



Differences in the Shaping of " Immortal " in Chinese and Western Fables

—Take Zhuang Zi and Aesop's Fables as examples

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Abstract. There are significant differences in the portrayal of "immortal" in Chinese and Western fables. This paper selects the two most representative texts of Chinese and Western fables - *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables*. Using the method of text analysis, this paper finds that the creation of the image of "immortal" in Chinese and Western fables is related to the living environment of two nations and the author of the two texts.

Keywords: Immortal, Zhuangzi, Aesop's Fables

1 Introduction

Fables are a literary style that matures from birth. Since its birth, it has shown vigorous vitality and has continued to today. In the West, fables are called "fable". The form of fables was widely used in the debate in ancient Greece. At the same time, some foreign works were gradually collected under Aesop, which enabled *Aesop's Fables* to enrich its content over the long years.^[1] In ancient China, "fable" as a unique name first appeared in the book "*Zhuangzi*". Among them, the "Tianxia Chapter" states: "It is believed that people in the world are addicted to material desires without awakening, and it can't speak solemnly with them. They use natural and casual words to deduce, borrow the words of ancient philosophers and sages to make people believe, and use fables to expand their minds and thoughts."^[2] And the "Fables Chapter" states: "Nine of the ten sentences in the allegory are believed, and seven of the ten sentences in the quotation of the elder sages are believed. The words that are freely expressed and have no prejudice are changed and updated every day."^[3] All these reflect that *Aesop's Fables* and *Zhuangzi* are the source of the maturity of the style of Chinese and Western fables respectively. Although *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables* have been written for a long time, there is still insufficient research on the two books in China, especially the comparative study of the two books. In addition, most of them focus on the philosophical perspective of *Zhuangzi* and some pedagogical perspectives of *Aesop's Fables*. Especially there are very few analysis of the "immortal" images in these two fables. This article hopes to

Fables from the following three perspectives: figure appearance, literary means and character connotation, and further study the reasons for the cognitive differences between the West and China on the same image in the same style, so as to analyze the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

2 Text Analysis of Zhuangzi and Aesop's Fables

2.1 Analysis of Differences in Character Appearance

Zhuangzi provides a detailed description of the appearance of the immortal in QiuguShe Mountain in the "Xiaoyaoyou" chapter. "There is an immortal living on the mountain of Qiugushe. Skin is like ice and snow, graceful as a virgin. Not eating grains, drinking wind and dew. Riding on the clouds and flying dragons, and swimming beyond the four seas. His expression was so focused that everything in the world was free from disease and the crops were abundant year after year." The appearance of the Qiugusheshan immortal has characteristics, mainly including the following: (1) The Qiugusheshan immortal has a handsome appearance, snowy skin, and beautiful posture; (2) The Qiugusheshan immortal does not eat cooked food; (3) The mount of the Qiugusheshan Immortal is a flying dragon, capable of traversing the four seas; (4) The Qiugusheshan immortal has unique characteristics that prevent people from getting sick and ensure a bountiful harvest. This is a relatively intuitive description of the image of "divine man" in *Zhuangzi*.^[4]

However, in *Aesop's Fables*, there are few descriptions of the appearance of "immortal". In *Old Eagle and Dung Beetle*, there are descriptions of Zeus' actions: "Zeus had to stand up, shake off the dung ball, and accidentally dropped the eagle's egg on the ground."^[5] And in *Heracles and Plutus*, there is a description of Heracles' appearance, "...Heracles deliberately lowered his eyelids and looked at the ground, ignoring him." In addition, *Aesop's Fables* is more about the emotional description of western "immortal". For example, in *Frog's Request for a King*, Zeus's "rage"^[4], in *Silver Rat and Aphrodite*, Aphrodite's "very angry", in *Zeus, Prometheus, Athena and Momos*, Momos's "jealousy", and in *Camel and Zeus*, Zeus's "rage", etc. It can be seen from these that the "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* has all kinds of emotions like people, even emotional impulses.

