

The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf: A Comparative Study of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization

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Abstract: The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf created different heroic images, and also reflected the differences between River Civilization and Maritime Civilization behind the characters. This paper will study them from the perspective of comparative literature, to compare the themes of the two epics, the cultural characteristics of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization, and the cultural features of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization. And this paper explore the reasons for the formation of the two heroic images, so as to deepen the understanding on River Civilization and Maritime Civilization.

River Civilization and Maritime Civilization are two important and unique forms of civilization in human history. There are distinct differences between the two, but they are intermingled and mutually enlightened. The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf represent typical works of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization respectively. The comparison and collision of these two works allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the unique charm of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization, and also demonstrate the diversity and inclusiveness of human civilization. Through the in-depth study of The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf, we can better understand and pass on these two civilizations, and contribute our wisdom and strength to the development of human civilization.

1. The King of the Bronze Drums and River Civilization

1.1 The Background of The King of the Bronze Drums

The king of the bronze drums is the treasure and symbol of the Yi. It is embedded with significant historical and mystical power. This epic tells a story about the succession of kingship and social order, as well as the turbulent period in the Yi society. In ancient times, there were frequent power struggles between the Yi tribes, and the bronze drum became a symbol representing authority and domination. The Yi also participated in a wide range of activities, such as sacrificial ceremonies, weddings and funerals. These activities not only provided chances for the creation of epics, but also brought the Yi people with opportunities to communicate and share their conceptions on epics [6].

Overall, the Yi epic masterpiece The King of the Bronze Drums is the wisdom of Yi cultural traditions and social regulations. The Yi people have preserved the treasures of Yi culture by passing down the epic to their descendants by means of oral account [3].

1.2 The Embodiment of River Civilization

1.2.1 Social Structure

In the River Civilization, the social structure of the Yi presented an obvious class differentiation. One is the hierarchy, and the other is the lineage system. It is generally believed that the Yi lineage is a patriliney formed by the patrilineal ancestor consanguinity. The members recognize and identify with each other through the genealogy based on the patronymic linkage naming system and believe in exogamy, which together constitute the core of the ruling base of Yi slavery. As recorded in The

King of the Bronze Drums, The Kunming group of the Yi took root in the snowy mountains. The river has been flowing for generations. The ancestors of the Yi family lived in Kunlun Mountains. The ancestors of the Yi family, industrious and intelligent, lived in Kunlun Mountains who were named Rorro, also known as Kunming people. . Thus, in the traditional Yi society, each lineage has its own genealogy, based on how the hierarchical society is formed, constituting an order of descent [7]. The genealogy was created to distinguish the Black Yi from the other ruled classes, to ensure the purity of descendants and form a consistent hierarchy.

The Yi society reaches decisions through collective discussion and negotiation, reflecting a relatively equal and democratic political model. The Yi is also characterized by a strong hierarchical order, from the high-ranking Zimo downwards, through the Nuohuo, Quohuo, Agia to the lowest ranking Xiayi, constituting a strictly hierarchical and ordered authority system. This hierarchical governance pattern is a gradually formed, which is inextricably linked to the segregation of lineage, the economic status and the power division [15].

1.2.2 Economy and Lifestyle

Traditional Yi society is characterized by poor living conditions and low production, and the function of the lineage branch is highlighted. In the epic, the life of the people of Yi people is portrayed as a clan living besides a river, each clan consists of several families. The members of the family are responsible for different production activities, forming the division of labor in the family. It is written in The King of the Bronze Drums, “At first we raised livestock, then we learned farming. Men and women have their own business to run together. The man is diligently herding, while the woman is industriously cultivating”. This precisely reflects the fact that members of a family are responsible for different producing activities, forming a domestic division of labour. The formation of lifestyle is decided elements such as geographic location, social development and cultural traditions. In terms of geography, the river basins were often fertile agricultural areas, providing abundant resources and irrigation conditions, promoting the development of agricultural industry. In terms of social development, the river basins are characterized by the concentration of population and the gradual division of labour, which strengthened links between urban and rural areas, thus contributing to economic and cultural prosperity. In terms of cultural traditions, the river basins often have long histories and rich cultural heritage, which play an important role in people's lives and influence their living habits and values [9].

