

A Semiotic Study of Dreaming in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics

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Abstract—Dreaming, as a sign of body, is expressed by mental icon to dreamer. Dreaming is the representation of dreamer's life condition and disease. This paper investigates the medical meaning in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics in the context of semiotic studies. It is found that the meaning of dreaming is decided by cultural community and proves the original thinking of traditional Chinese medicine.

Keywords—the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics; dreaming; sign; meaning

I. INTRODUCTION

Symptom is real sign of body in clinic medicine which is viewed as the patient's revelation of physiological disorder. It is reality which can't tell lies. Many semioticians categorized the symptom as sign which shows the internal condition of body. There is biological relationship between the object and symptom.

The semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok defines it as a compulsive, automatic, non-arbitrary sign, [1] which directly or indirectly connects with the internal condition of body. Roland Barthes assumes that symptom is the reality of abnormal state which can be decoded. The symptom is the unprocessed facts. Foucault Michel believed that sign is the symptom and existed in the reality. Sign is same to symptom, the only gap is that sign is the accurate description of symptom.

C.S. Pierce categorizes the sign to three types based on the relationship between sign and object: icon, index and symbol. He assumes that symptom is index, such that the symptom coupled with the object in the way of physical link. The link between the symptom and object is not decided by interpreter's mentality. The link forms before Index is perceived. That is, it is unnecessary for addressee to think about the cause of index. The indexicality refers to the relation between sign and object, usually the cause-effect link, correspondence and part-whole relation. The addressee can associate the sign with the object. Index directs the attention to their objects by force. Chinese medicine practitioners habitually put all attention to the symptom which is directed to inner condition of body by four ways of

diagnosis look, listen, and question and feel the pulse, which is the general diagnosing rule based on symptom analysis-thinking-prescription. The symptom as sign is meaning carrier from the doctor's perspective. Any disease results from the physical disorder, which is shown by symptom. With no consideration of symptom, the disease could not be judged and diagnosed. As Chinese saying goes, any symptom is the reflection of inner condition.

It can't be ignored that symptom is the accurate description of sign. Symptom is the reflection of disease on human body, which expresses the disease quality and physiological function, and it varies from time to time. This sign of body features the time which is so different from the other types of signs. How is the sign decoded in traditional Chinese medicine? The practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine take different approaches to understand the meaning of the symptom, such as looking at the face, listening to the patient's complaints, feeling the pulse and questioning, which are based on eight principal syndrome differentiation, including yin and yang, exterior and interior, deficiency and excess, chills and fever. The eight principles are helpful to locate the disease, tell the severity of illness and qualify the illness. The interpretation of symptom is decided by the principles of Chinese medicine and the interpretative community.

II. THE NATURE OF DREAMING AS SIGN

Dreaming is regarded as the product of human thought and very individualistic. It is mental activity with sleeping as the precondition of dreaming, whose pathological dynamism is not clearly revealed. Carl Gustav Jung assumes that dreaming is the expression of mental activity of subconsciousness. [2] Since dreaming is the expression of mental activity, the expression involves the meaning, in this point, it is regarded as sign. The definition of sign is that sign is the perception of meaning. There is big discrepancy between dreaming and other signs. The dreaming as sign is very special, it can be perceived by dreamers and is narrated to tell others who cannot directly perceive the dreamer's meaning.

Dreaming is the narrative of mental icon. It is represented by the mental icon as media which is not reflection of direct experience. Secondly, dream involves the character and plot in which the dreamer appears. The media of mental icon narrative is the pictures that are perceived by mind. The subject sends the text to the other, as usual, the addresser of dreaming as sign is one part of subject's consciousness, and the addressee is the other part of the dreamer's consciousness. The dreamer is not only the sender but the receiver of mental icon narrative. It can't be experienced and received directly, which forms the view that the dream is meaningless. The meaning of dream is only renarrated by dreamer to let others know it. Henry Yiheng Zhao assumes that the sender and receiver are the same one, namely consciousness, different parts of which become sender and receiver. It is argued that the sender of dreaming is the body of illness rather than consciousness according to the interpretation of cause of dreaming and pathological analysis in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics. Different dreams are determined by different parts of human body.

