

A Comparative Cultural Study of Australian Yurlungur Totem and Yi Tiger Totem

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ABSTRACT

Totem worship formed in primitive society shows the unique culture of its tribe or nation. Due to the lack of literature on the cultural comparison between Yurlungur totem in Australian aboriginal area and the tiger totem in the Yi nationality area in southwest China, this paper studies the totems of the two, discusses their similarities and differences, and seeks for the uniqueness and diversity of the world totem culture, so as to better the communication and understanding of their national culture.

Keywords: tiger totem, Yurlungur totem, comparative study

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1869, A Scot named McRae first made a profound study of totem worship. He found that "many habits and customs from different societies, ancient or modern, retain some traces of the totem era". In ancient times, mankind first experienced the chaotic period of nature worship in which mountains, rocks, water, fire, sun, moon, stars and clouds were endowed with humanity; to the period of spiritual belief of the animistic worship of their souls produced by dreamlike consciousness; then to the period of ghostly belief in the worship of a series of natural deities. At this time, human beings have reached the level of nature worship, but they still enjoy natural attributes and lack participation of social consciousness. Wundt pointed out in *Compendium of National and Religious Psychology* that "in a certain period, totem culture has laid the foundation for further civilization evolution, that is, it plays a transitional role between primitive years and the age of heroes and myths". Totem worship is a higher form of ideology than nature worship, and it is also a stage of development in the expression form of primitive nature worship and ancestor worship.

Totem is an Indian word meaning "relatives", "clan" and "race". Primitive people regard some animals, plants or other objects as the sign and symbol of their clan. They believe that their clan is related to them by blood or other special bonds, and such natural objects are totem. Both the Australian aborigines and Yi nationality in southwest China have their own totem. They believe that totem can protect themselves and their clansmen, and regard it as a sacred symbol, and hold religious ceremonies for them to form totem worship.

II. COMPARISON BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN YURLUNGUR TOTEM AND YI TIGER TOTEM

A. Origin

The Yurlungur is the main totem of aboriginal Australia. Yurlungur enjoys different names and appearances in different Australia Aboriginal groups. In their belief, Yurlungur serves as their ancestors, their deities and totem they worship. The origin of Yurlungur also varies from tribe to tribe. One is closely related to Ayers Rock in central Australia. Ayers Rock, also known as Uluru in the native language, means Yurlungur and turns yellow, grey and red when the sun shines it from different angles. In *Rainbow, Fish and Mountain*, rainbow falls in love with an earthly woman, but can't be with her, so he becomes a tall mountain. The mountain gathers all its energy and shoots a multicolor beam of light at the couple, turning them into two stone pillars. He, too, lost his life, with his feet buried deep in the desert and turned into the world's largest monolithic rock, Ayers Rock, and the inland Yurlungur was fierce and huge. Another story in *Rainbow Snake* says that in the far north of Australia, a river flowing into Carpentari Bay is inhabited by Yurlungur and his wife. The Yurlungur is the patron saint of the river. He allows the natives to fish in the river when they are hungry, but if they fish for pleasure, he becomes angry and catches the fishermen. Once there was a hailstorm on both sides of the river. The elders of the tribe, who had never seen hailstones, took a few worms they had dug up from the ground for the hailstones and said they were descended from Yurlungur. Since then, hailstorm has been used as the eggs of the Yurlungur couple. South of Tennant Creek, in the Northern Territory, lie thousands of giant, rounded boulders called Karlu Karlu by aboriginal

people who believe they were hatched by Yurlungur in Dreamtime. As a result, it was once a sacred place for the local aborigines to worship Yurlungur totem. The most popular saying is that at the beginning of all things in Australia, the Dreamtime, the ancestors of gods and deities meandered from south to north in Australia with the help of the body of the powerful giant python. They created all things in the world, mountains and rivers wherever they went. They endowed the mountains and rivers with shapes, named and sang for the places. It can help people get rid of diseases and disasters as well as make people get sick and die.

