Tracing the Cultural Origin of Chinese Identity Based on Ancient Chinese Myths: A Mythological Approach and Overview

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

Review Article

ABSTRACT

The main source of mythology is oral communication, lacking documentation or first-hand sources, which leads most sinologists to look away from ancient Chinese myths simply for the credibility of their Chinese studies. However, myths are still being told today, manifesting themselves as a living tradition, passed on from the ancestors to the future generations across various modern contexts. Only in this living tradition can we trace the spiritual link between the current China and its previous phrases, especially the primitive stage. This paper serves to provide the succinct English translations of representative Chinese mythical narratives, organized in accordance with the anthropological line of reasoning about the social development from pre-tribal society to urban civilization. More importantly, combining theoretical frameworks across disciplines, this paper proposes a mythological approach, with the caveat of its limitation, to the early civilization of China, and explores the cultural origin of the Han Chinese, which is deemed the backbone of today's Chinese nation. Taking this approach, an overview is provided to underscore the comprehensive reasoning of social development at the primitive stage, and reveal that ancient myths, alongside early religious activities, induced by material needs for survival and development, lead to cultural

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and ideological outcomes, which are then utilized as the foundation of a nation's cultural identity and nationalism through historicization and politically motivated interpretations. Such efforts are supposed to be a valuable addition to both Sinology and cultural anthropology, especially in the context of East Asia. Extending the overview, directions for future scholarly endeavors are suggested.

Keywords: Mythology; sinology; primitive society; cultural anthropology; nation; identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mythology means originally and literally "storytelling" and is loosely used nowadays to denote a body of mythical narrative [1] as in Greek mythology. Mythologists use this term to signify their studies on certain products of the imagination of a people, which takes the form of tales [2] as humans use these mythological tales, along with rituals, to establish a sense of community and identity [3]. Therefore, the dominant modes of conceiving the relationship between memory and national identity could be revealed in mythology [4] if approached scientifically, offering a supplemental approach for analysis of nationalism and/or a nation's cultural identity.

However, most mythical narratives appear to be filled with inconsistencies. Not only taking a form of fragmentation, some of the narratives could also be combined and retitled later in the oral communication, which is exactly in and of their very nature. In this concern, scientific methodology is required to guide the use of mythology in the academic inspections. As suggested by Jung [5] the mythology scholarship "must not appeal at the outset to theoretical considerations and judgments"; instead, a research project should start with "storytelling" per se, followed by interpretations that serve certain academic interests. Then to standardize the interpretation process, at least three major questions can be asked of a certain myth: What is its subject matter? What is its origin? and What is its function? [6]. Theories of myths may differ on the answers they give to these questions, scaffolding distinct studies. In essence, if a mythological study suffices to be an exceptional one, it will richly reward those interested in the dynamics of artistic creation, cultural construction, ethnic emergence, and nationalism, as well as belief system [7]. Aiming for such academic contributions, the mainstream of mythological studies to date have based themselves on the interpretations of fixed, literary texts, which should also apply to the case of Chinese mythology [8]. Nonetheless, in most studies of nationalism, definitive answers have seemed within reach, only to fade from view with the arrival of fresh evidence or the advent of newer, seemingly more sophisticated theories [9] which casts a question mark over the existing mythological approach to Chinese nationalism and national identity. Therefore, methodologically, the author proposes an alternative that should be relatively appropriate, following the discussion on how ancient Chinese myths should be approached.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

Chinese mythology constitutes part of the world mythology series, which prioritizes the mission of introducing Chinese mythology to the West, as well as the rest of the world, for follow-up inquires [10]. Compared to Greek and Roman myths, myriads of Chinese myths seemingly have yet to receive ample attention from the academia withstanding the prosperity of Sinology, not to mention extensive translations between languages for general readership. In this sense, preceding the presentation of research question, the current study starts with a review on previous literature that contemplates the academic values of Chinese mythology in different research traditions.

2.1 Academic Values of Chinese Mythology

Chinese mythology has provided a multidisciplinary agenda for research. According to Lee [11] it was at the end of the 19th century that the concept of mythology was imported from West to East Asia and used as an ideological tool to create nations and establish national identities; consequently, the Eastern scholarship of nation-state mythology was established with national borders as boundaries. In the early twentieth century, the oral myths and legends began to draw the attention of Chinese scholars, when the anthropology and ethnography were introduced to China and the

"folk literature" (or folklore) started to be collected [8]. As part of the efforts to explore the far-reaching influences of ancient Chinese myths in traditional Chinese culture, some scholars investigate the influences on later literature, especially on poetry and fiction [12]. Research on the relationship between Chinese mythology and Chinese literature accounts for a considerable proportion of Chinese mythology literature, as most Chinese mythology scholars are also Chinese literature scholars [13]. The sources of ancient Chinese myths are wide and diverse, even with some parts contradictory to ancient documents, like the prestigious Records of the Grand Historian, or unearthed relics. Indeed, the orality of myths is making the investigation on Chinese mythology a Herculean task [8]. Yet, we cannot simply look away from this gold mine, or magnificent cultural legacy dating back to the early history of China, in that it reflects the knowledge and psychology of Chinese ancients, providing a lens for us inspecting early philosophy, moral values, aesthetics, scientific attitudes, religious consciousness, and so on [12]. In general, ancient Chinese myths imply the dynamics of social interactions that chronicle the rise of ancient Chinese civilization, whereas there are few other options for us approaching the mysterious primitive stage of China. In line with Liu [14] there should be a body of research on ancient Chinese myths - neither about verifying a fact based on mythical information, nor about deducing a prototype behind myths in retrospect - attempting to grasp the early thinking of the nation from a macroscopic perspective.

To understand the origin of a nation's culture, as suggested by Yang [12] we could, and should, look back at the nation's myths, which indicates a promising direction for Sinology. Ancient Chinese myths, collectively, constitute the ideological source of China's traditional culture, passing down unique ideas from Chinese ancestral mode of thinking to the current Chinese value system. In this sense, ancient Chinese myths have profound impacts on the development of Chinese traditional culture and present ideology. Moreover, Chinese mythology should be a legacy shared by East Asia, more than the product of one nation [15]. Chinese myths have a long history of being shared among different ethnic groups, thus also counting as an important reference for research on the mythology of any other geographically nearby nation, like South Korea [11].

3. DISCUSSION ON HOW TO APPROACH ANCIENT CHINESE MYTHS

There is a widespread agreement in the academic literature that nationalism is the core ideology in today's China [16] driving the awakening of self-consciousness of the "Chinese Nation" [17]. Then what fuels the construction of Chinese nationalism and national identity? The author turns to the wealth of ancient Chinese myths for a possible answer, which reflects the primitive beliefs and philosophical thoughts of Chinese ancestors under the benighted condition, tentatively locating the cultural origin of Chinese identity and hopefully contributing a methodological and contentual addition to the domain of Sinology, even though the possibility of inaccuracy, inconsistency, or incompleteness cannot be excluded, due to various versions of the myths for discussion. In this concern, we ought to sort out and illustrate Chinese mythology with the use of different research methods, across disciplines such as literary psychology, cultural anthropology, aesthetic culture, religious studies, folklore and so on, all in service of presenting the basic look of ancient Chinese myths, the thought connotations, and academic values [12]. In short, the convergence of multiple lines of mythological research constitutes a compelling rationale for mythologically approaching the cultural origin of modern Chinese nationalism and identity.