III. MEDICAL MEANING OF DREAMING AS SIGN

As mental icon narrative, the creation of dreaming is closely related to physiological and pathological condition. The dream is perceived by dreamer, which contains the meaning. The dream is the symptom as sign which plays an important role in clinical examination. In the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics, the dream was regarded as carrier of the medical meaning, which helps to trace how the dreaming shapes and how the mental icon is created from the pathological perspective. It is different from the view of superstition and future telling as symbol. For Chinese ancients, dreaming is the way to have access to meaning and health care and applied to medical practice. The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics expounds the medical meaning of dream as a symptom from the view of Yinyang, Five Agents and Zangxiang theory of Chinese Medicine.

Yinyang theory is concluded from the observation of nature by Chinese ancestors who focus on the analysis of unity of opposites in natural phenomenon. Yinyang is viewed as a mode embedded in the nature and the root of myriad things. The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics defines yinyang as follows: The Yellow Emperor claims that yinyang is the Dao of heaven and earth, the net (gangji 纲纪) of the ten thousand things, the parent (fumu 父母) of transformations, the origin (benshi 本始) of life and death, and the residence (fu 府) of spirit and insight. To heal illness one must seek in this root. [3] Yinyang is the base of world view which gets together human being, heaven and the Dao in a way that forms the dynamic wholeness. The cosmology of yinyang is applied to all kinds of areas. The dream is analyzed from the perspective of yinyang thinking in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics.

Firstly, dream originates from the deficiency and excess of yinyang of human body, which is shown to the dreamer by mental icon. The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics states that yin excess produces the dream that dreamer is afraid to cross the river, yang excess leads to the dream involving the big fire, the excess of yin and yang causes dream of fighting.

The excess of upper qi creates the flying dream, the excess of lower qi creates the falling dream. The overeating results in the giving dream, the starvation creates the insufficiency dream. [4]

Yinyang of the universe is in correspondence to one of Zang and Fu viscera. Dream results from the parade of spirits, because the liver governs the blood and contains soul (Hun 魂), the lung governs the qi and contains spirits (Po 魄), the heart governs the fire and belongs to the yang, kidney governs the water and belongs to yin, so the excess of yin produces the fear to cross the river in the dream, dreaming big fire comes from the excess of yang excess. The excess of yinyang leads to fighting in the dream. The mental icons in the dream are decoded in the context of Chinese medicine, yinyang excess and deficiency. According to the principle of yinyang thinking, upper is categorized to yang, and down to yin, the meaning of flying and falling in dream is interpreted in the code of yinyang. The interpretation of dream is determined by the interpretive community in which the yinyang thinking dominates.

The excess of yin qi and yang qi creates the dream in other parts of *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics*. It states the same views to the above mentioned. In the dream, the dreamer is one of the characters who can't control the plot. The dreamer is only part of his consciousness, so the fear, flying dream and fighting are bizarre.

The same case of dream interpretation in the context of yinyang thinking mode appears in the *A Treatise on the Latent Man* (qianfulun) by Wangfu in Eastern Han dynasty. [5] It states that the dream of rain makes person depressive, the appearing of drought in the dream makes person upset, the appearance of severe cold in the dream makes person sad, the appearance of strong wind in the dream makes person fly. The image of growing tends to occur in the spring dream, the image of brightness in the sky often appears in the summer dream, the image of harvest and storage in autumn and winter dream. The patients with yin illness often dream the cold, those with yang illness often dream the hot, and those with inner illness dream messy, and those with outer illness dream the worsening of illness.

The origin of dream is interpreted from the perspective of unique Chinese philosophy. Who sends the sign of dream? In the view of physiology and pathology, the imbalance of yinyang produces the dream. The special interpretation of the dream shows the medical significance in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics, the meaning of dream as sign is central to the diagnose of Chinese medicine.

