



Comparison of Moon Imagery in Chinese and Western

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Abstract. Throughout history, the moon has been repeatedly mentioned in both the East and the West. The imagery of the moon is both the same and different in Chinese and Western cultures. The moon has a rich imagery in both Eastern and Western cultures. The moon, as a recurring image in poetry, and it has been unanimously favored by mythology and poets. The similarities and differences of moon imagery are analyzed to reveal its cultural connotations and symbolic meanings in Chinese and Western, to discover the different cultural traditions and aesthetic psychological meanings of China and the West.

Keywords: moon · culture · imagery · difference

1 Introduction

Imagery, an essential component of writing, serves as the poet's medium for expressing feelings or ideas [1]. Primitive imagery is the deep collective unconscious of humankind, which is the deep psychological experience formed in the life of humanity since ancient times and inherited from generation to generation. As an essential part of human primitive imagery, the mythological archetypes are very important to grasp poetic imagery. An accurate grasp of the connotation of imagery in poetry helps to understand the meaning of poetry deeply. In Chinese and foreign poetry, poets are fond of the moon. In their poetic works, the moon imagery carries an infinite richness of emotions and meanings. Although there are similarities in Chinese and Western literature, moon imagery expresses different emotions and meanings, reflecting different cultural connotations and national psychology.

2 Primitive Imagery and Mythological Archetypes

2.1 The “Moon” in China

The Chinese moon gods began as female figures. Xi Wangmu, Xi He, Chang Xi (later evolved into Chang E), Nu Wa, Etc., appeared as moon gods in Chinese mythology. The image of the moon goddess evolved in various ways and eventually became Chang E. That is the widely known story of the Goddess Chang's flight to the moon. In the <Huai

nanzi>, it is written that “Yi asked Xi Wangmu for the medicine of immortality, and Chang E stole it to fly to the moon.” She stole the immortality pill given to Hou Yi by Xi Wangmu and ascended to immortality, where she remained alone in the Moon Palace. In Chinese mythology and legends, Chang E is a moving woman who conveys the image of the moon and symbolizes a pure and beautiful woman. Chang E is seen as pure beauty. In addition, her immortality is a symbol of the ancient ancestors’ fear of death and their pursuit of immortality; the moon, which is everlasting despite its changes, has become a symbol of eternity. Bai Juyi asked Chang E in the Moon Palace in *The Laurel of the Eastern City*, “The laurel tree in the moon palace is too lonely. Please ask the moon goddess if she wants to plant a few more.” However, Chang E lives alone in the Moon Palace and cannot keep her husband company, so she suffers from the pain of longing and the hatred of leaving home, and her loneliness cannot be relieved. In the traditional Chinese cultural context, the moon imagery will always be beautiful, pure, mysterious, eternal, poignant, and lonely. For the ancient Chinese literati, the moon became a carrier for people to express their sorrow and hate through generations of cultural accumulation [2]. In classical Chinese lyric poetry, countless verses use the moon to pine for one’s hometown. The poet begins with the nostalgic feelings of the ancients touched by the moon, a symbol of human ecology, leading to feelings about themselves, life, and the vast universe.

2.2 The “Moon” in the West

The archetypal imagery of the moon in the Western cultural context is also complex, adaptable, and dynamic, and therefore its archetypal imagery is reproduced in multiple forms. However, Western moon imagery is a perceptual or even an anthropomorphic image, unlike Chinese moon imagery, which is rich in implicit characteristics. The moon itself is a goddess, not a shackle that imprisons Chang E. The most representative one is Diana (also called Artemis), the goddess of the moon in Greek mythology. She is the god of women and hunting, representing motherhood and chastity. In mythology, Diana frequently appears in literature as the god of the moon. Diana is the epitome of female chastity, purity, goodness, and beauty and represents all the nobility and beauty of the moon. She is also the symbol of the queen, conveying power, dominance, majesty, independence, glory, victory, and divinity. As the goddess of care and nurture, she conjures up images of motherhood, birth, death, and survival. As the goddess of hunting, she symbolizes the capacity of Westerners to conquer nature and express themselves. Diana has rich metaphorical characteristics; the positive meanings are quiet, well-being, guardian, lover, Etc.; the negative images include sorrow, loneliness, evil, Etc. These metaphors about Diana influence the image and meaning of the moon in Westerners’ minds.

In Chinese history, masculinity and femininity have always complemented each other; Yin is the moon, Yang is the sun, one is the woman, and the other is the man, and these concepts are so deeply rooted. In Chinese and Western myths, the original imagery of the moon is all female. On the one hand, the former represents the embodiment of beauty, and the latter represents the symbol of beautiful and pure women [3]. Chang E is a lonely, miserable, and sympathetic woman who is subject to the man and her fate, which is sad and lamentable; therefore, the moon imagery is always full of sorrow and

sentimentality, and this beauty is negative, subtle, and introverted aesthetic tendencies of Chinese people. On the other hand, the western moon goddess Deanna is sacred, noble, free, inviolable, and sometimes brutal and fierce, arousing humankind's praise and worship. The moon's imagery reflects the westerners' positive and open minds, the spirit of exploration and progress, and their aesthetic character.