Yet, as every myth is de facto the product of thoughts and senses of people in ancient times, which in essence keeps shifting with the growth of human civilization, possibilities for adaptations during retrospects and interpretations cannot be simply overlooked. This is where the issues of historicization come in. In the case of ancient Chinese myths, as early as by the Warring States Period, scholars built off preexisting myths and formed a narrative system surrounding the Five Emperors(五帝); the great historian of the Han Dynasty, Sima Qian, chose to reshape the narratives regarding Five Emperors and incorporate them into the official history, marking the completion of the historicization of Chinese mythology [18]. Such adaptations for historicization extend to current literature. The unreasonable parts of a myth, for example, could be approached with present rationalism, in hopes of rationalizing the myth into a real and credible history; however, this approach could be problematic and even contrary to the essence of myths, as a rationalized and historicized myth only

ends up being "reasonable" at the cost of its original 'weird' elements, which are rich in ethical and political implications [19]. This limitation cannot be easily overcome, even for studies in which the methodology is proved valid and the logical development shows coherence. To support their hypotheses linking a myth's content to a theory, mythologists usually draw from studies in anthropology and ethnology, which suggest that a behavioral or thinking pattern in the story world is associated with some universal rationale. As a result, myriad scraps of "proof" have been collated so far and a wide range of different explanatory theories (often contradictory) have been advanced, in attempts to pin down those elusive concepts surrounding nationalism Lawrence, [9] – this issue haunts the endeavors of approaching nationalism mythologically.

Therefore, although most mythological studies must develop their arguments somewhat based on modern materialism, an appropriate approach is to look at myths with the logic of myths per se, and to explain them from the perspective of symbolism and belief, rather than misread them, blindly in search of "historical facts" or evidence. Thus, since the author also tends to historicize Chinese mythology and thereby locate the basis for early ethics, as the preparation for politicization [20] the limitation of doing so is noted here specifically, open for criticism, as a must-do, in a meticulous manner, of the mythological approach proposed later. Bearing the limitation in mind, the author attempts to outline the key concepts and narratives of Chinese mythology, provide an overview of the Chinese mythological worldview, and further reveal certain characteristics of the connotations behind the ancient Chinese myths.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

While the historicization of mythology could underpin the anthropological line of reasoning in terms of early social development from pre-tribal society to urban civilization, the logic and rationale beneath analysis transcend a sole scholarship, combining theoretical frameworks across disciplines, which might also require methodologies from different research traditions. Thus, for the proper use of theoretical and methodological tools in the current study, the aim of this paper should be first clarified.

4.1 Aim of this Paper: Research Question and the Scope of Interest

The aim of this study is to approach China's ancient times from the mythological perspective to trace the cultural origin of Chinese identity, thereby identifying the role of mythology in the formation of this modern cultural identity. To conduct such an enormous task, the author chooses a unique narrative method, while specific interpretations or analyses of related texts, as in most preexisting literature, are ruled out. As the task attempted by this study can be said to be ambitious, the readership might find that too large of a subject is dealt within a single paper, which could lead to sparse logical arguments or weak persuasions. Therefore, instead of in-depth examinations on certain texts, the author aims for a concise overview of the primitive society of China as being told by today's Chinese folk, which can be further divided into several monographs, all potentially in efforts to address one core question: how might ancient Chinese myths, as being told today, be used in the current construction of Chinese nationalism, at the state level, and Chinese cultural identity, at the personal level?

Instead of providing concrete or complete answers to the question above, the current study presents English-translated mythical narratives, well-organized for scientific communication, as a starter of addressing this question. While the English translation of ancient Chinese myths has already reached a considerable number of achievements to date, the present study tends to re-organize the fragments of ancient Chinese myths, logically developing them with interpretations as valid as possible to partially address the core question, which is supposed to be another contribution to the existing literature. By doing so, the early social development of primitive China can also be deduced, providing an overview of how the origin of the Chinese nation is imagined by Chinese people today through Chinese myths, and thereby partially addressing the core question mentioned above.

4.2 Theoretical Perspectives: Connecting Myths to Multidisciplinary Interpretations

Although interpretations shall be minimized to prevent any possible skewing of the myths' original meaning, scientific interpretations are still necessary, especially in the face of research questions that require answers in hindsight. To

connect myths and human activities, theoretical frameworks in terms of social or behavioral psychology should be introduced. For example, in line with Chwe [21] to coordinate group actions, a group of people must form common knowledge - knowledge of each other, knowledge of that knowledge, knowledge of the knowledge of that knowledge, and so on - for which the group turns to coarser concepts, namely concepts that are more blunt and less specific. In this sense, the coarse and inconsistent part of a myth system could result endogenously from the practical need of a people to cooperate, not just from individual cognitive processes or the limitation of oral communication. This line of thoughts underpins the selection, translation, and interpretation of all mythical narratives in the present study, with the limitation of modern rationalization and adaptation, inevitably, as discussed above. Moreover, additional theories, transcending the boundaries of psychology, will be introduced later to explain certain mechanisms of early Chinese social development, as reflected by specific myths.

4.3 Proposed Approach: Developing an Overview by Storytelling

Methodologically, Lévi-Strauss and Wilcken [22] suggest that meanings should be drawn out not just from individual myths, but clusters of myths, and that the transformations of those myths, from one version to the next, should be traced. As the latter suggestion, concerning fact- finding and fact-checking problems, falls outside this paper's aim, the author adopts their former suggestion and hereby proposes a mythological approach that could better serve this paper's interest.

The earlier discussion on how to approach ancient Chinese myths also presents a considerable number of critical reviews that support the proposal of an alternative mythological approach, more sticking with the tradition of oral communication and storytelling. Without introducing or comparing different versions of textualized narratives, every myth selected in this study is told in a general manner, leaving aside most controversial details, only in service of explaining how mythological tales are used for buttressing the cultural origin and pride of the Han Chinese, which is asserted as the backbone of modern Chinese nation across many Chinese contexts today (for example, a discussion about online Han supremacism, by Leibold, [23]. In short, this paper tends to re-organize the fragments of ancient Chinese

myths, logically developing an overview along with interpretations as valid as possible, which is supposed to be another unique and considerate contribution to the existing literature.

Indeed, it is not meticulous to develop the analysis of mythical narratives without introducing any published or textualized materials. Yet it does not necessarily mean that only in the presence of "sources" can a tale be told and used for analysis. For one reason, it is hard to exclude the possibility of theorization from any form of textualization. In this concern, although myths now manifest themselves as, both inevitably and irreversibly, an amalgam of primitive stories and their modern adaptations, the author attempts to screen out any preexisting "credible" or influential textualization, as it is hard to exclude possibilities of theorization from a specific storytelling text, which requires another line of research. In this regard, the main source of the myths collected for the current study, a cultural book published in easy-to- understand Chinese, can be found in the Note, while without further examinations on its credibility in this paper.

Nonetheless, myths per se are not precursors to Chinese nationalism or cultural identity. Thus, to serve the interest of the present research, what needs to be explained is how, by whom, a myth relating to Huaxia has been historically circulated, mediated, and emerged as part of the hegemonic narratives which establish and reinforce the cultural nationalism in present China. While no specific textual analysis is made in the current study, methodologically, the author taps into previous literature regarding the historicization and politicization of ancient Chinese myths and develops a line of reasoning based on the logic and rationale of materialism, to tentatively approach the relationship between ancient Chinese myths and today's Chinese identity, as well as nationalism.

