

Different Symbolic Meanings between Chinese Dragon 'Loong' and Western Dragon

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Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to discuss the different symbolic meanings of Chinese 'Loong' and Western dragon by exploring the same historical origin, different image systems, cultural connotations of the two kinds of dragon, and prove the error of Chinese 'Loong' being translated as dragon. This essay adopts the literature research method to explore and summarize the different symbolic meanings represented by Chinese 'Loong' and Western dragon through historical materials and documents, as well as their influence. Due to the political needs of Chinese feudal dynasties and the Loong-term development of national cultural identity, the Chinese 'Loong' formed a symbol of auspicious and sacred power. On the contrary, in the West, due to the uniqueness of religious belief, individual heroism and the worship of martial spirit, the killing of the dragon becomes justice and the dragon becomes a symbol of evil.

Keywords: mythological history, cross-cultural communication, cultural difference, cultural significance

Introduction

The dragons have a Loong history in the world. The earliest dragon pattern found in Chinese archaeology dates back to about 6,600 years ago. Dragon myths in the west first appeared in the ancient kingdom of Babylon about 4,000 years ago^[4]. Therefore, some scholars have analyzed the image origin, cultural inheritance and the symbolic meaning of semiotics of Chinese 'Loong'. At the same time, the research about the image of western dragon in mythology, religion and modern literature is also relatively rich. With the development of globalization and the advancement of world cultural exchanges, systematic elaboration of the image, connotation and cultural differences between Chinese and Western dragons, discussion of their different symbolic meanings and reasons for their formation can help people better understand the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and have a deeper understanding of the charm of different cultures. In the process of cross-cultural communication, avoid translation problems caused by cultural misunderstandings.

1. Differences between Chinese 'Loong' and Western Dragon

1.1 Differences systems between Chinese 'Loong' and Western dragon

Although the Chinese dragon 'Loong' is translated into dragon in English, they are actually two different mythical creatures. China and Chinese often use the dragon as a symbol of national image, so China is easily misunderstood when dealing with western countries that do not know much about Chinese culture. On the one hand, the Chinese dragon 'Loong' has always represented a positive symbol in the primitive period of China, it represents the worship of natural totem and divinities. In Chinese feudal society, it represents the authority and status of the emperor and the symbol of luck. With the development of me, 'Loong' symbolizes auspicious in modern China and has become one of the most important cultural symbols of the Chinese nation. On the other hand, western dragon is a kind of monster and represents the symbol

of evil and ferocity in western society. According to Babylonian mythology, Loong before the earth was formed, a fierce female dragon named Taman killed all the challengers. After a world war, Taman was executed by the sun god Maduk, who dismembered the dragon and separated the sky from the earth^[1]. Therefore, in the ancient western generally formed the concept of dragon slaying and spread a number of dragon slaying stories. These dragon slaying stories not only spread for a Loong me and a wide range of regions, and even formed a type of folk stories with a world.

The Chinese dragon 'Loong' family is not huge, but it has a unique system unlike any other creature. Those with scales are called 'Jiaolong', those with wings are called 'Yingloong,' those with horns are called 'Qiulong,' and those without horns are called 'ChiLoong'. The dragon in Chinese mainstream culture and general concept is the 'Zhengloong', which represents the emperor in the feudal period of ancient China, which is also the one object of this paper. The other object of this paper is the western dragon also known as the European dragon. The diversity of dragons in European culture is the result of many influences. Before, there were Greek, Babylonian, Christian and Nordic myths, Celtic culture and Anglo-Saxon legends, which created a colorful image of the dragon in European culture. For example, in many Greek legends, the dragon is the keeper of treasures and a symbol of evil. At the same time, under the influence of Christian legends, the dragon became a symbol of evil. Therefore, there are numerous differences between Chinese dragon 'Loong' and the Western dragon, especially the symbolic meanings. The reasons why the Chinese dragon 'Loong' and the western dragon have different symbolic meanings are diverse, which include the history of the development of the dragon's image, civilization, physical function or abilities, and culture.

