

Typical Female Images and Educational Value in Yi Myths: An Analysis of Kangba Yi Folk Myths

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the typical female images in the folk myths of the Kangba Yi nationality, revealing the special reverence and emphasis on women in Yi culture. In the myths of the Kangba Yi nationality, female characters often possess excellent qualities such as wisdom, bravery, and kindness, becoming heroic figures in folk legends. These female images not only demonstrate the concept of gender equality in Yi culture, but also reflect the respect and praise of Yi people towards women. Through the analysis of these myths, beneficial inspirations can be provided for contemporary education, such as carrying out aesthetic education through beautiful things, cultivating people's sentiments, improving their personality, promoting people to inherit the labor spirit of the Chinese nation, accelerating the development of gender equality education, cultivating people's humanistic literacy and values, and promoting the diversified development and prosperity of national culture.

Keywords: Yi nationality, Myths, Female images, Educational value, Kangba Yi nationality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mythology is widely present in human social, historical, and cultural contexts, and the culture of each ethnic group contains its unique ancient legends or stories. The content of these legends or stories is full of fantasy, and all things in heaven and earth have spirits. People, gods, immortals, spirits, and monsters have their own lives and magical powers, and some gods have the right to govern heaven and earth. In early folk myths and legends, there were many female characters. The female images in myths and legends have distinct cultural characteristics of the times. Cultural anthropologist Eisler pointed out that "the earliest description of the power of God in human form should be female rather than male, which is very reasonable". The myth of the beginning of women has emerged, reflecting humanity's worship and respect for the great motherhood (Mao Jianzhong, 2024).¹ It can be said that women play an important role in the development of human society and are irreplaceable.

2. KANGBA YI NATIONALITY

As an ancient nationality with a long history among the Chinese people, the Yi nationality has shown unique regional characteristics under the influence of long-term ethnic migration, social progress, and cultural exchange. Numerous beautiful and mysterious myths are passed down among the people. The social consciousnesses including science, religion, history, philosophy, morality, culture, and others the primitive Yi ancestors have formed a unity through myths and other ethnic cultures (Tan Yulin and Wen Fengze, 2022).

The Kangba Yi nationality refers to the self-proclaimed Yi people living on the Kangba Plateau. According to Yi literature and folk oral traditions, more than two thousand years ago, during the branch of the Sixth Ancestor, Muya Re and Muya Wo migrated from "Zizipu" (Zhaotong, Yunnan) to Liangshan and Kangba areas in Sichuan. Only a portion of the Yi people who migrated to the Kangba region remained and integrated into the local indigenous community, while another portion returned to Yunnan and other areas. During the Qing Dynasty, Yi ethnic family branches migrated

1. Mao Jianzhong, Touching the Thinker [J]. Delta, 2024, (06): 30-40.

from Yuexi, Mianning, and other places to the Kangba region². Up to now, the Kangba Yi people have lived on the Kangba Plateau for over 300 years, and their rich, brilliant, and unique long culture has become a necessary supplement to the rich traditional culture of the Kangba people. Most of the folk mythological stories of the Kangba Yi nationality are passed down through oral traditions and oral history. The typical female images in Yi mythology are not only cultural symbols, but also a spiritual force. Their images inspire the Yi people's longing and pursuit for a better life, inspiring them to actively face the challenges and difficulties of life. By studying the typical female images in Yi mythology, people can better explore and inherit the essence of Yi culture, enrich and improve the connotation of Yi culture, and enhance the cultural confidence and pride of the Yi people.

3. TYPICAL FEMALE IMAGES IN THE FOLK MYTHS OF THE KANGBA YI NATIONALITY

In the folk mythology of the Kangba Yi nationality, female images exhibit diverse characteristics. They have all beautiful, kind, brave and wise goddess images, as well as intelligent and witty ordinary female wise figures, as well as foolish rural women, witches, and poisonous women.