To effectively deliver this subject, an overview is provided in a form that resembles a cultural book for the public. Even though this approach is also problematic, with its insurmountable limitation, we shall not balk at the chance to get a glimpse into the primitive society of China and the cultural origin of Chinese identity, simply in fear of critiques from agnostics or skeptics. Therefore, the following sections, while mainly based on the author's arguments, serve as an overview of the Chinese mythological worldview, and reveal certain characteristics of the connotations behind

the ancient Chinese myths, which might be utilized in the development of Chinese nationalism and cultural identity.

5. THE MATERIAL BASIS OF PRE-TRIBAL AND EARLY TRIBAL CIVILIZATION

Archaeological results show that more than a million years ago, the ancestors of the Chinese nation began to live on the vast land that borders on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean in the east and crosses the Roof of the World (Himalayas) in the west. At that time, the currently well- known primitive cultures in the Huang-Huai(黄淮) Region and Yangtze River Basins, the present-day microlithic cultures of Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, etc., as well as other early cultures throughout central and southern China, had ensued and coexisted, which demonstrates the composite, high-level achievements of early Chinese civilization. However, due to the limitations of the material conditions, the relatively advanced tribes with written relics mainly lived in the Yellow River basin. From west to east, geographically, are the ancestors of Zhou(周), Xia(夏), and Shang(商) – while they are listed chronologically in most cases, as Xia, Shang, and Zhou (Xia is widely considered as a mythical era, rather than a historical phrase). They influenced each other culturally, and gradually nurtured a common cultural belonging under a constructed concept beyond tribes. To better understand the material basis of this process, the following discussion starts with the myths that reflect the transformation of the production methods and lifestyles at the pre-tribal stage.

What bears repeating is, through the myths, we are able to approach the prehistoric stage in which ancient people lived, feeling how they explored the world and how they perceived themselves; facing their living environment back at that time, ancient people experienced confusion, curiosity, fear and reverence, and attempted to explore and explain the mystery of nature with their primitive thinking [12]. Consequently, the worship of nature was generated, along with early religions and leaderships in early communities [17].

Notably, it is modern materialism that navigates this line of reasoning. As early as before the emergence of tribes, based on the gregarious nature, the primitive human communities already existed in the form of clustered groups. Compared with the tribal civilization, this is a more primitive, loose, and depoliticized stage of civilization, known as pre-tribal civilization, which generally refers to the period before the Neolithic Age. Although the pre-tribal civilization did not satisfy all the characteristics of the tribal stage, the transformation of the production method and lifestyle had far-reaching effects, laying the material foundation for the later development of civilization. In the meantime, the role of primitive divinity and cultural expression in that period, developing with material life, also contributed considerably to the formation of early civilization.

5.1 The Scope of Ancient China: the "Huaxia" worldview and the "Five Shi"

For ancient China, there are two terms that need to be clarified up front: Huaxia(华夏), as in the "Huaxia land"(华夏大地), is usually understood as a generalized geographical concept; Zhonghua(中华), on the other hand, is deemed to carry more ideological values as a product of socio-political construction based on modern nationalism and usually found in "Zhonghua Minzu"(中华民族), which literally means "Chinese nation" in the context of modern China (for an in-depth discussion on relevant concepts, see Sleeboom, [24]. The current study on primitive Chinese civilization, with respect to the cultural origin of Chinese nationalism available in the myth system, shall be based on the regional and relatively objective concept of ancient China, Huaxia, to avoid possible skews or misunderstandings from modern ideological construction. In its original sense, the Huaxia land is believed to include the majority of today's Henan Province, southern Hebei Province, southern Shanxi Province, eastern Shaanxi Province, and western Shandong Province, which collectively covered the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. However, with the migration and dispersal of Huaxia ancestors, the geographical scope of Huaxia was constantly expanding, so was the system of Huaxia myths. In this sense, the distribution and integration of specific myths in different regions, along with the establishment of ancient civilizations in the mythological era, is worth deep thinking [25]. Based on intersubjectivity, Jung [15] sought to reestablish Chinese mythology as a shared East Asian legacy, the subjects of which can be divided into two groups: the group that

constructed Chinese mythology and the group that claimed and transmitted it; while the former should be the Dong-yi race, a collective term for ancient peoples inhabiting eastern China, the latter is considered to be Han Chinese [15].

The present study explores how ancient Chinese myths can be used as a lens to approach the cultural origin of Chinese nationalism, focusing particularly on Huaxia as the geographical concept for ancient China, in contrast to Zhonghua, and reminding the readership of potential misunderstandings from modern ideological constructions. In the barbaric era of the Huaxia land, Huaxia ancestors honored five mythological heroes named "Five Shi"(五氏).

Notably, "- shi"(-氏) in Chinese serves as an indicator of family bearing the same name that is placed before "-shi". Hence, Five Shi could be more than five legendary figures, but five influential families or clans. They are Suiren-shi, Youchao-shi, Fuxi-shi, Nüwa-shi, and Shennong-shi; the myths about them, collectively comprising the ancient Chinese version of polytheism, depict how the primitive Huaxia underwent a series of revolutionary changes, as imagined in the ancient Chinese belief system.

5.2 The Myth of Suiren-shi(燧 人 氏): Imagined Origin of Manmade Fire

Primitive tribes might subdivide fire into two categories: celestial and destructive fire, terrestrial (or cooking) and creative fire; the contrast between the two kinds of fire could be emphasized in a culture's mythology [26]. Mastering the second category of fire denotes a farewell to the savage life. In the context of Huaxia, Suiren-shi is believed to take this credit.

Among the Five Shi, Suiren-shi is honored as the head of the five, known as the "Emperor Sui"(燧皇). He is worshipped by Chinese people as the Huaxia version of Prometheus, due to his outstanding contribution: discovering how to drill wood for fire and instructing people to use fire for cooking. Before the time of Suiren-shi, there was even no concept of fire in the conceptual world of Huaxia ancestors. As argued by Lévi-Strauss [26] before learning about fire and the cooking of food, primitive people simply placed meat on a stone and exposed it to the sun's rays.

According to the myth of Suiren-shi, there was a thunderstorm when a lightning struck a forest and ignited a blazing fire. Witnessing this scene, Suiren-shi, who happened to pass by the forest, realized the convenience of fire: it can not only be used for lighting and driving away animals, but also for keeping people warm and cooking food. Thereafter, Suiren-shi led people to look for similar natural fire, and the quality of life was thereby greatly improved. However, natural fire could easily go out, which Suiren-shi was worried about. He occasionally saw a bird pecking a tree with sparks bursting out; then he was inspired to drill wood for fire (in another version of this myth, similarly, he started to chisel wood with stone). Consequently, Huaxia ancestors mastered the method of making fire, which greatly promoted a leap forward in terms of people's life quality and life expectancy. It also laid the foundation for a primitive agricultural production mode, namely the slash-and-burn cultivation, which exerts far-reaching influences on Huaxia as an agricultural civilization.

5.3 The Myth of Youchao-shi(有 巢 氏): Imagined Origin of Nesting Skills

The invention of nesting indicates a farewell to cave dwelling, to which Youchao-shi is believed to contribute much. In ancient times, humans and beasts used to live together in nature with no effective partition, and the human population was spread in a relatively sparse and scattered manner. Before mastering systematic methods of taming wild animals, human beings were in a weak position when confronting beasts, especially predators. Living safely, away from beasts, became the overall strategy for people to cope with beasts at this stage, and it also influenced people's decision-making on dwelling places and lifestyles.