1.2 Same origin, different image

Although the 'Loong' and western dragon have a number of differences, at the beginning, they shared one origin. The images of both Western and Chinese dragons are complex, so there are different views on the origin of dragons in academic circles. One of them is that scholars believe both are created by transforming the image of the snake. The 'Loong' is formed by the combination of various parts of various animals and the main body of the snake. Jun Zheng states that the mainstream Chinese thought believe the main part and basic form of the 'Loong' is the snake. There was a primitive tribe that used the snake as their totem, which merged and absorbed many other totem groups. Then, they put the feet of the beast, the head of the horse, the tail of a lion, the horns of a deer, the claws of a dog, the scales of a fish on the big snake, so it became the Chinese dragon 'Loong' we know now^[9]. This is also confirmed by archaeology. In ancient history, Fuxi and Nuwa were the ancestors of human beings, and they were the images of the combination of human and dragon. The book *Lu Shi · Hou Ji* records: "Fuxi, dragon body and ox head" (Fuxi, the head of the dragon and the ox). The book *Bei Tang Shui Chao* notes: "[Fuxi], snake body." (Taihao, the head of a snake). So far, the portraits, frescoes, silk paintings and bronze mirrors unearthed from archaeological excavations are also consistent with the contents recorded in the literature; that is, the images of Fuxi and Nuwa are all human head and snake (dragon) bodies^[8].

The dragon shape of Western countries is not very standard, it is different in different countries and different periods. Even the same country in the same period of the dragon also has different views, but they are generally based on the snake as the prototype. As Chengming Ji points out, the legendary dragon in western countries looks like a monster like a snake. Some western countries have also transformed the dragon from a snake to a beast head snake^[3]. In addition, westerners regard the dragon as a basilisk with powerful power, which means that in the eyes of westerners, dragon is essentially a kind of snake, but this kind of snake is more evil, uglier, and more powerful than ordinary snakes^[9]. Both Chinese and Western dragons originated from snakes, but due to the different attitudes of Chinese and western people towards snakes, Chinese and western dragons formed different symbolic meanings in the development process. This is because primitive Chinese regarded snakes as a totem of worship, while westerners generally hated snakes.

Although the Chinese and western dragons have the same original, and the Chinese dragon 'Loong' is translated as 'dragon' in English, they are actually two different mythical creatures, in particular, they have completely different symbolic meanings. First, the specific appearance of Chinese and western dragons is different. According to the description of Qian Fu Lun by the scholar WangFu of the Han dynasty, the ZhengLoong just has one head, and it's horns

like a deer, head like a camel, eyes like a ghost, neck like a snake, belly like a clam, scales like a fish, palms like a tiger, and ears like an ox. In western culture, the dragon image combines the characteristics of reptiles and mammals. It is shaped like a giant lizard, has a body like a snake, and a back with huge fleshy wings like bat wings. It has eagle claws, crocodile mouth, sharp teeth, and can spit fire and venom. There is a description of Hydra in Greek mythology. Hydra is also called Lernaean Hydra. It is a large water snake of the genus, there are different versions about the number of its heads. Yan and Fan notes, "Pausanias thought there was only one, Simonides said there were five, and Edward Topsell increased to seven, reaching as many as a hundred by Diodorus Siculus"^[7]. It can be seen that the appearance of Chinese and western dragons is significantly different.

1.3 Different connotation

Chinese 'Loong' and Western dragons have different connotations. The definition of the 'Loong' in The Modern Chinese Dictionary (bilingual version) is "(1) the supernatural animal in the legends of ancient mes in China, with a Loong body, a dragon, horns, feet, walking and flying, swimming, and the ability to make clouds and rain. (2) In feudal mes, the 'Loong' was the symbol of the emperor, and the word dragon was also used in the things used by the emperor." The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines the dragon as: "dragon: a mythical monster like a giant reptile. In European tradition the dragon is typically fire -breathing and tends to symbolize chaos or evil, whereas in the Far East it is usually a beneficent symbol of fertility, associates with water and heavens." As Shi and Jia said, "In Chinese dictionaries 'Loong' first refers to a kind of mythical animal (neutral), while in Western dictionaries, 'dragon' first refers to a monster (obviously derogatory)"^[1]. Therefore, as far as the dragon itself is concerned, the positioning of the Chinese dragon 'Loong' is completely different from that of western dragon. The 'Loong' is a neutral mystical animal, while western dragon is a derogatory monster.