Secondly, the dream as sign originates from the excess and deficiency of Five Zang viscera. Five Agents include wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Promotion and restriction among five agents are two inseparable respects which expresses concretely that there is restriction within promotion and there is promotion within restriction. For instance, wood promotes fire, fire promotes earth, wood restricts earth. Five agents are applied to the medical practice for the purpose of the analysis of human organs function. Wood, fire, earth, metal and water match green, red, yellow,

white, black in color, liver, heart, spleen, lung and kidney respectively.

The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics states that the exhaustion of qi produces the chaotic dreams. The exhaustion of qi refers to the extreme deficiency of yang and yin. The deficiency of lung qi creates the white things and bloody corpse in the dream. When the metal is exuberant, war appears in the dream. The deficiency of kidney qi creates the drowning dream, when the water is exuberant; dreamer is hidden in the water and felt fearful. The deficiency of liver qi creates the grass in the dream, when wood is exuberant, dreamer is afraid to rise and hide under the tree. The deficiency of heart qi creates the thunder and fire extinguishing in the dream, when fire is exuberant, there is big fire in the dream. The deficiency of spleen qi creates the insufficient food in the dream, when earth is exuberant, there is house making in the dream.

The white color corresponds to the metal of five agents, blood results from metal cutting; in this point, the bloody scene appears in the dream. Lung corresponds to the autumn in seasons covering three months, so war occurs in the dream. Kidney corresponds to winter in seasons covering three months. Liver corresponds to spring in seasons covering three months. The red color corresponds to the heart and the summer, so the fire is presented in the dream. The yellow color corresponds to the spleen and the earth of five agents, so insufficiency of food is presented in the dream. Here all natural phenomena in the dream are correlative based on the categorizing according to the principle of five agents.

The yellow Emperor's Inner Classics states that the excess of liver qi causes the anger presented in the dream, the excess of lung qi causes the fear and crying presented in the dream, the excess of heart qi causes the laughing presented in the dream, the excess of spleen qi causes the singing and heavy weight of body presented, the excess of kidney qi causes the separation of waist and spine presented in the dream. The qi excess of Five Zang viscera refers to pathogenic factor, which disrupts the function of heart, liver, spleen, lung and kidney and causes different dreams.

The meaning of dream is analyzed in the Chinese medicine context and is very different from psychological interpretation. The decoding of dream is decided by cultural context and interpretive group.

IV. THE DECODING MECHANISM OF DREAM AS SIGN

The decoding of sign has a bearing on individual's culture code, which is equal to "semiotic sphere" proposed by semiotician Juri Lotman. The code refers to the conventional programming system, whose function is to link the signifier with the signified to construct the context of meaning making in which the interpretive community understands the meaning of the sign. The code is a set of rules which are used to make the meaning and analyze text. The text communication includes encoding and decoding, encoding is that meaning is embedded in the text as code, decoding is that original meaning is understood according to code. Roman Jakobson assumes that the creation and interpretation of text relies on the code communication. If the relation

between signified and signifier is arbitrary, understanding the conventional meaning of the text requires knowing of the code. The meaning of dream in the context of Chinese medicine is obtained based on the code. The code of yinyang and five agents are applied to various fields, such as Chinese medicine, geomancy science and divination.

As weak encoding text, the interpretation of dream is not fixed, because the dream is the mental icon in sleep which is experienced only by dreamer. [6] The dream is known by others through retelling, the meaning of which is not embedded according to the code. The receiver of dream as sign can't decode the dream as the rules of football indicate. There is a big room for the receivers to interpret dream, so the meaning varies from context. There is a big gap on code between the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics in China and The Interpretation of Dream by Sigmund Freud. The cultural interpretation is so different based on different code in spite of same text. The same text leads to different interpretant on different code.

V. CONCLUSION

Dream is narrative by the mental icon as media and felt only by the dreamer. The dream as sign contains physiological and pathological meaning. The interpretation of dream is determined by cultural sphere, accordingly, the medical meaning of dream is formed in the context of Chinese medicine on the basis of yinyang and five agents code. From the perspective of semiotic studies, it analyses that how the dream shapes and is interpreted in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classics, and also finds the original thinking in Chinese medicine.

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