Chinese, Ancient Greek Mythology and "Human Essence"

The Exploration of "Human Nature" From the Perspective of Information Philosophy

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Abstract—The issue on "human essence" has always been a hot philosophical issue. Historically, this concept has been newly annotated in different historical periods. The creation of mythology is the first attempt of mankind to pursue their essence. They first imposed their own nature upon gods, and then tried to find the sources and explanations for all their actions. They even imposed their existing political system, differences in gender and status as well as clothing features, and all these attributes of human society to gods. In this means, mankind had gods created themselves and made themselves children and successors of gods and further intended to replace gods to take the control over everything in nature in the age as gods hide. As a result, human essence and gods were then constructed. The essence of god functions as an intermediary between mankind and the outside world (society and nature), while human essence is "sons of gods". At this time, the most valuable initial attempt of mankind in defining human essence is that they began to learn to construct intermediary and use intermediary to construct and define themselves. Wu Kun's philosophy of information has opened up a new ground in philosophic thinking; so at the same time, it also provides a new perspective to interpret "human essence". "Human essence" was actually formed through multidimensional construction. In addition to the multidimensional construction, there were the dual construction of existence and non-existence as well as the combination of ego, id and superego under arrow of time.

Keywords: human essence, Chinese mythology, ancient Greek mythology, god, demigod, philosophy of information

I. INTRODUCTION

What is human essence is a classic proposition. As Kant said, "Two things fill me with constantly increasing admiration and awe, the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: the starry heavens without and the moral law within", [1] [(P1)] the history of human civilization is a history of defining the world and human beings, and a history about the evolution of human essence.

Mythology is the beginning of human civilization. Human beings interpreted and got know about themselves through creating myths. In ancient times, for people were unable to interpret neither the world nor themselves, they created gods to interpret. Therefore, the earliest exploration of human essence was derived from myths.

II. THE SHAPING OF HUMAN ESSENCE IN CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

China boasts with a large system of mythology, and Chinese myths are inseparable from Chinese history. For example, in Han Culture, there is a goddess, Nu Wa, who is one of the most influential gods in Chinese culture. She was respected as the ancestor and mother of Chinese civilization. Regardless of the lost book *Shizhoupian* in Spring and Autumn Period, it was Qu Yuan [2] [(P 60)] who first mentioned Nu Wa in his *Elegies of the South · Asking Heaven* in which he wrote, "Who made her body change into seventy shapes strange?". And later, Xu Shen mentioned in *Word Power Made Easy*, "Wa, ancient goddess, the creator of creatures on earth." [3] But why did Qu Yuan chose goddess Nu Wa instead of well-known creator Pan Gu? It's simple to answer that there was no Myth about Pan Gu at his times [4]. After creating the things on earth, Nu Wa created human beings in accordance with her own image. However, the goddess in matrilineal society was gradually forgotten in the following society dominated by men.

Fu Xi was created as a principal patriarchal god, for as the legend of Nu Wa creating human beings was popular, there was no description of Fu Xi or other gods. The earliest record of Fu Xi can be traced back to the mid-Warring States period, in *Chuang Tzu*, it wrote, "It is the basis for the changes of everything, the key that Yu and Shun became the saints, also the principle that Fu Xi and Ji Qu practiced all their life time, let alone for ordinary people!" [3] Chu silk book during the same period made a complete record of myth that Bao Xi and the Empress (Fu Xi and Nu Wa) procreated and created the world. [5] In the Han Dynasty, Fu Xi and Nu Wa were considered as brother and sister, and then a couple. [6]On the stone bricks of Han Dynasty unearthed in Henan Province, the snake tails of Fu Xi and Nu Wa were found entangled together, which was the same as the picture unearthed in Jiaxiang, Shandong Province. [7] Stein also dug out similar on silk painting in China in the late Qing Dynasty. [8] [(p83)] So Nu Wa was then described to be

the goddess created the world together with her husband. This is different from previous stories.