1.4 Different symbolic meanings

The last and most important, Chinese and western dragons have different symbolic meanings. The ancient Chinese dragon originated from the primitive tribe period. According to the historical records, the first ancestor of the Chinese people, the Di Huang, traveled around the country and unified the military orders of various tribes aer defeating the tribal leaders Di yan and You Chi. Then, with the advent of the feudal dynasty, the ancient Chinese emperors mythologized themselves as the son of the dragon god. With the help of people's reverence for the dragon, they established the authority of the emperor and gained the trust and support of the people. Thus, the dragon Loong's image became the emblem and symbol of power of the son of heaven. Moreover, the Chinese dragon has been a symbol of good fortune and auspicious sign since ancient mes. Zhu and Tang said: "Loong is full of ancient Chinese people's wish for production and life and Loonging for a beer life"^[10]. In western culture, the dragon often represents demons and evil forces. It is also regarded by westerners as the embodiment of terror, ferocity, greed, and disaster. In the original Greek mythology, the dragon often appeared as a guardian of rare treasures. Although at that me they were in opposition the Greek heroes, they were still ruled by the gods and had nothing to do with evil or demons. However, in the middle ages, in order to expand its influence, Christianity began to vilify the dragon to foil their own noble and holy. The dragon is described in the bible as a terrifying incarnation of Satan, a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns that greedily devoured newborn babies^[10]. Since then, the dragon has become a symbol of cruelty and evil. Because of the symbolic significance of dragons, westerners had formed a strong concept of killing dragons.

2. Reasons for the differences

2.1 Different origins of Chinese and Western civilizations have

Since China and the west originated from different civilizations, they have different attitudes towards snakes, which leads to different symbolic meanings in China and the west. China is one of the world's four ancient civilizations. It originated in the plains of the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. There is a vast plain area, rich in all kinds of resources, because the Yellow River flows through so convenient irrigation, the land is very fertile. The favorable natural

environment provides the superior living conditions for the original inhabitants of China^[9]. They live in harmony with nature. This kind of life made the ancient Chinese people form a stable and peaceful state of mind. At the same time, it has formed the spirit of the unity of man and nature in the Chinese civilization, that is, the universe is naturally a big heaven and earth, while humans are a small world. Human and nature are essentially interlinked, so all human beings should conform to the laws of nature to achieve harmony between man and nature. This psychological and cultural trait influenced the attitude of ancient Chinese towards snakes, that is, since they have created a harmonious way of living together, there is no need to eliminate all poisonous snakes.

As is known to all, western civilization originated from the Greek civilization, which was mainly born in the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea with the Balkans as the center. The area was small, hilly, poor in soil, and volatile in climate, which was not conducive to the growth of crops. Therefore, the inhabitants had to claim resources from the vast ocean around them, it was a painstaking process. In this process, the Westerners have cultivated the characteristics of being individually centered, constantly outward exploring, constantly self-pursuing, self-expanding, and self-innovating, that is, they advocate the martial spirit, believe in their own strength, have the courage and courage to conquer and transform nature completely, and completely destroy everything that hinders their survival and development. Therefore, snakes, especially vipers, that would interfere with their production activities must be hated and rejected by early Westerners^[9]. Different civilizations have different attitudes towards snakes, which have influenced the image development, physical function, and symbolic meaning of the Chinese dragon and the western dragon.

Because of the different physical functions of dragons, they also have different symbolic meanings. The Chinese dragon in ancient China possessed the ability to control the weather and was often described as a god who controlled thunderstorms. Research by Chen and Zhang suggests that Chinese dragon is regarded as a celestial myth creature and auspicious animal, which is a tool to connect with heaven or a symbol of good fortune^[8]. The first collection of romantic poetry in the history of Chinese literature, *Chu Ci* recorded: "The god of Xiang Shui went north in a dragon boat, water in the stone beach rapids flowing, the 'Loong' boat across the water light and swift. (Riding the flying dragon to the north, the stone is shallow, and the flying dragon is fluttering). Therefore, the dragon is regarded as a divine beast that drives the gods. Moreover, the dragon is a biological explanation of the cause of lightning and rain by primitive ancestors. Shan Xu, a professor from Suzhou university explained the character 'Loong' in ancient animal bone inscriptions. It retains the curve of lightning and uses a part of the character thunder to represent the dragon's mouth, while the word dragon opens down to indicate rain pouring out of the dragon's mouth^[6]. The ancient Chinese people were highly dependent on the land, and agriculture was greatly affected by the natural conditions, especially the weather. The physical function of the dragon in China was to control thunderstorms and rains. Therefore, the ancient associated the dragon with the imperial power and called themselves as the real son of the 'Loong', so that gained the trust of the people and strengthened their rule over people.