In accordance with some archaeological discoveries, early Huaxia civilizations fall into the category of cave dwelling civilizations. These Huaxia ancestors seek caves for shelter, instead of sleeping in the open. However, the caves that were open to humans were also accessible to beasts. Thus, taking caves as shelters was not effective enough to protect people from wild animals; turning to a better option of dwelling constitutes the only solution. This is where the myth of Youchao-shi comes in. Youchao-shi was said to be inspired by the birds' nests in trees, and then taught people to build their own house by imitating the way birds nest in trees. From then on, Huaxia ancestors went out to seek acorns for food in the daytime and came back to

their nests at night to avoid head-on confrontations with beasts on the earth. From cave dwelling to nesting, this change ushered in major changes. The life safety was better guaranteed. Meanwhile, the birth of primitive architectural technology provided technical supports for Huaxia ancestors to overcome environmental constraints and expand their living spaces, as well as the scope of civilization.

5.4 The Myth of Cangjie(仓颉): Purported Origin of Chinese Characters

Cangjie, though not being one of the Five Shi, is claimed to be an official "historian" of the Yellow Emperor - another influential legendary figure in the Huaxia belief system, which will be discussed later. Since the purported contribution of Cangjie marked the end of the preliterate age in Huaxia, his myth is noteworthy here.

The official "historian" assumed by Cangjie, different from the historians in the later history, mainly refers to the role in charge of recording the daily expenses of a tribe, daily chores, etc., not the work of systematically combing, compiling, and cataloging the important personages and events for record. The specific responsibility of Cangjie was to count and record the number of livestock. At that time, there was no written character. During the process of recording livestock by tying knots and hanging shells on ropes, Cangjie gradually realized the limitation of this recording method. Afterwards, Huangdi entrusted him with heavier jobs, assigning him the work of recording sacrifices, allotments, and even the tribe's population. It was no longer possible for Cangjie to stick to the old strategy to cope with these tasks.

One day, there was a group hunting, when some hunters disputed in front of a junction of roads. Some said that there were tigers in one direction, while others argued that there were deer in another direction. Witnessing this scene, Cangjie realized that people could identify the whereabouts of certain animals based on the footprints. Inspired by this, Cangjie created a set of symbols, namely hieroglyphs, to indicate common things in daily life, solving the problem of recording objects. More to the point, the invention of hieroglyphs provided a basic, effective carrier for fine textual recording. The primal character system created the premise for the documentation of life and the inheritance of ancient Chinese civilization. It also established a template for the development of totem systems that serve as identity symbols for different Huaxia tribes, and for the constructed Chinese nation, "Zhonghua Minzu", as a whole.

6. THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRIBAL IDENTITY SYMBOL

The academia has offered various approaches to the development of social identity. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) [27]. When it comes to national society, Benedict Anderson coined the term "Imagined Community", arguing that what we think of as nations are no more than imagined communities, and that members of an imagined community share imagined ties [28]. Similarly, Hobsbawm [29] theorized how social mechanisms link the contemporary experience of a people to their previous generations, underwrite the processes of the historical imagination, and give rise to the Identity of a nation. The philosophical work of Henry Corbin with the usage of the term 'imaginal' for details, see Corbin & Horine, [30] as it serves as a bridge into the more mythical and archetypal reasons for the generation of myths, which can resonate the psychological sphere. The author turns to psychology for deeper discussion.

The psychology scholarship points out the reflection of objective reality as a starter to understand identity, which is deemed as the source of all human psychological activities. It is impossible to talk about any spiritual life or psychological activity, including the sense of belonging and the concept of identity, without inspecting objective reality. Human socialization, relying on psychological activities, is a process in which an individual develops one's own personality by approaching objective reality in a specific sociocultural context. In this process, one learns about and internalizes socially accepted behaviors and values, and thereby transforming into a social being. This mechanism explains how socialization is realized on an individual level, through the interaction between social members and social environments. Likewise, the formation of national identity is another kind of human socialization, or more precisely, social integration, which could be interpreted as a process of labeling a people, instead of an individual, based on their self-understanding as a group. The product of artificial construction is usually used as the label to identify a certain people and to distinguish them from others. This is where the totem culture comes in. Analyzing

the material basis for the socialization behind totems could be a starting point for us to look beyond totems. Myths, though being accused of lacking credibility, somewhat reflect the material basis, i.e., the objective reality back at the time when the stories were staged, and therefore provide us with a mythological approach to the primitive social integration.

6.1 The Origin of Totem: from Nature Worship to Tribal Spirit

As maintained by Sigmund Freud in his masterpiece, *Totem and Taboo* - later translated in English (2012) - the totem, in the first place, is the common ancestor of the clan and their guardian spirit. Totem belief is deemed the core of tribal spiritual life. Born out of primitive drawings, totems serve as one of the most concentrated reflections of reality perceived by people at that time, implying the germination of human curiosity and creativity. Although it is difficult to accurately interpret tribal totems in their original meaning, we can still make reasonable and constructive inferences in the relational context of primitive society, taking, for example, tribal productivity, cognitive level, language ability, geographical variations of tribal descendants, as well as species evolution into consideration. Far-fetched guesses are thereby excluded from the subsequent discussion.

A tribal totem should be the creation of tribal people based on their reverence for certain natural element(s), which indicates their tribal spirit. Based on superstitions and worships about certain animals or other natural substances, primitive people subjectively established a coreference relationship between their tribe and the objective they worship. Consequently, a symbol for the object is created, in a highly abstract manner, to represent the tribe, reveal the tribal spirit, and guide the tribal rituals. As a symbol of kinship and affiliation, totem is one of the earliest cultural phenomena. Some scholars even regard totem worship as a form of primitive religion, while others accuse such arguments of being problematic [31]. In the case of Huaxia, the centerpiece should be the creation of Loong(龙) totem, with relevant myths surrounding this symbolic Chinese dragon.

6.2 The Loong Totem: Reflection of the Change in the Nature-Human Relationship

In line with archaeological findings, most of the existing totem relics of primitive Huaxia tribes are preserved on painted potteries. The decorative pattern of pottery is deemed a groundbreaking artistic achievement in the Neolithic Age. The depictions are rich in contents, especially well-known for the animal patterns, such as fish, birds, tigers, frogs, pigs, sheep and so forth. In China, there are abundant remains of painted pottery with animal patterns, unearthed in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, the Central Plains of the Fen- he(汾河) River, Wei-he(渭河) River basins, as well as the upper reaches of the Yellow River and the northwestern part of the Daxia(大夏) River basin. Since most primitive tribal sites are found to be located near rivers, it is safe to say that these tribes lived by rivers and relied on fisheries; fish pattern is therefore the most common image for totem. The painted pottery with human faces and fish on it, which was unearthed in Banpo village, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province,could be a support to this argument.

As for Loong, or Chinese dragon, unlike other totem images, it is not an existing species, but a supernatural creature that has never been scientifically proved so far. The current discussion does not focus on the possible biological origin of Loong, but the cultural origin of this icon, as reflected in the ancient Chinese belief system. Notably, surrounding the icon of Loong, numerous critical studies on Fuxi-Kao (伏羲考) by Wen Yiduo (闻一多), who suggested the theory of Loong totem, can be found with divergent views held by different scholars. Since the examination of these views falls outside of the current research scope, the author simply opts for the less controversial, Loong-related narratives to develop this part of overview.