Scholars attach great importance to the study of tiger totem worship, and they all agree that "tiger is the totem of Yi nationality". As the sixth largest ethnic minority, Yi is mainly distributed in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Guangxi provinces. Yi's ancient creation epic *Meige* tells the story of god who made sky and earth, but could not make it stable. In all helpless, the five sons who created the sky get the revelation of god, find the world's most ferocious tiger. So they used the four big bones of the tiger as pillars and the shoulders of the tiger as directions to support the sky. Then the rest of the tiger turned into mountains, rivers, minerals, plants and animals. As the original text of *Meige* says, "the head of the tiger is used as the head of the sky, the tail as the tail of the ground, and the ears as the ear of the sky... the whiskers turn into sunlight, teeth into stars... blood into the sea... skin into land...", reflecting that tigers are the source of everything in the eyes of Yi ancestors.

Therefore, the Yurlungur totem of Australian aborigines and the tiger totem of the Yi nationality in China are both derived from myths and legends and have the mysterious color of creation. In their respective origins, both totems are regarded as the creator of all things in the world, with mysterious magic, and people have a sense of protection and awe for them. However, they share similarities. The Yurlungur and tiger are related to aboriginal Australian and Yi people, respectively. In Australian totem legends, the Yurlungur is related to local aborigines, while Yi classics also record the combination of ancestors and tigers.

Although the origin of Yurlungur totem of Australian aborigines is similar to that of tiger totem of Yi nationality, the understanding and extension of totem belief are different. Australian aborigines believe "animism", everything is created by the spirit in Dreamtime, and they have a strong spiritual dependence on nature. They respect, rely on and even worship nature. They see themselves not as owners of the land, but as custodians of it, tasked with the mission of their ancestors to preserve it for generations to come. As a result, they never transform nature, nor do they have the desire and pursuit to create a better life. At the same

time, they take that life does not belong to them, but is embodied in human form from Dreamtime, and is repeated through generations of reproduction. They believe that human life can be mystically linked to the "dream" vitality through totem worship or religious rituals, and will continue to exist with the help of such vitality. So, in their belief, death was not a punishment for sin, and certainly there was no such thing as heaven or hell. The Yi people in southwest China developed a series of primitive religions due to their living environment. In the process of hunting, the Yi ancestors came to know and understand tigers and worshipped the natural attributes of tigers. They came to know tigers with fear and gratitude, hoping that their people could be as strong, fierce and brave as tigers and that their tribe could have strong survival ability and competitiveness. They prayed that the fierce tiger would protect their tribe and their descendants. Therefore, the tiger totem worship of Yi nationality reflects their hope for life, the domination of power and the yearning for happiness.

B. Characteristic

As for names, Yurlungur has different names in different parts of Australia. In South Australia and Victoria, it is called bunyip while in Central Interior it is called wanamb. In addition, the Yurlungur was called akaru in Adnyamatana tribe in South Australia, wollunqua in Warramunga tribe in Central Australia, and bulain in Ingarda tribe in Western Australia due to the indigenous languages spoken by different tribes. This is quite different from the name of tiger given by the Yi people in southwest China, which is basically the same as that given to people and their tribes. According to *Tiger Hui* (Vol. 3), a Ming Dynasty document, Yunnan's barbarians call the tigers luoluo. In the Ailao Mountains of Yunnan, the Yi people generally call themselves "luoluo", and their ethnic groups are called Luo or Hu. Other Yi dialects, such as Le (乐), Luo (洛), La (拉), La (腊), Lang (浪), Le (勒) and Lao (牢), are all other names for luoluo, which are transliterations of the tiger. Liangshan in Sichuan province called the male tiger "Luo Po" and the female tiger "Luo Mo". In the past, every Yi family in the Ailao Mountains offered a portrait of their ancestors painted by sorcerer, and the Yi language called it "Nirama" (涅罗摩) ("涅" means ancestor or god), which means female tiger god or ancestor. The paternal clan of the Yi people in Sichuan, Yunnan and Liangshan called the female tiger "Lamo" or "Luomo". They have similar pronunciations for the name of the tiger and for their own clans. In addition, Yi communities employ tigers to name the places, hills, rivers and villages where they live. The Yi people of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou call the mountain where their ancestor Aputumu lived "Auror", which means "tiger ancestor mountain". The ancient book of *Yi in Southwest China*, Guizhou, translates "Le Nibo", where the six branches of Yi nationality are separated, into

"Tiger Mountain". *Jingdong County Annals* called Aileshan (哀乐山) Ai Leshan (艾乐山), meaning Big Tiger Mountain. In Yi language, "ai (哀, 艾)" means big, while "le (乐)" means tiger. In the Yi areas of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou, places of the Yi nationality named after tiger can be found everywhere.