Western dragons are often described as cruel, greedy, evil, fire-breathing guardians of treasure, and disaster monsters. There is a myth about golden apples in ancient Greece. According to the myth, when Hera married Zeus, Gaia, the goddess of the earth, gave them a golden apple tree. This tree was planted in the sacred garden of Atlas. It was cared for by his four daughters, the sisters of Hesperides^[10]. In addition, in *Beowulf*, the dragon who guards the treasure takes mad revenge from the Goths when the treasure is stolen. It poured fire on houses and on heaven and earth, scorched the earth, leveled castles, and killed many Goths. In the latest *Godzilla* movie in 2019, *Monster Zero*, a three-headed dragon that has been frozen for thousands of years, awakens and commands tans from all over the world to destroy the earth and bring disaster to the earth. Thus, the physical function of western dragons is usually to breathe fire and poison, and their ability to guard treasure. At the same time, they can also bring disaster.

2.2 Different social nature of China and the West

Ancient China and the early west had different cultures, and it results in the different symbolic meanings of dragons. Ancient Chinese society was strictly atheistic or pantheistic. Ancient China was in the feudal period for a Loong me. Such

social nature determined the control of emperors over people from physical life and thoughts. Since there was no fixed religion that could influence the whole country, controlling the minds of the people became a problem that the emperor had to solve. Based on the legendary physical appearance of the 'Loong', the physical function of controlling rain and thunder, and the Chinese belief that the 'Loong' was a water god that can bring good luck, the 'Loong' gradually became a tool for emperors to strengthen their power and consolidate their rule.

Some emperors used the way to consolidate their power by asking historians to make up stories between them and the 'Loong'. For example, the first emperor of the Han dynasty, Bang Liu was not born into the nobility, but in order to get the recognition of identity and blue-blooded attestation, thus strengthening the centralization of the new dynasty and consolidating the rule, Bang Liu coerced historian to fabricate that he is the son of the 'Loong'. He said his mother Liu Ao had mated with the 'Loong' and gave birth to him. Sunzhan Xu, an eminent archaeologist notes that in the Han dynasty, Liuxiu dreamed that he rode a 'Loong' to heaven. Then, he became an emperor. Sun Liang and Sun Xiu, the sons of Sun Quan, both of them succeeded to the throne of Wu because they made up stories about the 'Loong'^[6]. In addition, other emperors would limit others except themselves use of dragon pattern to highlight the royal majesty. A classic example of trying to build and enhance the majesty of the ruling class through exclusive use of the 'Loong' was the Yuan dynasty. Yueqiao Chen and Huiping Zhang argue that the rulers of the Yuan dynasty had strict regulations and controls on the details of the use of Loong-patterned clothing, even making it detailed to use the number of claws. For example, no one except the royal family was allowed to use five-claw Loong-patterned clothing^[8]. After the establishment of the Ming dynasty, it was recorded in volume 67 of the history of the Ming dynasty that Yuanzhang Zhu made specific regulations on different levels of civil and military officials to express their official positions with different animal decorations. Their clothes and curtains were not allowed to be in dark colors, yellow and purple, and embroidered 'Loong' and phoenix patterns were not allowed. Thus, it can be seen because of the nature of the dragon itself and the atheism of ancient China, the dragon became the tool of the emperor and thus became a god that had the symbolic significance of symbolizing imperial power.

3. The significance of different symbolic meanings of Chinese 'Loong'

3.1 The significance of cultural symbols

Unlike the Chinese dragon, the western dragon does not bear the cultural cohesion and accumulation of a nation or has a special cultural symbol meaning. Most people in the west have religious beliefs, they have no need to worship people or creatures other than God. To take western Christianity as an example, Christianity is a religion that recognizes only one god as the creator and ruler of everything in the world, including human beings. People must obey God absolutely. God knows everything and can do anything. Jun Zheng reports that the ten commandments observed in Christianity, three are the fear and worship of god. The first is to fear God and not to misuse his name. The other was to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of rest for god. God uses six days to create everything and the seventh day to rest. It is a day of worship for God, usually called Sunday. It is also stated that idols are not to be worshiped, that is, no one or god but God is to be worshiped^[9]. This difference between atheism (pantheism) and theism led to the Chinese people to worship the 'Loong' as a totem, while the westerners could not worship the dragon because of the fact that Christianity could only worship God as the only deity.