Throughout the history of Chinese civilization, Loong stands out as one of the most representative icons. In the hearts of Chinese people, who call themselves as the descendants of Loong, Loong is a powerful creature with supernatural powers. However, the specific image of Loong remains cloudy throughout history. The current description of Loong could be nothing but a version or prototype, processed and modified by generations after generations. What is the image of Loong at its birth? The snake worship of Fuxi(伏羲) tribe – as in "Fuxi-shi", one of the Five Shi - could be the forerunner of the Loong worship. Then how the snake worship turned into the Loong worship is worth consideration. It could be driven by the change

of mindset, from being blindly subjected to nature to dreaming of conquering nature.

As mentioned above, the spiritual connotation of totem is inseparable from nature worship. In the eyes of Huaxia ancestors, nature was the ultimate existence of omnipotence, as well as the highest-level object of all worships. In this sense, nature appears to be Heaven in the context of Huaxia. This worldview made Huaxia ancestors attribute their hard work, brave exploration, and crystallization of collective wisdom to nature, which can be found in the ancient myths introduced above: inspirations for innovations were gained from nature. Moreover, Nüwa(女娲), as in "Nüwa-shi" of the Five Shi, was said to conduct the decree of nature to smelt five-colored stones, thereby patching up the sky and rescuing people from the doomsday; similarly, inspired by nature, Fuxi learned how to domesticate wild animals and taught people to fish with nets and to hunt with weapons. Taking one step further from these myths, we can land on the conclusion that primitive people were obedient to nature, hoping to achieve self-sufficiencyand prosperity.

However, natural disasters were relentless. Heartless mother nature repeatedly brought despairs to her believers. For instance, meteorites fell from the sky and destroyed human habitats; torrential floods overwhelmed people and cattle; the outbreak of plague claimed many lives and the land all laid waste. Facing the capriciousness of nature, people gradually realized that passively following the will of nature was not the best option for survival. There should be a marvelous creature that could not only control water, rainfall, typhoons, and floods, but also fly in the clouds and hide in water, thereby contending with nature and assuming the spiritual support for helpless people. The concept of Loong was born thereafter.

There is a myth about the creation of Loong. It is said that Fuxi and Nüwa were inspired by the image of snake and conceived of Loong. They traveled all over the world, went up mountains and plunged into seas. After going through countless hardships, they managed to gather the body of snake, the head of crocodile, the horns of buck, the eyes of tiger, the scales of carp, the legs of lizard, the claws of goshawk, the tail of shark and the whiskers of whale, and used their witchcraft to combine these materials so as to create the Loong that in turn replaced snake as

their tribal totem. Loong was later inherited by Huangdi(黄帝), literally the "Yellow Emperor", who was believed to unify the Huaxia land. After the unification of Huaxia, Loong started to be worshiped as a long-lasting totem in the Chinese belief system. Today's China is still known for its Loong culture.

In the author's understanding, the creation of Loong, as a manmade creature rather than a natural thing, was a harbinger of the idea that human could conquer nature, as well as the pursuit for self-improvement. Loong totem marked the greatness of Huaxia ancestors confronting nature and the enhancement of their subjective initiative. The characteristics of Loong, usually described as diligence, bravery, self-improvement, and so forth, have become a source of precious spiritual wealth underpinning modern Chinese nationalism.

6.3 Division in Contemporary Interpretations on Loong: Peace-loving or Militant?

There have been contradictory comments on the characteristics of Loong, rooted deep down inside the mind of Chinese people. Recently, with the rise and rampancy of the China threat theory on a global scale, some claim that the Chinese dragon represents the desire for supreme power and symbolizes the intention of invincible conquest. In the eyes of others, who argue that China will rise peacefully, the impeachment on Loong is a fallacy. In line with the narratives for the peaceful rise of China, Chinese people, claiming themselves to be the descendants of Loong, are not blinded by the possession of power; neither do they preach the ideas of doing harm to neighbors and winning non-cooperative games on the international stage. From this perspective, any China threat narrative quoting Loong as a cultural proof is built upon misunderstandings of the true mind of Loong.

Multiple cultural and ethnic groups with different symbols lived together on the Huaxia land. In ancient Chinese myths, aside from Loong, the Queen of the West clan took blue bird as her totem, while Shennong-shi(神农氏) chose ox, the Bei-di(北狄) clan turned to wolf, and other clans and tribes worshipped bear, tiger, and leopard. Loong, believed to be made of the components from most animals mentioned above, therefore represents all the cultures and spirits behind

various Huaxia totems. It sends out a message of unity and harmony, instead of the evil intention of killing and conquering. Maybe in this sense, today China is promoting the Loong culture and teaching next generations about the spirits of Loong, in both governmental and civic spheres. However, scholars with related concerns are invited to keep an eye on such ideology projects, as the interpretation of a cultural item is at the mercy of authorities for political purposes in most cases. Therefore, once the interpretation of Loong goes wild, it is highly possible that the national character of China will change from a peace lover to a militant villain. As discussed before, the process of a person internalizing a sense of national identity and belonging constitutes an important part of individual socialization. The influence of national culture on a person could be immeasurable, shaping the personality imperceptibly and in turn cultivating the national character. What should be alert is, through the spiritual connotation of symbols, a national character can be built and modified, for better or worse. The example of Nazi, Reichsadler, and Swastika could be taken as a red flag warning us about how destructive the application of symbolism can be.

7. ANCIENT CHINESE POLYTHEISM AND LEGENDARY PREDECESSORS

A result of the historicization of Chinese mythology is the formation of a genealogy with Huangdi, or the Yellow Emperor, at its core [19]. This Huangdi-centered genealogy accounts for ancient Chinese polytheism, containing a series of legendary predecessors, and can also be approached as the product of primitive religions. The ancestor god and the god of heaven merge into one, permeating the historicization of ancient Chinese myths [18].

7.1 Regional Sovereignty and Integration behind Ancient Polytheism

Primitive religions are believed to build off myths from the beginning. The connection between mythology and primitive religion cannot be denied by even those who object to equating these two do; religion is a clue for studying a nation's myths [17]. In the case of ancient China, the rise of polytheism and early religious beliefs can be identified in the myths depicting the Huaxia universe.

In the worldview of Huaxia ancestors, the Huaxia land is regarded as the center of their world. More

than a stretch of land, Huaxia is described as the "central heaven and earth" and the source of "orthodoxy". Outside the land of orthodoxy, other ethnic or cultural groups, which settled in the east, west, north, and south, were excluded from the category of Huaxia. The traditional notion about these "non-orthodoxic" race groups goes like: Dong-yi(东夷)，Xi- rong(西戎), Nan-man(南蛮), and Bei-di(北 狄). The integration and assimilation between these groups from the "Four Directions" and the Huaxia community from the "Central World" propelled the social integration and the formation of early multi-tribal community. The tribal leaders were deified as god-like "Emperors", giving birth to early Chinese polytheism. It is possibly because back at that time people tended to liken the reigning emperors to gods; on the other hand, adapting to the ruling needs, the leaders embraced such thinking of the masses to strengthen the hierarchical order at the ideological level. As a result of long-term literary processing throughout history, the conflicts and integrations between tribes were dramatized into a romance between these god-like emperors. Notably, it is also argued that from the Spring and Autumn Period to the Warring States Period, the theory of abdication rose and turned mythical heroes in ancient myths into human emperors, while the gods and monsters that could not be transformed into human emperors were eliminated from then on, which directly led to the historicization of ancient Chinese myths [18]. In this regard, the early development of Chinese common identity can be approached as romanticized family histories of legendary emperors, worth academic efforts of discerning the essentials behind rhetorical devices and tracing the source of the common sense of belonging, as reflected in ancestor worship.