3.1 *The Images of Beautiful, Passionate, Brave and Wise Goddesses*

3.1.1 *The Wise and Brave Yi Ancestor Goddesses*

In the myth "Floods Over the Sky" passed down in the Kangba Yi region, it is said that after the floods flooded the sky, ordinary people Jumu Reniu hid in a wooden cabinet and escaped the disaster. After being discovered by the heavenly soldiers, he was arrested and punished with hard labor in the heavenly court. Dingu Ani was the youngest daughter of the heavenly god Midnight Dingu. She was intelligent, diligent and eager to learn, enthusiastic and lively. Dingu Ani's magic was outstanding among her peers. She had dark and shiny long braids, and her face was as beautiful as a full moon; She was capable of eloquence and speaking with a pleasant and pleasant tone. She had the fond gazing of a beauty, wore a beautiful

pleated skirt, and walked lightly and gracefully. Every time Dingu Ani sees Jumu Reniu being harassed, she always cleverly helped him resolve it. Dingu Ani fell in love with the brave and resilient Jumu Reniu. Jumu Reniu begged Midnight Dingu to marry Dingu Ani. Midnight Dingu didn't want to marry his daughter, so he posed a difficult question. Dingu Ani used her magical power to help him complete the task of cultivating and sowing crops in the four seas and eight wastelands, and harvesting grains in the southeast, northwest, and four directions of the Heavenly Court; With keen observation, she found the spotted dove that has eaten half of the root seed, and shot it to death with superb archery. Jumu Reniu solved the problem one by one. Midnight Dingu had to marry his daughter to him and drive them out of the mortal world. Dingu Ani secretly hid heavenly species, including seeds such as Yuangen, buckwheat, and hemp, as well as livestock such as mules and donkeys, and brought them to the human world for cultivation and breeding. From then on, there was food and livestock in the world. Jumu Reniu and Dingu Ani engaged in a battle of wits and courage with Midnight Dingu. Finally, with the help of small animals, they made three mute sons speak up, who were the ancestors of the Tibetan, Han, and Yi nationalities. The story of Dingu Ani has always been praised.

3.1.2 *The Hardworking and Beautiful Mothers of Salvation Heroes*

Zhigealu was the most revered hero ancestor of the Yi people, and his mother Pumuniyi is not only beautiful, but also very hardworking. In the epic poem of the Yi nationality's creation, "Hnewo Teyy", there is a record, "she sits under the eaves weaving, the weaving stakes look like starry cloth, weaving knives seem to be eagle wings flying, weaving shuttles look like bees, and patterns on the cloth she weaves look like rainbows". Pumuniyi's face was more beautiful than the full moon. She wore a beautiful pleated skirt and sat in front of the house every morning weaving. One day, an eagle flew into the sky and circled seven times, dropping three drops of blood on her pleated skirt. Among them, the third drop of blood penetrated her pleated skirt and dripped onto her skin. From then on, she became pregnant. On the dragon day, dragon month, dragon year, she gave birth to Zhigealu. Later, she was captured and imprisoned in the abyss for not surrendering to demons. Zhigealu embarked on the path of saving his mother. He traversed through thorns and thorns, shooting the sun and moon,

2. Preface to "Yi Ethnic Genealogy Culture in Jiulong County" [N]. Ganzi Daily (Chinese Version), 2011-08-06 (003).

subduing demons and demons, moving mountains and fields, and benefiting the people.

3.2 Ordinary Women in the Mortal World

3.2.1 Hardworking, Brave, and Resourceful Women

Diligence and bravery are the national character of the Yi nationality, and they have always respected moral standards. The Yi people in Southwest China mostly live in semi high mountains, high mountains, and deep valleys, with complex terrain, variable climate³, and limited natural resources. Faced with difficult conditions, only hard work can yield rewards, and only courage can survive. In myths, many ordinary Yi women are exceptionally intelligent, hardworking, and brave; On the other hand, males are mostly foolish and dull. "The Smart Woman" tells the story of a woman and Zhigearu fighting their wits. Zhigearu claimed to be the smartest person. One day, he rode the road through a village and saw men working in the fields. Suddenly, he wanted to test him and see how foolish they were. After several rounds of wits (see "Table 1" on the next page), Zhigearu was defeated by the clever woman and willingly succumbed.