The 'Loong' symbolizes auspicious and sacred power, while the western dragon symbolizes evil and disaster, so this different symbolic meaning leads to different cultural influences, namely different utilization of dragons. The 'Loong' has penetrated all aspects of Chinese society and become a kind of cohesion and accumulation of Chinese culture. It is a symbol of Chinese culture and has a high cultural value. First, the 'Loong' has humanistic and social values. Yan and Fan claim that the spirit of Loong is 'FuSheng' that means to benefit all sentient beings, which is a kind of value and happiness theory. Therefore, Chinese believe the Loong contains the auspiciousness and fortune in people's lives. This point is reflected in festivals and folk customs, for example, Lantern Festival carries out dragon lantern exhibition and the 'Loong' dance performance, dragon boat race in the 'Duanwu' ". Festival, and other traditional festival activities are also full of

auspicious and progressive atmosphere. At the same time, this spirit is also reflected in the language vocabulary. For thousands of years, many words about the 'Loong' are still widely used and have strong vitality. For example, anyone who has moral character, talent, or precise writing, or outstanding behavior can be compared to 'Loong', such as 'Loong Fei Feng Wu' (The dragon flies and the phoenix dances) 'Loong Teng Hu Yue' (Dragon and Tiger Leap) and so on^[5].

3.2 The significance of cultural cohesion

Second, the 'Loong' has the value of cultural cohesion. As Jia and Shi pointed out, Chinese people generally worship dragons, which is the common belief of all Chinese people. This common belief is very easy to make people have a sense of national identity so as to unite the Chinese nation closely, enhance the consciousness of 'the descendants of the Loong', and arouse the spirit of unity and cooperation^[1]. Third, Chinese dragons have artistic appreciation value. Simiao Sun, an ancient Chinese scholar, wrote the book *Loong Hu Tongyuan Jue* (Dragon and Tiger are all the best) and Boyang Wei wrote *Loong Hu Dan Jue* (Dragon Tiger Danduel) and other works about the 'Loong' not less than dozens of. People's love for the dragon is also fully reflected in painting. Kaizhi Gu, a famous painter in the Jin dynasty, was good at painting the 'Loong', leaving many works about it. In particular, the 'Loong' painters whose names people don't know have made great contributions to the 'Loong' art. They painted murals with the 'Loong' as their content in temples all over the country in ancient times and even made many wood and stone sculptures of the 'Loong', which displayed the vivid image of dragon in front of hundreds of millions of people, making the people deepen their impression of the 'Loong'.

On the contrary, because westerners regard the dragon as a symbol of evil, they had formed the concept of killing the dragon. Since ancient times, in western literature, painting, sculpture and other artistic creation, there were warriors and dragons' duel story, for example, the most typical is St. George slaying the dragon. St. George killed the dragon that occupied the only water source in the city, preventing the continued sacrifice of the citizens. The citizens were influenced by his righteous acts, so all of them renounced paganism and converted to God. Ji said: "Westerners believe that the dragon is a vicious basilisk that threatens human safety and is an alien force that human beings must fight against. They took the dragon as a symbol of evil and formed a strong concept of dragon slaughter. They believed that the hero who conquers the dragon should be worshipped and even should be regarded as the patron saint." The flag of the United Kingdom still bears the symbol of St. George Cross. He was hailed as the patron saint of England, Portugal and Yugoslavia. The deification of early dragon slaying heroes reflects the strong desire of westerners to conquer the dragon.

4. Conclusion

No matter in the west or the east, the mysterious legends about the dragon appeared in the ancient times. The symbolic meanings and cultural values of dragons are obviously different. It is because of the differences between Chinese and western cultures and civilizations, as well as the differences in the physical appearance and physical functions of dragons. In ancient China, the 'Loong' symbolizes auspice and imperial power. Through the process of evolution and sublimation of the Chinese Loong's history and culture, the dragon has become a broad totem, cultural symbol, spiritual symbol, belief carrier and emotional bond of the Chinese nation. The dragon is regarded by westerners as the embodiment of cruelty, greed, evil and disaster, and is proud of killing the dragon. This also shows that the Chinese dragon and the western dragon are not the same creatures at all. The cultural connotations and influences of the Chinese dragon 'Loong' and the western dragon are quite different, and there are huge differences between the two words, which should not be translated straightly. Therefore, in the process of cross-cultural communication, people need to understand each other's culture on the basis of accurate output, rather than mechanical translation of it.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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