Embracing the life mode of traditional agrarian civilization, Huaxia ancestors gradually developed the need to settle down in a certain district. They lived in groups and organized divisions of labor, giving rise to clans and tribes as the main units of primitive sociopolitical structure. In the process of social integration, the concentration of political power ensued with the construction of identity symbol and the sacrificial activities in rituals. To enhance the cohesion of their communities, the tribal leaders led the people to conduct sacrifices to their ancestors. By doing so, ancestors were endowed with divinity. "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors" (三皇五帝) are deemed the direct product of such

activities. In fact, the notion of "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors" also appears in historical documents following the formation of united dynasty like Han (汉) [18].

7.2 Blood Lineage between Legendary Figures in Ancestor Worship

Chinese mythology shows a tendency to emphasize the concept of blood lineage, forming a descendant circle with common ancestors at the center [18]. Such imaginations about blood lineage bridge the traditions of ancestor worship and the early religious activities.

The existence of a nexus, a legendary figure leading a prosperous tribe that strives to absorb other tribes into one entity, can be found in a great deal of mythical narratives. In this regard, the discussion on Huaxia ancestor worship should start with the nexus, which is the Yellow Emperor, or Huangdi, representing the Huaxia community, and the "Four Emperors", representing the race groups from the Four Directions mentioned before. Looking into relevant myths, the author tends to reveal a thought-provoking aspect in the pedigrees of the Huangdi and the Four Emperors. These worshiped ancestors are believed to be closely related in terms of genealogy. Yandi (炎帝), namely the Emperor of the South, and Huangdi are described as half-brothers, while the Emperor of the North is said to be a descendant of Huangdi and the Emperor of the West is believed to be a son of Huangdi. This kind of imagined blood tie could deviate from the need for social integration. To strengthen the sense of community and eliminate the potential conflicts, ideological operations are adopted to impart a sense of common origin into the people within the same community. Based on the need for ideological unification, mythical narratives, or a nation's history being now told to the masses, could be grandiose and politicized, serving to confirm the value of a nation as a unity, in a normative thought process.

However, historical figures and events, even conveyed in mythical narratives, should be multilateral by nature, rich in implications beyond what is being told. At the core of the historicization of Chinese mythology is the "ethicalization", which refers to a process of beautifying the "winners" and degrading the "losers" [19]. As a result, gods, or ancient emperors, gradually turn into a series of pale concepts, which stand for "good", while their rivals, who were defeated, are established as the "evil". In this sense, our understanding of a nation's imagined ancestors should not be limited to a series of god-creating movement and family romance in myths; instead, we shall strive to investigate what is underneath the narratives, and thereby prevent our studies from slipping into blind worship or ignorance, somewhat meant by the myths for ideological purposes.

Religion, throughout its history, has always been indissolubly linked to mythical elements; on the other hand, myth, even in its most primitive and roughest form, contains religious elements. In a sense, ancient myths foreshadowed the themes of later religious ideals [17].

8. TRIBAL CONFLICTS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Today, while self-claiming to be the descendants of Loong, Chinese people also tend to identify themselves as the descendants of Yandi and Huangdi, or Yan-Huang-zisun(炎黄子孙) for abbreviation. This is deemed the common origin of Zhonghua Minzu, the Chinese nation, in concept. It might have a cultural origin in two major tribes, led by Yandi, in the south, and Huangdi, in the center, respectively, going from rivalry to unity, along with their allies, which implies that intertribal conflicts ended up with social integration.

8.1 Polarity and Parity: Huangdi and Yandi

Huangdi's mother was named Fubao(附宝), who was married to Shaodian(少典), the monarch of the Youxiong Kingdom(有熊国). The Youxiong kingdom, though being named as a kingdom, might be no more than a tribe state, located in Jishui, today's Xinzheng, Henan Province. Fubao was said to conceive Huangdi when she was hit by a lightning bolt. When Huangdi was born, he was first named Gongsun(公孙); since he lived nearby a place called Ji-shui(姬水) for a long time, he took Ji(姬) as the surname. After settling down around the Xuanyuan Hill, the widely known name "Xuanyuan-shi" was adopted to denote him. The Xuanyuan Hill was believed to be the Center of Heaven and Earth on the Huaxia land; the conjecture about its location is

in today's Kaifeng, Henan Province. After succeeding to the monarch of Youxiong, he was officially titled the Yellow Emperor, namely Huangdi, which means the supreme ruler of the Loess Plateau, or Huangtu Gaoyuan(黄土高原). During his reign, his ambition was constantly growing, to an extent that he was also known as the Dihong-shi(帝鸿氏) in some narratives, which literally means the great ambition of emperor.

As for the origin of Yandi, as mentioned earlier, Chinese people are willing to believe that he was the half-brother of Huangdi. It is said that the mother of Yandi was named Nüdeng(女登), married to Shaodian, the monarch of Youxiong. She came across a Loong and conceived Yandi. Yandi was born near some place named Jiang-shui(姜水), thus he took Jiang as his surname.

He was also known as Shennong-shi(神农氏), which means the God of agriculture, since he was believed to invent ploughs and plowshares, and to taste various herbs in person to see if they can be used as medicine.

Notably, Yandi and Huangdi respectively took Jiang and Ji as their surnames, which were the two greatest surnames of the later Zhou dynasty. It can be said that in the belief system of the Zhou upper class, the two great emperors were their ancestors, hereby granting them the legitimacy of ruling. However, due to vague records available in ancient documents, it is impossible for us to find out whether the myths about Yandi and Huangdi were based on exactly two ancient heroes or several figures under the two titles. A relatively scientific conjecture is that the name of a certain mythical figure could be a collective concept, referring to a group of related figures that are believed to make a series of interrelated contributions to later generations.

8.2 Integration and Coexistence: from Bipolar Conflicts to the Yan-Huang union

In primal times, it was not uncommon that Huaxia tribes attacked each other for resources and spaces. At first, Yandi and Huangdi led their tribes to invade and massacre each other, maintaining a state of parity; but soon after the military force of Huangdi peaked, the Huangdi tribe attempted to force its counterparts to follow its leadership. This intention can be explained from the perspective of geopolitics [32] as the

Huangdi tribe occupied the Heartland of Huaxia and therefore expected to expand its living space. The Yandi tribe refused the peace offer. Consequently, two epic battles broke out on the Huaxia land.

The first battle took place in Banquan(阪泉). Yandi retreated in defeat and settled in the south, granted the Sovereign of the South by Huangdi. Since then, Xuanyuan-shi occupied the legitimate status, and the Huaxia community, as the imagined predecessor of the Han Chinese, came into being.

The second battle was known as the battle of Zhuolu(涿鹿), Chiyou(蚩尤), as the descendant of Yandi, refused to follow the orders of Huangdi. It was said that Chiyou had 81 brothers, all of which had bronze heads that swords or knives could not penetrate; the body of Chiyou was incredible enormous and strong, and he consumed sand, stones, coppers, and irons as food. Such descriptions fall into the category of typical demonization, implying how the minority represented by Chiyou was evaluated by the Huaxia community. Chiyou once served as the God of Ordnance under the leadership of Huangdi, in charge of building the boardwalks. Following the death of Yandi, Chiyou claimed the throne and led his troops to strive for hegemony. In response, Huangdi launched a decisive battle in Zhuolu, defeating and killing Chiyou. Thereafter, Huangdi formally unified the Huaxia land and established the capital in Zhuolu. A grand ceremony, namely 'Feng Shan'(封禅) in Chinese, was said to be held at the sumit of Mount Tai(泰山) to commemorate this unification and pray for the peace and prosperity of the Huaxia union, marking the end of intertribal conflicts in primitive China.