In the form of totem, the formation process of Yurlungur totem and tiger totem is similar, that is, human and totem interchange. Aborigines believe that there is no clear boundary between the spiritual and the physical, and that any visible object is equally divine. Thus they venerate the land and life, believing that the spirits of their native ancestors had created and placed themselves in the physical world. They also did not recognize the existence of a "god who could rule the world or the universe," and therefore did not confer on elves the status of "gods who could rule everything." Therefore, the aborigines believe that totem is fantasy creatures half man and half beast, man and beast, male or female, and retain the original idea that totem is man and man is totem. There is also saying that tiger and mankind can change from one another in the Yi nationality. The proverb of the Yi, "阿达提莫鸟都茨其" means "My bones and blood are made of tigers." A folk tale of the Yi people in Weining, Guizhou, tells of a girl who is both a human and a tiger. A classic book of the Yi nationality, *Yunnan Annals*, states: "Luoluo is also known as barbarian. The body of the chief was wrapped in tiger skin and burned, and his bones were buried in the mountains. They often turn into tiger clouds." They think they are not only the offspring of tigers, but will become tigers after they die. All these show that the Yi people personify the tiger totem, which has two shapes of human and tiger. But in appearance, Australia's Yurlungur totem varies in form. It is generally believed to be a large snake with rainbow skin, horse-like mane and goat-like beard. But on closer inspection, the inland Yurlungur is huge. Although the totems in east Coast states and north coast islands have the characteristics of Yurlungur, they no longer look like it. Some resemble crocodiles, some resemble emus, and some resemble a combination of fish and snakes. People often see the Yurlungur totem of Australian aborigines in paintings with kangaroo head, crocodile teeth, fish tail, feather-like ears, and long body. On the contrary, the tiger totem of the Yi nationality is more realistic, and can be seen in the relics of various folk customs.

In terms of the symbolic meaning of totems, the Yurlungur totem of aboriginal Australia varies from region to region. In central Australia, the Yurlungur is seen as a symbol of man or woman, while on the east coast, it is believed to have a mysterious connection with a witch doctor who has the ability to make rain or heal people. The Yurlungur of the north coast enjoys the highest status, and is worshipped as a patron saint, a creator. The symbolic significance of the Tiger totem of the Yi people is highly consistent in Sichuan, Yunnan,

Guizhou and Guangxi in southwest China. First of all, the tiger is the lord of all things. The astrology almanac of Ganluo in Liangshan, Sichuan, The History of the Female Tiger has four pictures of the tiger stepping on the ball, with the tiger head facing east, south, west and north, indicating the change of seasons. In another picture, eight tigers are arranged on all sides to symbolize the tigers pushing the sun's celestial sphere around the earth, leading to the alternations of day and night. This reflects the Yi people's idea that the tiger is the omnipotent god of heaven. In the Ailaoshan region of Yunnan, a picture of the "mother tiger" painted by priest is enshrined in every household. Second, they believe that the tiger is a symbol of valor and toughness, and is the patron saint of the Yi people on the battlefield. In ancient tribal times, when the Yi people went out to war, they wore tiger skins to pray to the tiger god to protect them. Among the Yi people, once he assumed the title of head, he would sit in the tiger chair and wear a tiger robe, with a flag embroidered with a mighty black tiger. Moreover, they believe that the tiger is the patron saint of the Yi people, which can bless their families with peace and happiness. At the entrance to Maidichong Village in Yunnan's Shuangbai County, a 3-meter-high stone tiger named "Luo Ma" is the patron saint of the local Yi people. The Yi people believe that only after cremation can the soul break away from the human body and return to their tiger totem. Before cremation, the body must be wrapped in tiger skin, the priest in tiger skin, and the headman in tiger skin, so as to give instructions to the living and to protect the tribe and people in times of crisis.

C. Culture and arts

Ancient nations and magical lands have always nurtured their own civilizations and cultures in the river of history, and art is one of the main ways to observe and understand the ancient civilizations of these tribes and nations. As totem of the Australian and Chinese Yi peoples, Yurlungur and tiger are the source of artistic creation in their cultural history. Traces of these totem can be found in paintings, costumes, songs and dances. They adopted these artistic expression to show their nation's connection with their ancestors.