With the development of patriarchal society and further rising of men's social status, the "Three Emperors" began to emerge as ancestors of human civilization. The earliest concept of the "Three Emperors" appeared in *Rites of Zhou · Spring Rite Officer · unofficial history*. *Rites of Zhou* is not, as it shown in the book, composed by the Duke of Zhou. [9] Some scholars in the Southern Song Dynasty and Kang Youwei believed that it is a pseudograph, written by Liu Xin. [10] [(P 2204)] [11] [(P 76)] And in present academic circle, there are two popular views about this. The first group of scholars holds that *Rites of Zhou* is the book *Zhou Official*, which is not pseudograph as it was criticized. Though it might not be written by the Duke of Zhou, it would be composed by someone in the Western Zhou or Eastern Zhou Dynasty on the basis of his thoughts. [12] [13] The other group of scholars believes that the book was completed in the Warring States period, for there are some historical facts of the Spring and Autumn Period in the book. In particular, the main thought of the book is very close to that in *Guan Zi* in the Warring States Period. [14] [(P 228-276)] [9] Therefore, the idea that *Rites of Zhou* was written in the Warring States Period was most credible.

The concept of "Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns" occurred in *Rites of Zhou*, and other classics in the Warring States period as *Chuang Tzu*, *Guan Zi* and *Mister Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals*. This also proves that *Rites of Zhou* should been written after the Spring and Autumn Period. In this sense, it was in the Warring States Period that the concept of "Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns" was innovated and spread. In the *Historical Records · The First Emperor of Qin Dynasty*, it records that the three emperors in pre-Qin period are: the Emperor of Heaven, the Emperor of Earth, and the Emperor of Tai. [15]When it came to the Han Dynasty, the "Three Emperors" changed greatly due to the works of gods and kings such as Fu Xi. There were totally eight different versions. The only goddess Nu Wa was listed in the "Three Emperors" in *Folk Legend*. On the contrary, Fu Xi occurred in every version and ranked first. Two generally-known versions of the "Three Emperors" were seen: Fu Xi, Patron of Agriculture, and Yellow Emperor [16] or Fu Xi, Suiren and Patron of Agriculture. [15] No matter in which version, Nu Wa was not listed. Thus since this period, Nu Wa has basically withdrawn from the myths of this patriarchal stage. But this is not enough, soon after, the patriarchal society created a unique male creator to take the place of Nu Wa-Pan Gu.

The Legend of Pan Gu appeared much later. It might first occur in the Eastern Han Dynasty. It was said that the Legend of Pan Gu was recorded in *San Wu Li Ji* by Xu Zheng, but it is a pity that the original book has been lost and only some of the passages have been quoted in books later. However, the compiled scattered writings were not complete, so they were not so credible.[17] No wonder many scholars believe that the Legend of Pan Gu is a foreign product or derived from the myths of southern ethnic minorities. [18] [(P 92)] Some scholars even believe it is from the myths of ancient Babylonian or ancient India. [19] [(p. 230)] These views, whereas, triggered a hot argument in Chinese academia over the origins of the Legend of Pan Gu afterwards. [20] Rao Zongyi pointed out there was already a Pan Gu image on a stone in Yizhou Prefecture, Sichuan, so that the emergence time of the legend was confirmed to be the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty before (194 A.D.). [21] Generally, Pan Gu was created much later. Nevertheless, myth itself is a work created by human beings. There is no essential difference whether it is borrowed from other nations or created by Chinese people.

What can be confirmed is that Pan Gu was created just to make mythological history complete and reasonable. Gu Jiegang put forward that the theory of "ancient Chinese history made through piling". [22] The ancient Chinese history and the history of myths are overlapped and mixed with each other, where there is very obvious trace of fabrication. Ancient gods, unexpectedly, were created much later. Though modern archeologists and researchers of ancient cultures tried their best to recover the correct ancient Chinese history, [23] it is sure that human beings were bound up in creating the history of gods and themselves. What's more, this phenomenon can be found not only in China, but also in other nations in the world.

III. THE SHAPING OF HUMAN ESSENCE IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Among various versions of ancient Greek mythology, Hesiod's *Theogony* is the best accepted one. The world started from Chaos. And the first deity is Gaia, the creator of the world, who gave birth to other deities in the world with her eldest son Uranus. [24] [(P 29)] This is exactly the same as the legend of Nu Wa creating the world. In another version of Greek mythology, it described that the sea goddess eurynos is the creator of the world. She was also born in Chaos and gave birth to a great serpent Ophion. And then she gave birth to a cosmic egg with Ophion, from which the world was born. [25] This serpent may probably remind us of Nu Wa and Fu Xi, who had the body of human beings but the tail of snake. And the egg may also remind us of Pan Gu. How similar the way in which the ancient people thought about the world.