9. TRANSFORMATION FROM BARBARIAN TRIBES TO CIVILIZED SOCIETY

Most heroic myths involve national ancestors and state founding stories, and a considerable number of them are found related to the origins of modern countries [13]. Although the concept of nationalism, alongside nation-states, is believed to come into being gradually during the modern citizen stratum rising and rebelling against the absolutist monarchies in Europe (for an in-depth discussion on nation-state and nationalism, see Malesevic, [33] some national identity symbols,

utilized by urban intellectuals for ideological purposes, could trace back to the ancient times of a certain people. In similar concerns, Huaxia tribal totems have been discussed in the context of multiple tribes coexisting and interacting with each other. This part extends the earlier discussion on identity symbols and looks more into the mythical origin of the early state on the Huaxia land, after the unification realized by Huangdi.

9.1 The Myth of Jian Mu(建 木): Imagination of a Supreme Authority

Prior to the formation of the Huaxia union, powerful tribal leaders sought to establish and consolidate their reigns by military conquests, as reflected in the myths regarding tribal conflicts. In a series of military operations, the internal power of a tribe was concentrated to forge a more efficient command system for military needs, which provided a preparatory environment for the birth of the early state. Under such circumstances, to complete the social transition from the tribal union to the early state, ideological constructions were required to consolidate people's belief in the newborn political community, as well as their obedience to the ruling class. The myth of Jian Mu might serve this purpose.

According to the myth, there was a holy tree, named Jian Mu, in the wild of Duguang (都广之野), the heartland of the central Huaxia. Jian Mu was believed to be as high as the Heaven, thus ordinary eyes could not see the treetop. Huangdi, after becoming the sovereign of the central Huaxia, claimed his ownership of Jian Mu and regarded it as a ladder to the Heaven. It is said that Huangdi would select talented people from his tribe to climb up Jian Mu and thereby turned them into gods if they could reach the Heaven. After Huangdi, Zhuanxu(颛顼) took the throne, feeling afraid that those potential rebels, like Chiyou, would easily go out of control after becoming powerful gods. Consequently, Zhuanxu deployed guardians to prevent mortals from climbing the Jian Mu. In the end, Jian Mu was destroyed, so that gods and mortals were separated. Mortals could never become a god, while gods, as a metaphor of the rulers, achieved a unilateral rule over man. This could be interpreted as an attempt to divide the rule class and the masses at the ideological level, thereby solidifying the reign of the early state. Besides,

as reflected by the myth of Jian Mu, another trend worth noting is the secularization of gods. Those terrifying gods thereafter come out from their mysterious states, becoming increasingly embroiled in the human world and full of human-like desires; the relationship between humans and gods is thereby eased [34] which can be interpreted as the increase of self-confidence and activism on the part of ancient Huaxia people. By the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Zhou people transformed the concept of "emperor and son"(帝子) into the concept of "mandate of destiny"(天命), expelling most of the ancient saints who interfered with real life from their altars and replacing them with a heavenly virtue; Taoism was thereby integrated into the concept of blood lineage, forming a cultural awareness of "staying close to people's affairs while staying away from ghosts and gods" (近人事而远鬼神) Jin, [18].

9.2 The Great Flood Myth: Centralized Power for Crisis Management

Wittfogel [35] argues that the flood-control projects in Eastern society assume an important incentive for the emergence of the centralized states. Some ancient Chinese myths echo this argument, reflecting that large-scale social projects function as another catalyst for accelerating the concentration of political power. More generally, there are many studies on creation myths and flood myths, in that these two types of myths, being highly interrelated, constitute the basis of a nation's myths, which suggests a starting point to approach the thinking prototype of a nation [13].

In the Yellow River Basin, after entering the agrarian age, Huaxia ancestors frequently suffered from the flooding of the Yellow River; meanwhile, agricultural production posed huge demands on water conservancy. Hence, it was imperative to concentrate labors and resources to build water conservancy under efficient command. According to the myth, Gun(鲧) and Yu(禹) assumed the leaders of major flood-control projects. Notably, Yu, who was believed to be the founding father of the mythological Xia "dynasty" - this stage is not accepted as a historical era by the mainstream - was said to gain his prestige and authority from his excellent contributions to flood controls.

Gun is believed to be a descendant of Zhuanxu, and have supernatural powers, capable of transforming into a white horse. His outstanding talent and morality convinced people in Huaxia, thereby granting him the leadership in flood controls. As for the source of the great flood, it is said that the Emperor of Heaven held the grudge against humans, since a human named Houyi(后羿) managed to shoot down nine scorching suns that were also the sons of the Emperor. For revenge, the Emperor of Heaven ordered the remaining sun to inflict drought disasters on Huaxia; subsequently, the worst flood, along with ferocious beasts, was released to cause Huaxia people to live in misery. Such imaginations about the source of disasters reflect the worldview of Huaxia ancesters at that time when no scientific explanation to natural phenomena was available. To save people from the sufferings, Gun stole what was known as the God Soil, or Xirang(息壤), from the Emperor of Heaven, built dikes with it to ward off floods, and taught the people how to take advantage of water conservancy for good. After hearing about what Gun did, the Emperor was so furious and ordered a god named Zhurong(祝融) to kill Gun.

After the death of Gun, his son Yu took over the responsibility of flood control. Replacing his father's method with a new one, Yu initiated a series of large-scale projects to heighten the high lands and dig the lowlands to disperse the flood water, which had prominent effects. Meanwhile, after learning that a god named Gonggong(共工) was causing troubles in secret, Yu raised his troops to fight against this god. He also managed to kill another god named Xiangliu. During the fight against floods, an officer under his command, named Fangfeng-shi(防风氏), appeared to be negligent and even caused a delay in the process. Yu killed Fangfeng-shi to warn the others. Notable, the mortality of Chinese gods is again implicated here, as they could be killed, which can be compared with, for example, their immortal, Celtic counterparts see Wagner, [36] MacCulloch, [37].

Such myths are supposed to imply a series of power struggles, during which Yu managed to reinforce his hold over the power. Under the governance of Yu, the conditions for dwelling and agriculture, along the Yellow River, were greatly improved. Due to his extraordinary achievements, Yu took over the throne from Shun(舜) and established the Xia state. Thereafter, Yu traveled around the Huaxia land on foot, mapping and dividing the Huaxia land into Nine Provinces(九州): Jizhou(冀州), Yanzhou(兖州), Qingzhou(青州), Xuzhou(徐州), Yangzhou(扬州), Jingzhou(荆州), Yuzhou(豫州), Yongzhou(雍州), and Liangzhou(凉州). The early administrative division of ancient China is believed to surface this way.

9.3 The Myth of Qi(启): Imagined Establishment of Hereditary Monarchy

It is said that, around the 21st century BC, the tradition of abdication and delegation was changed for the first time in history, and the throne was passed down to Qi, the son of Yu, confirming the Xia as the first "dynasty" (yet not scientifically supported) ruled by one royal family in Chinese history.

