scholar Ф.С.Сосенков. "The idea of 'unification of Russian territory' was first introduced in the 12th century in the Russian literary landmark "The Tale of Igor's Campaign". in the 12th century." [12] One hundred years after "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" was written, when the Mongol Empire invaded Kievan Rus', the princes of Kievan Rus' began to unite in a real sense against foreign enemies. Polytheism gave the people a solid faith, and the Russian people were able to unite quickly in the fight against the invasion. Whether it was the Grand Duke Igor's expedition against the Polovtsi or the Great Patriotic War against the fascist invaders, the Russian people have always attached great importance to national security, which is the result of the spiritual core of the whole nation shaped by the polytheistic worldview.

"The Tale of Igor's Campaign" is a historical and literary basis for interpreting the character of the East Slavic peoples, including Russia, and is a reference for solutions of interaction and mutual understanding with the East Slavic peoples. In the current era of globalization, exchanges between different ethnic groups are becoming more frequent, and in the face of the unprecedented changes of the past century, the correct treatment of ethnic and cultural differences is of great significance for the construction of a community of human destiny. It is reasonable to adhere to the Chinese cultural tradition of inclusiveness and to look rationally at the cultural differences between other nations and our own. We should analyze the causes of their culture and national character with a materialist historical view, make full use of modern Internet and other new technological means to broaden the sources of national interactions and increase international connections, provide a tool basis for a comprehensive interpretation of national cultures, and respect the diversity of national cultures in the world.

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