With the improvement of productivity and economy, the Yi people began to gradually get rid of primitive hunting and gathering and turned to agricultural production. This transformation is a mirror of the impact of economic development on the way of life as depicted in The King of the Bronze Drums, and the continuous progress and development of the Yi people throughout history [1].

2. Beowulf and Maritime Civilization

2.1 The Background of Beowulf

Beowulf was set in medieval Scandinavia and took place mainly in the seaside areas of present-day Denmark and Sweden. The epic describes many sea adventures, battles and voyages, revealing the Norsemen's dependence on the sea and their spirit of exploration.

The epic's protagonist, Beowulf, is a valiant warrior from Geatland who was brought in to help King Hrothgar of Denmark fight the evil dragon Grendel and its mother. Beowulf's adventures include battling Krakens, dragons, and other monsters that threaten the mankind. He shows Norse bravery and heroism who defends his homeland and people with his power and wisdom [14].

The text of Beowulf first came into being around the 10th century, and the existing edition was gradually developed and evolved by oral inheritance. The author of the epic was probably an early English poet who combined traditional Norse tales and heroic culture at that time in his creation.

2.1.1 The Embodiment of Maritime Civilization

In the 5th-century Europe, the sea became an important transportation route for trade for

Europeans, facilitating economic, technical and cultural exchanges, and provided a vast navigational realm. Land transportation was limited because the European continent was divided by mountains and rivers. However, the seas around Europe connected the regions and served as a key channel for transportation.

In addition, the ocean has become a metaphor and symbol in the epic works of civilization. The ocean seen as a symbol of mystery and represents the mankind's exploration of the unknown, has become a metaphor in the epics of civilization. This symbolizes the hero's exploration for the deeper questions of human existence and meaning through the sea. The vastness and unpredictability of the sea can also be seen as a challenge in human life. The courage, wisdom and perseverance of the mankind in the face of difficulties and perils are depicted in sea stories and myths in the Beowulf.

For example, the epic poem refers to Beowulf's battle with sea monsters, such as Grendel's mother. For the truth and right, ruler of the Heavens, Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting. Their battle horns sounded again and again. Then they put down their weapons. They could see the water crawling with snakes, serpents swimming in the boiling lake, and sea beasts lying on the rocks. So Edgeth's son proved himself, did what a soldier must do. This shows the exploration of the sea and the development of seamanship by the Norsemen, who may have acquired a certain knowledge of sailing and navigation to meet challenges in the sea ^[8].

In Beowulf, although there are relatively few depictions of marine trade and technology, the voyage, the fight with pirates and sea monsters, all give hints to the ancient Nordic People's exploration of the sea and the existence of maritime activities which reflects the importance and influence of trade and Navigation technology in the Maritime Civilization at that time ^[4].

2.1.2 Social Structure

Entire Maritime Civilization was divided into different classes, from ordinary sailors at the bottom, to merchants and captains in the middle, to rulers and nobles at the top. This hierarchy not only reflected the division of labour in society and the status of different groups, but also the pursuit of power and wealth. Each class had its own privileges and responsibilities, while the stability and prosperity of society was depended on mutual cooperation and balance among different classes.

The ruler of Maritime Civilization is usually a powerful and valiant king or queen who wields extensive power and authority and determines the fate of the entire society. The heart of the political system is the maintenance and extension of royal power, with the king protecting the interests of Maritime Civilization by military force and diplomacy, and communicate and fight with other countries ^[16].

The people experienced many challenges and changes, and the social structure and political system evolved accordingly. As recorded in Beowulf that, "his hall, his throne, the best of buildings, had melted away in the dragon's burning breath. Beowulf swam sadly back to Geatland, almost the only survivor of a foolish war. Hygelac's widow brought him the crown, offered him the kingdom." These changes and conflicts not only demonstrate the struggles and destinies of individuals, but also reveal the fragility and complexity of social and political institutions ^[2].

3. Comparative Study

3.1 Differences in Cultural Characteristics

In the context of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization, The King of the Bronze Drums and Beowulf reflect some of the differences in culture.

First, differences in geographic location. The Yi is one of China's ethnic minorities, mainly located in Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. These regions have a complex topography with a large number of mountain ranges and plateaus. This geographical environment has a profound impact on the development of the Yi. On the one hand, the mountain ranges and plateaus provide the Yi with abundant natural resources, such as water and plant resources, which enable them to engage in agricultural and hunting activities. Such activities are closely related to their way of life and have

shaped their economic and social structure. On the other hand, the complex topography of the region has also led to inconvenient transportation, limiting the Yi's contact with other regions. This inaccessible geographical condition has resulted in the unique cultural and social system of the Yi [10].