During the reign of Qi, relatively mature state institutions were established. Therefore, it is safe to say that, in this period, a stable state power had emerged on the Huaxia land, marking the end of primitive society. As for the start of hereditary monarchy, it is said that Yu originally intended to pass down the throne to Gaoyao(皋陶), one of his assistants for flood controls. However, Gaoyao died early, which made Yu turned to Boyi(伯益), another influential flood-control assistant. After the death of Yu, Boyi hosted his funeral and memorial service, and did not claim the throne instantly. Qi took advantage of this loophole, ascended the throne, and eliminated whoever opposed him, thereby establishing the rule that the throne shall be passed down within the royal family. Along with the hereditary monarchy, the initial constructions of the state during the Xia "dynasty" - again, as a mythological era - left behind numerous ancestral legacies, laying the foundation for the later formation of nation-state; some of the political traditions established at that time were deemed unchangeable throughout the continuation of the Chinese civilization, until the end of feudal society.

Discussion on Chinese Identity, Nationalism, and the Mythological Approach Myth is deemed the dawn light of human civilization [14] which can be

used to understand the early development of human society. Throughout the development of human civilization, natural and cultural factors, such as clan-based blood tie, primitive region, and tribal politics, gave birth to a series of populational concepts, as subordinate categories of human beings. Compared with the concept of race, which is defined more in the biological and genealogical sense, the concept of nation could be the product of human sociocultural construction, functioning in the ideological domain. In the late period of primitive society, the tribal groups, which inhabited in the same region, shared similar historical and cultural accumulations, as well as similar blood and affinity relationships, could develop a common sense of identity and belonging, which laid the spiritual foundation for the early state.

The origin of the process above should be identified in the early stage of human civilization, regarding which no direct or explicit historical material is available for contemporary examination. The myths, however, mostly passed down via oral communication among folks, can be regarded as important circumstantial evidence, if approached in scientific manners.

Like most other subjects investigated by cultural anthropologists, mythology does not attempt to extend our knowledge by discovering new information about a people. Instead, mythology serves to deepen our understanding, through mythical narratives, on what is already closest to us - experiences, traditions, values, concepts and so forth – or what makes up our daily lives but ordinarily escapes our notice simply because they appear to be so familiar and predetermined to us. To locate the cultural origin of such phenomena, mythologists begin by finding the stories to tell, the narratives conveyed beyond the oral communication, more into the belief system of a people.

The connection between modern Chinese cultural consciousness based on Han Chinese tradition, their cultural identity and myths is an important area of research. In this paper, the primitive era of China has been approached from the perspective of mythology, for the purpose of tracing the cultural origin of Chinese nationalism. China has forged its current national identity system that Han Chinese, as the mainstay of modern Chinese nationalism, coexists with the fifty-five officially identified ethnic minority groups, as "one big family" as proclaimed in official documents. Such beliefs cannot be

established without various forms and degrees of integration, to which the ancient Chinese myths have contributed a prominent part ideologically. In this regard, this paper has provided an overview articulating the fact that those ancient myths being retold in the current Chinese nationalism are structuring current Chinese society. Taking one step further from this overview, future studies could investigate to what extent a specific myth sculpts the thinking of Chinese citizenry in a certain respect.

As maintained by Campbell [38] the comparative study of the mythologies of the world compels us to view the cultural history of mankind as a unit, from which common themes could be found, such as Fire-theft, Deluge, Resurrected Hero and so on, implying some world-wide patterns in terms of early human civilization. Yet, nations today differ from each other in many respects, which cannot be simply inspected with general themes or narrative patterns. In this sense, a line of research attempts to understand the natures of different nations through the comparative study of national myths [13]. The current China stands as a "big family" in unity, where multiple ethnic groups maintain coexistence with Han Chinese taking the advantageous position. This fact requires that academic discussions on Chinese nationalism, as well as relevant practices of multi-ethnic governance, should not fully adopt the traditional theoretical frameworks established in the Western discourse. The formation of the present China, as a distinctive nation-state, requires case-by-case analysis with China-based experience and materials. For instance, while the historicization of Chinese mythology has been criticized for sticking to a mindset of Western nationalism that stresses ethnic singularity, research on the myths of Chinese ethnic minorities has received increasing attention, which is considered part of the endeavors for breaking away from the Han-centered nationalist perspective [13].

10. CONCLUSION

The present study underscores the comprehensive reasoning of social development at the primitive stage, revealing that ancient myths, alongside early religious activities, induced by material needs for survival and development, lead to cultural and ideological outcomes, which are then utilized as the foundation of national identity and nationalism through politically motivated interpretations. The mythological overview, following the logic of early

social development, addresses how the origin of the Chinese nation is imagined as being told in Chinese myths today.

Since in practice mythology is correlated with education, literature, philosophy, psychology, and ethics, to name but a few [14] politically motivated interpretations of myths can be found in various fields, collectively contributing to the construction of nationalism. Looking beyond a nation's cultural identity and nationalism, the current discussion also highlights the need for further research to deepen our understanding of the relationship between a nation's spirit and a nation's myths, no matter in what channel they are being told.

Yet, as discussed earlier, this study is not without limitations. Notably, as the content of a myth has varied over time, we need to know on which texts a statement is being made; without introducing the specific source of a narrative, the author might be accused of merely playing a storyteller and crafting nothing but a frivolous collection of bedtime stories. However, as an "honest performance" of primitive, ancient, and rustic thoughts, myths should be approached as a crystallization of ancient wisdom [14] In this sense, it is appropriate for us to understand myths as the sources of contemporary spirits, rather than the objects of interpretations with modern mindsets. Accordingly, myriads of research topics can be found and so many hypotheses remain unproven. When drawing on myths for academic investigations, as mentioned earlier, we should start with the tradition of oral communication, and screen out any form of existing textualization if it is hard to exclude possibilities of theorization from a specific storytelling text - which requires another line of research, beyond the scope of the author's current research interest [39].

As a spiritual treasure of China, the inheritance and development of ancient Chinese myths are worth further discussions in Sinology [12]. Moreover, looking beyond China, we could also draw some universal implications from research on Chinese mythology. The notion of the unity of heaven and mankind in ancient Chinese myths, for instance, is considered an early message of sustainable development [14] For future anthropological and ethnological studies in the context of East Asia, while strengthening the dialogue and cooperation with the Western academia, we shall not blindly follow the Western traditions or be adherents of Western academic hegemony. Turning to the mythological approach, we could start by combining Western theoretical frameworks, like geopolitics, as introduced in this paper, with the historical and mythical experience from the local society, to examine the localization of certain world-wide patterns and the transplantation of certain modern state systems from the West. Ultimately, we should look forward to establishing suitable theoretical frameworks, which can facilitate our work on East Asian nationalism, governance practices, and so forth. For starters, as argued by Lee [11] it is now necessary to leave cultural territorialism behind and write a new "common mythology" that encompasses homogeneity and originality from the perspective of connections and comparisons within and beyond East Asia [40].

In sum, mythology represents a way of understanding the world, and reflects some common psychological needs from the beginning of human history, such as the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty [14]. In this sense, Chinese mythology, though being utilized in the present study to approach the cultural origin of Chinese identity and the primitive society of China, can inspire a wide spectrum of studies with various concerns in ancient and contemporary East Asia.

NOTE

The main source of myths in this article is a cultural book published in Chinese, which is "Meng, C. (2007). Quick Chinese: Stories from Chinese Mythology(快捷汉语：中华神话故事). People's Education Press". Furthermore, a wealth of relevant studies from both Chinese and Korean literature have been added to facilitate the analysis and discussion. Such insights serve as a supplement to Western perspectives, depicting an academic vision that could and should be led by the East Asian community. For these references in other languages, their original titles and sources are kept, along with the English translations in parentheses for English readership. These translations might not be meant precisely by the original author(s) or editor(s).

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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