

ON THE STUDIES AN ANCIENT CHINESE MYTH "GONG GONG"

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Summary: This article discusses about a myth named "Gong gong" /共工/ totem which is believed to be the creator of ancient Chinese rice planting and the overviews research studies on this myth dating 4000 years ago.

Key words: Civilization, myth, Chinese history, source text, rice planting, Gong gong /共工/ totem

Any mythological studies indisputably attract researchers' attention and the older the myth the more valuable and interesting it is. One example of this kind of myth is Chinese myth named "Gong gong". First of all, there are four main aspects concerning the myth's meaning and cultural importance which have been discussed and studied by numerous scholars. They are as follows:

First, whether "Gong gong" was a real person who lived in this historical period,

Second, whether the myth narrates about a deity or totem,

Third, whether it was the name of any tribe or warring royal families, (a tribe)

Fourth, whether "Gong gong" can be related to "gun" (Prince) – name for nobility title or rank during the Manchu period.

Now, some examples of these as recorded in historical scripts, chronicles, documents and biographies are given. For instance, the ancient Chinese document named "Shang shu"¹ contains a mention about the first aspect as below. In total, "Shang shu" has three motives related to "Gong gong": "Gong gong is a good totem generally but had cruel doings. On outside he looks respectful however his inner side is not fair"². Likewise, two or three different motives about "Gong gong" as a historical real man that noted in this source.

There are a number of examples of references to "Gong gong" recorded in historical scripts, chronicles, documents and biographies. For instance, the ancient Chinese document named "Shang shu" contains a mention about the first aspect as below. In total, "Shang shu" has three aspects related to "Gong gong": "Gong gong is a good totem generally but had been cruel on some occasions. On the outside he looks respectful however his inner side is not fair". Likewise, two or three different aspects about "Gong gong" as a historical real man were noted in this source.

It is obvious from historical sources and other records that nature forces had a great influence on peoples' lives in China where settled civilization had been around for thousands of years.

¹ Шан Шу 尚书 [shang shu]. This is a first famous historical document of ancient China. It means "Mountain and the Sea Treatise". But it would be appropriate not to translate the name of any Chinese historical source.

² "Shan Shu" source is an ancient note of Chinese.

Gong gong” is a totem or spirit which created ancient Chinese rice planting. The totem-related myth “*Gong gong*” had many versions, which were initially passed through in oral form, and later were recorded.

As mentioned above, “*Gong gong*” presents a number of controversial aspects for scholars and researchers from fields such as semantics, culture, biology, geography, making this myth one of the most studied within Chinese mythology.

Moreover, the myth contains one particularly interesting episode with a great significance for the Chinese civilization and history:

A female totem Niyi Wa³ /女媧/ sowed planted crop on the dry banks of the Yellow River or the Queen River, thus originating the first agricultural practices, however when she planted rice in basin of the Black River, it resulted in argument with *Gong gong*, which was won by the later due to his overwhelming power and wizardry.

There is another fascinating version/motif “How *Gong gong* beat his head against the Bu Zhou Shan /不周山/ mountain in a fit of anger”:

Soon after Pan Gu /盘古/ separated the sky and land, and the female totem Niyi Wa created a man, the water totem *Gong gong* fell apart with fire totem Zhu Rong. Then *Gong gong* attacked Zhu Rong, putting out the magic fire at the Guang Ming Gong /光明宫/ palace. Thus, the entire world fell into darkness. At last, Zhu Rong /光明宫/ rode his fire-blowing dragon to the battle with *Gong gong*. Gradually, the brightness came back to the entire world, but it angered the water totem *Gong gong*. So he summoned the lords of sea Shian Liu and Fu Yeou, and ordered them to turn around the sea flow and put out the magic fire again. Meanwhile the Zhu Rong called upon the wind totem to blowing up his fire, and so the burning fire chased *Gong gong*. Then, *Gong gong* tried to escape from the burning fire and dive into the sea, however warriors of Zhu Rong divided the rivers and seas and started to pursue him. *Gong gong* kept running away and came to Mt. Bu Zhou Shan, where he looked back and saw the warriors still chasing after him. Finally, *Gong gong* got angry, felt ashamed and beat his head against pillar of Mt. Bu Zhou Shan that made a tremendous disaster.