There are obvious differences in the description of the appearance of "immortal" in *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables*. The "immortal" in *Zhuangzi* is a synonym for the beauty of the real world. Its appearance is perfect, and everything in the real world will not cause its emotional waves. But the "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* has feelings. Although there is less description of the appearance of the "immortal" in the text, some emotional actions of the "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* are important reasons for the development of the fable.

2.2 Analysis of Differences in Character Connotation

Zhuangzi is a Philosophy of life that "people with the highest moral cultivation can conform to the objective, forget themselves, and those who have reached the apotheosis

and unpredictability state have no intention of seeking merit, and saints with moral knowledge have no intention of seeking fame". The image of "immortal" he describes is his strong pursuit and praise of a beautiful golden age and ideal figures, and is also to promote his Freethought to future generations. And the image of 'Qiugu Sheshan immortal' is a highly idealized 'immortal'. It does not eat cooked food between humans, only 'absorbs wind and drinks dew', and it can 'swim thousands of miles away' in a blink of an eye. It also breaks free from the shackles of the mortal world and can 'make things flawless and ripe every year'. The image of " Qiugu Sheshan immortal" is the embodiment of Zhuangzi's philosophy of life that transcends external objects, and it is also an externalization of his absolute spirit of freedom. In "*Hu Zi Meets Wu Xian Four Times*", the portrayal of Hu Zi, Wu Xian, and Lie Zi is compared with the "immortal" image of Hu Zi and the "human" images of Wu Xian, Lie Zi, and Wu Xian. This also promotes a spiritual realm of freedom, believing that once a person has concerns about life and death or life, they are greatly constrained. And only by forgetting oneself like a 'great person' can one transcend the mortal world and obtain absolute spiritual freedom.^[6]

The image of "immortal" in *Zhuangzi* has the obvious characteristic of "entering the realm of absolute freedom with no means to rely on", and this "no waiting" is an absolute freedom, but it breaks free not only from the constraints of the spiritual level, but also from the constraints of the relative world, surpassing the laws of the objective world. Since it can surpass the laws of the objective world, it means that it can perform actions that ordinary people can't or dare not, and create miracles that ordinary people can't do. Therefore, it is an absolute freedom of objective action, and this "objectivity" is not the objectivity of the objective world, but the "objectivity" in Zhuangzi's thought. So the "immortal" image in *Zhuangzi* bears the deep spiritual imprint of Zhuangzi, while the "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* also has similar characteristics and is also stamped with the cultural imprint of the ancient Greek nation.^[7]

In "The Enlightenment of Mythology - A Study of Humanistic Issues", Lu Shuying and others believe that "all Greek gods are morally perfect, but they each have 'beautiful personalities'. Mythology reflects the value pursuit of early Greeks and foreshadows the value direction of future development."^[8] The development of fables has a prerequisite, which is that there are very rich myths in the local area. The prosperity and development of ancient Greek mythology also influenced the selection of fables by mythological characters, resulting in a series of "immortal" images such as Zeus, Aphrodite, and Hermes appearing in *Aesop's Fables*. However, a typical feature of the ancient Greek mythology is that "Immortal and man are alike". The ancient Greeks' pursuit of "Immortal and man are alike" makes the image of "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* also have such a "sameness" feature.^[14]

2.3 Analysis of Differences in Literary Means

In terms of literary means, there are also great differences between *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables* in shaping the image of "immortal". *Zhuangzi* provides a very detailed description of the "Qiugusheshan immortal" in the *Xiaoyaoyou chapter*, using the metaphor of "skin like ice and snow, graceful like a virgin". These two metaphors make

the appearance of the "immortal" portrayed in *Zhuangzi* vivid and can directly outline a picture in one's mind. The article then provides a brief description of other aspects of the "immortal", describing their way of travel as "riding on clouds and flying dragons". The characteristics of the "immortal" are also directly described as "its divine concentration, making things flawless and ripe in years" and "carved to restore simplicity and stand alone in its form".

The description of "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* is slightly simple, and it basically depicts a character in the way of dialogue. *Hermes and the Sculptor* is a typical fable that shapes the image of Hermes through dialogue. It uses the technique of comparison, comparing the words spoken by the master, and then extending the meaning. This makes Hermes' image of "immortal" with a fetter of vanity. This forms a sharp contrast with the "Qiuqusheshan immortal" under *Zhuangzi*. The huge difference between the two is also closely related to the differences in character connotations.