Among the aboriginal cultures of Australia, painting is their most dazzling work. Whether the rock paintings, rock carvings left by ancestors or the dot paintings, bark paintings and body paintings by descendants, they all record the historical narration of the Australian aborigines, including the Yurlungur totem. The relationship between Yurlungur and water can be found in paintings by aboriginal artists, suggesting that Australia's winding and undulating rivers were the source of life as Yurlungur crept along. In terms of singing and dancing, the Australian aborigines praise and pray in the way of singing and dancing with the theme of the myth and legend of the "Dreamtime".

Based on their unique religious belief and totem worship, they create special and simple songs and dances with primitive culture, which is also an expression of indigenous religious celebration.

The artistic expression form of Yi tiger totem is also rich and colorful. Tiger totem is widely used in Yi stone carving art. Carved stone tigers can be seen at the entrance of villages, local-God temples and doors of the Yi ethnic group, which have the functions of guarding against, deterring and warding off evil spirits. In terms of clothing, Yi nationality advocates black tiger, and its clothing is mostly black. Most Yi men wear black, while women wear red and yellow on a black background. The costumes are decorated with tiger-shaped patterns, especially tiger-shaped shoes worn by the elderly and tiger-shaped hats worn by children of the Yi nationality — two triangular tiger ears are embroidered on the top of the head, while the characters "tiger eyes", "tiger nose", "tiger mouth" and "king" are embroidered with colorful threads. The most primitive artistic expression of tiger totem is the tiger dance of the Yi nationality. The sacrifice dance of tiger totem in Xiao Maichong area, Shuangbai County, Chuxiong, Yunnan — "Tiger Sheng" has a strong mysterious color. It exorcises ghosts and epidemics through the ritual dance of totem to pray for the safety and health of the ethnic group. Nowadays, the Yi drama Zuo Teji, which is popular in Bandi, Weining in northwest Guizhou, calls the tiger totem "Re Gan A Bu (惹干阿布)". In the *White Wolf Song* dance recorded in *Guizhou Tongzhi*, La Yi Mo Bi (腊衣摩比) refers to the female tiger dance wearing a mask.

It can be seen from the above that the similarities between the two are diverse, inseparable from totem, myth, legend, and primitive life, with a strong sense of mystery and magic. The theme is inseparable from the totem of the gods they believe in and presented through paintings, priests and dances. The development of modern society has brought these traditional totem arts into the homes of ordinary people, appearing in architecture, interior decoration, utensils used and national costumes. The combination of old and new art and the artistic collision between two nationalities are bound to make it richer and stronger.

III. CONCLUSION

A glimpse of the development of ancient society and culture reveals that the primitive thinking, backward production and closed communication between the Australian aborigines from the southern hemisphere and the Chinese Yi people from the northern hemisphere, two distant nations, share totem worship. The mysterious creation of totem, the primitive idea of blood relationship between people and totem, and the similarity of animal deification and animal personification all show that the totem worship

of the two must have gone through similar development process in ancient times. However, due to the differences in climate, environment and social development, the national psychology and symbolic significance of totem worship formed by the Australian aborigines and the Yi people in southwest China are also different. As for the origin of totems, aboriginal Australians believe that totems guard everything, especially the land. Since the Yurlungur created everything, the priority of his descendants is to protect the land created by their ancestors. However, the Yi people in southwest China are in awe of the tiger totem. In the ancient times when they could not conquer nature by themselves, their ancestors had to rely on the fierce and brave tigers at that time, so that they could survive in the harsh environment by virtue of the deifying power of tigers. Finally, historical development also makes a difference in the combination of the two with social development. After tens of thousands of years, the lifestyle and social system of aboriginal Australians are still as backward as the primitive tribes of the Middle Stone Age. The influence of European colonialists on the extermination of Aboriginal Australia in the last two or three centuries cannot be ignored. However, at the same time, the totem culture of the Yi nationality in southwest China has been effectively combined with the development of Chinese national culture with the changes of Chinese history. In the process of mutual absorption and collision, the totem culture of Yi nationality has inherited and extended its essence, forming a colorful and progressive one. The originality and mystery of Yi tiger totem also enrich the Chinese culture, making it more unique and diversified.

Today, these totems still play an important role in the cultural life of their tribes. In a multicultural society, their uniqueness and mystery will still be displayed in various cultural forms, and they will still show their charm in the world.

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