In contrast, the Germans were widely distributed, encompassing a number of countries including Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and others. The diversity of Europe's geography also had a significant impact on the development of the Germans. First and foremost, Europe is rich in rivers and sea resources, which provides the Germans with the opportunity to develop agriculture and fishing, impact on their economic life and contribute to the development of urbanization and trade. Next, Europe's geographic location and closer ties with Asia, Africa, and other European regions make the Germans politically and historically important. Their culture and social systems are also influenced by different civilizations, giving them an important role in European history.

Second, differences in cultural traditions and religious beliefs. The Yi people are deeply influenced by the culture of the Yi religion and sacrificial system, which is widely socialized and acceptable among the Yi people. The Yi religion and ritual activities are closely linked to the production and life of the Yi people. The Yi are one agricultural and pastoral people. For the Yi, agricultural production is an important way to obtain food. In the early Yi society, due to socioeconomic and natural environmental conditions, the productivity level was low. In order to pray for a good harvest, the Yi forefathers personified or deified natural factors affecting agricultural production, such as sunshine, rain, and land, thus giving rise to religious rituals. The Yi people usually perform a variety of rituals related to various aspects of agricultural production throughout the year. Land is an important factor in agricultural production, and the Yi ancestors believed that crops sprouted, grew, blossomed, and bore fruit because of the role of Earth God and Goodness, needed to communicate with them through common rituals such as sacrifices of poultry, animal, and blood which can also be reflected in *The King of the Bronze Drums* [12].

As Britain has the dual influence of Norse mythology and Christianity in its ancient Nordic culture, the story in *Beowulf* also incorporates elements of both mythology and Christianity. In addition to the Christian God and gods, the epic also implicitly adds other religious imagery, such as "They would wait for the new year, for spring to come following the sun, melting the old year away and reopening the sea." The ice symbolizes heroic strength, the angry waves refer to the ocean, and the spring light refers to light and justice. On a deeper level, *Beowulf's* victory over Grendel, the mother of Grendel, and the poisonous dragon symbolizes the triumph of the good over the evil and the Christ over the Satan.

3.2 Differences in Themes

The King of the Bronze Drums is a Yi epic which focuses on the history, traditions and culture of the Yi people. Against the backdrop of River civilization, the epic describes the farming life and mountainous culture of the Yi society. Themes include the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings, traditional beliefs and rituals, clan and tribal organization, and the feelings and guardianship of the homeland. These themes demonstrate the close connection between the Yi people and nature, as well as their understanding of and respect for the mountain environment [13].

In contrast, *Beowulf* is an ancient Norse epic featuring the hero Beowulf and describing his battles and adventures. Against the backdrop of Maritime Civilization, the epic emphasizes sea exploration, the spirit of adventure, and heroism. Themes relate to seafaring and trade, courage and honour, kings and noble power, and struggles with monsters and conflict among others. These themes demonstrate the Norsemen's desire for the incoherent sea [11] and their spirit of exploration, as well as their worship and praise of warriors and heroes [5].

Therefore, although both *The King of the Bronze Drums* and *Beowulf* are epics, they embody different themes in the context of River Civilization and Maritime Civilization. *The King of the Bronze Drums* focuses on the harmony and faith between the Yi people and nature, while *Beowulf* emphasizes maritime adventures and heroism of the Norsemen. These different themes reflect the influence and shaping of different cultural and geographical backgrounds on the creation of the

epics.

4. Conclusion

For the humankind, both River Civilization and Maritime Civilization have important values. River Civilization emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of human beings with nature and the guardianship of the land, as well as the stability of society and the development of agriculture. Maritime Civilization, on the other hand, emphasizes the exploration and exploitation of the seas and promoted exchanges between different cultures and the development of civilization. Together, they constitute the diversity of the world, enriching the cultural heritage of the humankind and the plurality of social development^[11].

Both River Civilization and Maritime Civilization embodied in these two epics are important milestones in the development of human civilization. River Civilization is based on farming, which provides a stable food supply and the basis for social development. Maritime Civilization, centres on navigation and trade, facilitates exchanges and interactions between different regions and cultures, and promotes economic, cultural and technological prosperity.

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