Figure 1. Beating his head against the pillar tree

As the mountain, which was the pillar between the sky and land, had been broken down, half of the sky had fallen down and a big hole emerged. Then the creator of land, Niyi Wa, mended it and made the sky complete again⁴. The story tells about *Gong gong*'s anger, hatred and hidden spite.

³ Нийү ва 女媧 [niyiwa] totem, she created the female.

⁴ Myth “Gung gung got frustrated and beat the Mt. Bu Zhou Shan 不周山”



Figure 2. Representing the half of sky fallen in and a big hole emerged due to the fact that mountain Bu Zhu Shan, a pillar of the sky and land has broken down.

Representing the half fallen sky and the big hole that emerged due to the fact that mountain Bu Zhu Shan, a pillar of the sky and land, had been destroyed (damaged).

The third version of "Gong gong" myth was recorded in "The script by five Di's of Shi Jii". In this source, there was a relation between the totem *Gong gong* and the water totem *Gong gong*. It had a human face, snake body, red hair and also cruel behavior and under his command has two heartless totems. The first of two totems was Shyeng Liu with nine heads, human face, snake body, blue skin, and he takes delight from carnage. The second was Fue Ewu who had brutal features, extremely tall frame, enormous power and very vulpine nature (Zalga, 2012).

Also, a source named "Magnificent sutra of Shen Yi Jing-Xi Bei Huang Jing" 神异经-西北荒经 says: "There was a man in the north-west. His name is *Gong gong* who has a human face, snake body, human hands and legs as well as cruel character". But there is another text known as "Shan Hai Jing" 山海经 saying: "*Gong gong*'s domain is located in north-west and borders with Niyi Wa and Zu weng Shui". Principally, there is a clear connection between this myth and the one about *Gong gong* getting angry and beating his head against Mt. Bu Zhu Shan.



Figure 3. The portrayal of "Gong gong" with human face, snake body and red hair. Zhu Rong 祝融 was reported to have had black hair.

Judging from these three sources, *Gong gong* is an ancient Chinese myth and its detailed research is significant for the Chinese history, culture and literature as a time-capsule.

The research on nature, climate, cultural ecology, region, topography, history, philosophy and other features relating to the myth "*Gong gong*" will give us a new look on the ancient Chinese culture and history.



Figure 4. Gong gong dives into the ocean

In the sphere of the oriental culture, some motives of Mongolian and Indian heroic epics have been kept mythological characteristics. For instance, in a famous Mongolian epic *Janggar* (Жангар, 2000), the main character Janggar collects some white items which are either bones or not, belonging to the Arag Ulaan Khongor of Arslan. He finds them at the bottom of the Savage Red Sea, brings to the earth and fixes into a body. Whereas, in *Ramayana* (Дамдинсүрэн, 1986), an ancient Indian epic, a prince Raam makes offerings during three days and three nights for the lord of sea Saghart. In return, he and warriors from the bear and ape kingdoms are granted a free pass to the continent Arslan. Also, the fiery goddess Agni tests queen Sita by making her jump into a raging fire, saving her from death on his palm, thus proving her faithfulness.

The most interesting aspect of the motives in ancient myths and epics is the relationship between man and sky, man and totem, sky and totem. Hence, their amity or conflict plays a decisive role in bringing either wellness or adversity to the three worlds of organic and non-organic beings.

If we consider that *Gong gong* is man-heaven or totem-spirit, then:

Firstly, research on the ancient myth “*Gong gong*” and contrastive study of its versions is needed to clarify a number of serious question such as what was the culture, lifestyle, customs, traditions and everyday chores in ancient China, how they evolved over the course of time, and to determine if there was something important that went missing or died out and so on.

Secondly, research should not be limited to the ancient Chinese myth alone, instead it rather provides a new point of view into the whole Oriental culture.

Thirdly, if we study further the ancient Oriental mythology, we will answer questions like: what was changed, forgotten and abolished from the ancestral root culture, philosophy of life, customs, traditions and everyday chores over thousands years?

Resume

The ancient myth *Gung gung* plays an important role to the studies of the Chinese mythology. The myth *Gung gung* has several versions. There still have been faced issues related to the studies of this myth. The myth needs to be studied from the cultural, historical, philosophical, ecological and climatic points of view.

Номзүй

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