3 An Analysis of the Differences between the Images of "Immortal" in *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables*

The reason for the difference between the images of "immortal" in *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables* is not a single one, but a combination of many factors. The birth of mythology is related to the living conditions and geographical environment of the ethnic group. The living environment of the Chinese nation was extremely harsh from the beginning. From early Chinese mythological literature, it can be seen that our ancestors faced not only various fierce birds and beasts but also various disasters, such as towering floods, scorching sun, and earth shattering. God was also born to solve these disasters.^[9] At the same time, such a harsh environment forced the Chinese ancestors to restrain themselves and integrate themselves into the entire tribe. Only when everyone united can they hope to overcome the harsh environment and seek hope for survival. Over time, a strong sense of group consciousness and rational control consciousness of the Chinese nation have gradually formed.^[15] And the image of "immortal" has gradually become a pursuit of inner ideals from the role of solving disasters. In stark contrast, it is the living conditions of the Greek ancestors. The early Greek ancestors lived on the Greek Peninsula and the islands of the Aegean Sea, with various ways of production and extremely rich products. The Greek primitive people lived in a material rich environment, and naturally didn't need to overcome difficulties for their livelihood like the Chinese primitive people did. They could survive through personal struggle, which is also closely related to its ethnicity.

The ancient Greek nation was a nation living by the sea, and there was a huge difference between the Chinese nation that originated in the Yellow River basin. Their production methods were completely different. The settlements of the ancient Greek people relied on the seaside, and the Mediterranean climate prevented extremely harsh conditions in the sea.^[10] As a result, the ancient Greek people were able to rely on marine industries for a living, belonging to a typical marine ethnic group. The Chinese nation is rooted in the Yellow River Basin and relies on unified cooperative agricultural production. In addition, in the era of low productivity, this production method made

people only rely on the collective to survive, which also led to the formation of a unified, common, and compliant collective ethnic identity. The ancient Greek people relied on the production method of sea operations, which directly linked the amount of harvest to individuals. When encountering extreme weather, they could only rely on themselves to solve it. Over time, this situation brought strong independence and individuality to the ancient Greek people. And this cultural mentality gradually influenced the original cultural creation of the ancient Greek nation, starting to pursue the "sameness between gods and humans".^[11]

There is another reason for the difference between *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables* in shaping the image of "immortal", that is, the author himself. After textual research by scholars, it is believed that the inner parts of *Zhuangzi* should be written by Zhuangzi himself, as their content maintains a high degree of consistency in ideology and style, which can form a relatively complete ideological system of Zhuangzi. Therefore, the image of the "Qiugusheshan immortal" and "Hu Zi" is exactly what Zhuangzi pursues personally, achieving a state of "being selfless, devoid of merit, and nameless", which is the external manifestation of Zhuangzi's absolute spiritual freedom.^[12] However, the author of *Aesop's Fables* is still in the state of textual research. In addition, the content of *Aesop's Fables* is also constantly absorbing new fables. From this, it can be seen that the image of "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* is more influenced by the original cultural cornerstone of ancient Greece and is the product of ancient Greek national culture. This is a manifestation of cultural mentality passed down through individuals and society.^[13]

4 Conclusion

The image of "immortal" in *Zhuangzi* and *Aesop's Fables* is obviously different. The main reasons are as follows: (1) The living conditions and geographical environment of the early Chinese and Western people led to the difference of their cultural cornerstones, and then with this cultural cornerstone passed from generation to generation, it affected the image of "immortal". (2) Related to the fable author. Through the textual research of scholars in all dynasties, *Zhuangzi* is believed that the author of the inner part is basically Zhuangzi himself, but the author of *Aesop's Fables* is still in the textual research state, and the fables contained in it may be written by others, so the image of "immortal" in the inner part of *Zhuangzi* is the pursuit of Zhuangzi's ideal character, which is an absolute externalization of the spiritual world. The image of "immortal" in *Aesop's Fables* is the inheritance of the ancient Greek national cultural mentality and the cultural cornerstone of a nation.

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