But then, as the matriarchal society was replaced by patriarchal society, the status of female deities began to be replaced by males. For example, the legend of Nu Wa creating the world was replaced by Pan Gu's creation of the world, and the status of Gaia was also replaced by her own sons. As a nation values morality highly, China, seldom add ugly aspects of human beings to its deities. But there are also legends show that as Nu Wa and Fu Xi came together, for they are brother and sister, they felt much ashamed for their combination. So they conducted a ceremony for their behavior and warned their decedents not to do the same. [3] However, in ancient Greek mythology, there were many myths about despicable and ugly essence of human beings, such as infanticide, patricide, fornication, promiscuity, tyranny, hatred, jealousy, revenge, suspicion and various unbearable emotions and behaviors of human beings. We can

find that the battle among gods for rights on Mount Olympus is actually an evolutionary history of mankind from barbarism to civilization. The actions of deities in the myths are all brutal. [P 49-50] And at the time of Zeus, the third generation of the gods, the deities finally began to move toward to civilization. And the relationship among gods was not as tense as before. But the battles among gods are far from over.

Homer's *Iliad* described the final battle of the 10-year Trojan War, but this time-consuming war was not only a war among mankind, it was a war among deities, for most participants of the war were demigods or heroes favored by gods. The war was triggered by the jealousy and struggle of three goddesses for a golden apple. In the course of the war, there were many gods directly or indirectly involved. For instance, Achilles, the strongest hero in the Greek coalition, was a son of sea god Thetis. Apollo, the god of light, also caused plagues for the disrespect of Greek coalition commander Agamemnon to him, etc. [27] [P 3-20] Almost every major event in the war was either caused by gods' actions or prophecies made by gods before. In ancient Greek mythology, gods were more capable human beings, and their attitudes and ideas about war were the same as those of ordinary people.

All of the aforementioned gods' behaviors are actually human essence. Mankind first imposed them to gods, and then found explanations for their own behaviors through the actions of gods. And they even designed their existing political systems, differences in gender and status as well as clothing features to gods. For example, the gods in Greek mythology were all thinly dressed and most parts of their body were exposed because of the perennial heat in the Hellenic region [28]. Odin, the king of the gods in the Nordic mythology, was wearing a thick gown, cloak and gold armor, [29] which was because of the colder climate in northern Europe. All these show that the geographical conditions in which the mythology was created also had a great influence on gods' dressing.

Therefore, on the one hand, mankind place gods in a position that surpasses all things in nature so that gods have infinite power to control over everything. On the other hand, they allow gods created themselves. As gods' children and successors, mankind further require to take control over nature by replacing gods' place in the hidden age of gods. In such a well-established and logical setting, the nature and essence of gods and man were constructed. Like Prometheus's prophecy, Zeus would be replaced by his own son, so there is no everlasting king of gods. Gods would eventually be replaced by their own descendants, just as dynasty change in human society.

The most famous sons of Zeus were not given birth by goddesses, but by human beings, such as Hercules. There are many other semi-divine legends, as Perseus, another son of Zeus and previously mentioned invincible Achilles in Trojan War, son of sea goddess Thetis etc. Their deeds were more wonderful than those of gods and their heroic images were greater than those of gods as well for they had an attribute

which gods did not have — death. And their death put them with the most memorable and touching heroic tragedy, so their existence directly associated gods with ordinary people, and they were the intermediary of gods and mankind. As idols, they also reflected every mortal.