3 Comparison of Moon Imagery

3.1 The "Moon" in Chinese Poetry

The moon in Chinese poetry has diverse imagery and conveys complex and rich emotions. The full moon, which is as bright as a disk, symbolizes happiness, completeness, harmony, and reunion, while the waning moon is a symbol of hardship, frustration, disillusionment, despondency, and mutilation [4]. Thus, the sadness and happiness of life are closely linked to the moon being full and crescent, and the moon has become the emotional support of Chinese people. In Du Fu's poem *Remembering My Brother on the Moonlit Night*, he wrote, "The White Dew Solar Term has entered since tonight, the moon is still the brightest in my hometown." The poet is so homesick for his hometown that he has the illusion that the moon in his hometown is brighter than in other places, setting off the poet's intense feelings of homesickness. For lovers or couples separated, the moon becomes a trigger and a witness to their longing for each other. Zhang Jiuling *Since My Lord from Me Parted*, "Since my lord from me parted, I've left unused my loom. The moon wanes, broken-hearted, to see my growing gloom." The poet used the bright moon to symbolize the purity and innocence of a woman's love and devotion. As she misses her husband day and night, her face becomes more and more haggard, just like a full moon whose light is diminishing. For those who are disillusioned and despondent, their sadness is always pinned on the imagery of the moon. In Meng Haoran's *Passing the Night on a River in Jiande*: "I guide my boat to a mooring by a misty islet, with the setting sun, a traveler's sorrows revive. Wilds so vast, the sky stoops to the trees; The river so clear, moon close to man." The poet's thoughts on his travels and his lonely and sorrowful feelings can only be understood by the moon, which is also lonely now. The moon imagery reflects the ancient literary psychology of searching for their world, finding their spiritual home, and restoring the harmony and unity of the world, reflecting the theme of looking at the moon and pining for their hometown that often appears in classical poetry. In Li Bai's *Asking the Moon with Wine*, "When will you alight, o moon in the blue?" It is a question of the wonders of infinite space and time, with a sense of fascination and confusion. The poet finds a place to rest his soul clarity. The universe of the earth gives rise to many reveries and meditations of the poet: "A lonely wheel-like moon shines brilliantly far and wide. Who by the riverside did first see the moon rise?" The mind explores the philosophy of life and the mysteries of the universe.

3.2 The "Moon" in Western Poetry

Compared with the diverse characteristics of moon imagery in Chinese poetry, moon imagery in Western poetry is relatively monotonous. Moon imagery in English poetry

always conjures images of holy, beautiful, innocent women. The English poet Keats called the moon a queen in his *Ode to a Nightingale*: “the night is infinitely tender/The Queen of the Moon may have ascended her throne/Gathered around her stars of goblins.” In the poem *The Moon*, the American poet Thoreau wrote that although the moon is sometimes “dimly shaded,” her light never wanes. In a poem entitled *Silver* by Walter de la Mare, he compares the moon to a lovely woman, “Slowly, silently, now the moon Walks the night in her silver shoon/This way, and that, she peers and sees Silver fruit upon silver trees.” Western moon imagery is often found in love poems. When a person’s love is frustrated or they feel lonely and alone, moon imagery expresses their longing for their loved one and always inspires grief. Shelley’s poems, *To the moon*, expresses his feelings of loneliness and sadness over the vastness of the universe and the failure to pursue his ideal: “Art thou pale for weariness/Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth/Wandering companionless/Among the stars that have a different birth/And ever-changing, like a joyless eye/That finds no object worth its constancy?” The moon represents the wandering goddess who grows weary of ascending to the sky and stared down at the earth in the poetry. The moon waxes and wanes, constantly changing. What remains unchanged is eternal sadness. The poet regards the moon as his bosom friend and expresses infinite concern and sympathy for her eternal loneliness and sadness. In *Echo*, Shelley directly connects the moon with love. Love has a natural echo, which is more beautiful than all echoes. From the perspective of the longitudinal history of the development of Chinese literature, Chinese literature has formed an indissoluble marriage with politics, which Confucianism deeply influences. The West stresses the individual-centered individual standard. Reflected in literature, it stresses the elucidation of personal feelings and consciousness [5]. In the elucidation process, these feelings and consciousness are not bound by other social concepts and etiquette and can often be expressed freely and vividly. Based on this feature of western poetry images, “moon” can fully express the poet’s thoughts, especially those personal feelings hidden in the deep heart, such as pure love between men and women, even those immoral love, which can be presented with the help of the moon.

4 Conclusion

Although there are similarities between Chinese and Western, the descriptions of the moon or the emotions expressed through the moon imagery are very different, reflecting different cultural connotations and national psychology. In the eyes of Chinese poets, the moon is a trigger and repository for various emotions, such as longing, sadness, philosophical thoughts, ethereality, clarity, Etc. In English poetry, the moon imagery holds simpler, more straightforward, and more transparent emotions. A complete understanding of the differences between moon imagery in Chinese and Western poetry will help us to accurately understand the emotions and thoughts expressed by the poets through moon imagery. Looking at the moon image in Chinese and Western literature, we can see that people regard the moon image as a kind of emotional sustenance and consolation. Due to political, economic, cultural, social, and other factors, there are differences between the moon image in Chinese and Western literature. However, both Chinese and Western moon images have provided a broad space for the development of human culture, and for

us literary lovers, they have also brought an aesthetic feast. After all, excellent culture has no borders. Let's enjoy a round of bright moon peacefully and build a variety of moon literature.

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