IV. HUMAN BEINGS DEMONSTRATE THEIR OWN ESSENCE THROUGH GODS THEY MOLDED

The creation of myths is the first attempt of mankind to seek for their own essence. Facing with a volatile world around them, mankind was forced to adapt, survive, understand and create. Primitive people, in great ignorance, wished to explain the nature and themselves to overcome their ignorance and fear. So they created gods so that the gods created them while creating the nature. In the creation of gods in Hesoid's *Theogony*, a divine universe was born. Gods, the world as well as human themselves were depicted in this way. [30] [P 1] And in the process of creating gods, human beings also borrow from each other. The creation was tortuous and complex. For example, the image of the Nu Wa in Chinese mythology was possibly from the myths of ethnic minorities in the south, while the image of Pan Gu might be from foreign countries. [19] [p 230] These inferences have all been mentioned above. Many stories in Homer's *Odyssey* were borrowed from European Near Eastern culture (Mesopotamia, West Jews, Egyptians cultures) and cultures of other regions. In particular, they have many similarities with stories in *The Bible* [31] [P 1]. This is the reason why the earliest myths of mankind were so similar, not only in ways of thinking, they even have mutual references.

The trace of human creation in mythology is so obvious that it even could be found in the plot of the mythological stories. That is the case for the design of characters and plots in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. There are many characters in Homer's epics, and many of whom appeared just to be killed. For instance, Pandarus, the Trojan, was killed shortly after he finished his story, and the main heroes were highlighted and survived through the description of these secondary heroes. For example, Hector had to be alive till the climax of the story. Odysseus even could not die in Troy as the protagonist of *Odyssey*. [32] To sum up, the creation of myths is just like the creation of a novel, which also requires ups and downs as well as exciting storytelling. At the time, human essence was actually created in the process of myth creation.

In the phase of mythology, human essence was constructed by human beings themselves. Although at that time human beings were still ignorant and naive, the initially intelligent people already begun to learn to indirectly define themselves by means of constructing intermediary. This intermediary is gods. Gods, on the one hand, were the creators of the world and mankind, on the one hand, contact and distinguish human beings from nature. And finally, the rulers would take the advantage of gods to consolidate their power and unite people to promote social prosperity and stability.

However, since gods were created by human beings according to their own images, these gods could not but

directly or indirectly present the images and essence of human beings. For instance, in related myths creation, deities were similar to human beings both physically and psychologically such as Nu Wa. In the influence of ideology of matriarchal society, people thought that the world and people were also created by females. In the process of the establishment of Nu Wa's identity, matriarchal society system was consolidated. This phenomenon was more obvious in ancient Greek mythology. Take the Trojan War described by Homer as an example. Many gods participated one after another in the war. Gods made all sorts of predictions and even helped to add fuel to the fire. Various mental activities of human beings were shown on gods. Because they were much more powerful and scrupulous, they went even further than those men.

Relevant myths revealed that mankind and nature were both created by gods, but mankind was superior over nature and loved by gods. In this sense, human were supposed to have rights to utilize and control over nature, thus the status of mankind in nature was established. Due to sluggishness, the system and habits of human society were derived from goods, as well as superior blood relationship of clans or city-states. So people's obedience to rights and the balance of social hierarchy were both reasonable. In this way, the nature of gods worked as an intermediary between people and the outside world (society and nature).And hence, primitive people determined the nature of human beings through gods – "son of god."

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the famous ideal of "son of god" was created by human beings themselves, which actually increased their confidence in struggling with nature. And at the same time, it helped to create conditions for smooth running of their political rule. It also helped to unite human society together and inherit family culture from generation to generation. Most importantly, humans began to learn to construct intermediary and use it to construct and define themselves early in their childhood. Such construction was multi-level and complex, including the constructions of divine universe, the families of gods (society), gods, demigods and humans. This constructive behavior was also in line with the definition of human essence by philosophy of information, for human essence was relied on a multidimensional construction. [33]

V. CONCLUSION

Wu Kun's philosophy of information opens up a new world in philosophical thinking, and at the same time it also provides a new path of interpreting the issue of "human essence". From the perspective of information philosophy, in addition to the construction of multi-dimensional existence, there is also dual construction of existence and non-existence, as well as the combined function of ego, id and superego under arrow of time. We can see here that human essence is diverse and complex, involving multilevel intermediation theory [34] and new information ontology [35]. The issue of human essence could neither be concluded as the problem of nature and society, nor limit to the problem of existence.

Human essence is supposed to have its own complexity and uniqueness.

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