3.2.2 Stupid Women

Frogs are very common in primitive myths and have special meanings. Many ethnic myths both domestically and internationally have the theme of frogs. The Yi ethnic myth "Obasire"⁴ passed down in the Kangba region tells the story of a woman who jumps out of her knee and calls out "grandma". Living and eating all by the fire pit, the woman always despised the little frog for being ugly and useless. She often hit the frog with a broom and clamps him with tongs. The little frog always dodged quickly. With the passage of time, whenever there was a gathering of clan members for festival and ritual activities, the little frog would avoid his mother, take off the frog skin, and put it in the chopstick basket, and change himself into a handsome and intelligent young person to participate in the event, becoming the most eye-catching winner. Later, the little frog asked to

marry his uncle's little cousin as his wife. After marriage, the wife and mother discovered the secret of the little frog molting into a human. While the little frog was out participating in an activity, they threw the frog skin from the chopstick basket into the fire and burned it, and the frog also died. Originally, as long as the frog can complete his molting and transform into a human, he will possess greater divine power. The foolish and vain mother and wife despised the ugly appearance of the little frog, destroyed the frog skin that protected him, and the immature frog god died young like this. This also implies that the late matrilineal clan social system was challenged by the new patrilineal clan social system. The matrilineal clan had made strong resistance, and even the young male gods who were protected by the gods became victims of the conflict between the old and new systems (Guo Xing, 2019)

3. Xu Qiaoyun, Cultural Education in the Southwest Yi Ethnic Area of the Qing Dynasty Under the Background of the Community for the Chinese Nation [J]. Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 2024, 45(02): 34-37.

4. Yi transliterated, meaning Frog God.

Table 1. Wisdom fight between Zhigearu and the mortal woman

Character	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Ending
Zhigearu	Q: How many times did you swing your hoes today?	Q: Am I about to get on to ride the horse or get down from it?	Q: I want a rope that can see but can't use.	Q: I want the egg from a roster.	Zhigearu gave her the markable Yi woman cloth to restrict her wisdom
The wise woman	A: The steps your horse walked today equals to my times of swinging my hoes.	A: Am I going to stride the threshold or go back into the room?	A: Place the ash of a grass rope on the ground.	A: Her husband is pregnant and not suitable to be out of room.	

3.3 Witches and Vixens

3.3.1 Ancestor of Ghosts: Zizi Nizha

The Yi people have a common language that goes, "Beautiful women will be possessed by demons". Zizi Nizha is one of the most beautiful women in Yi mythology and also the ancestor of ghosts. "Zizi Nizha", also known as "The Origin of Ghosts", has a female protagonist named Zizi Nizha. She appeared in the image of white buck deer, and after being shot by an arrow, she transformed into a stunning beauty, with "delicate and smooth cheeks, sparkling eyes, and elegant eyelashes..." (Jiri Motie, 2023). Later, she fell in love at first sight with the leader of Aviniku and became married. After marriage, Zizi Nizha was kind, virtuous, and had a good family. But when the husband learned about her background, he used the excuse of being sick and made things difficult, instructing her to seek medicine in the most dangerous place. The husband invited Bimo and Suni to curse, causing Zizinizha to turn into a white goat on her way back. She was shot dead and thrown into the river, washed away, and later picked up and shared by an uninformed crowd downstream. Those who had eaten the goat meat died and then turned into a mischievous ghost, giving birth to the ghost.

3.3.2 Malicious Wives

As the saying goes, heroes are saddened by beauty. Even the national hero Zhigearu, a descendant of God, can't escape this fate either. After growing up, Zhigaaru married two beautiful sisters and lived on both sides of Sonodem⁵ for half a month respectively. Zhigealu rode his white flying horse back and forth on both sides. As time

passed, his wives all wanted to keep him by their side for a long time, so they took advantage of Zhigearu's lack of attention and quietly cut off half of the fly horse's wings. The next day, when Zhigearu flew over the sea on the flying horse, the horse's wings broke, and people along with the horse fell into the sea, never surviving.

4. THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF TYPICAL FEMALE IMAGES IN ORAL MYTHS OF THE KANGBA YI NATIONALITY

There are many myths in ancient Yi literature that record the story of "giving birth to the son but not seeing the father". The qualities of kindness, wisdom, and diligence are magnified in these female images, such as the welfare of the people, the ancestors of the Yi nationality such as Ziye Ani and Pumuniyi. There are also images of greedy and foolish Yi women, as well as malicious wives. The vigorous portrayal of this type of female images in myths indirectly reflects the important influence of traditional culture's reverence and praise⁶ for women with noble qualities on the aesthetic standards, moral concepts, ideological consciousness, and behavior of the Yi people. The female images portrayed in myths carry traditional virtues of the Yi nationality, such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, trustworthiness, intelligence, filial piety, and diligence, which influence the ideological concepts and ways of handling affairs of future generations from different dimensions. Exploring and interpreting the educational value contained in the female images of

5. Transliteration, Dianchi Lake, Yunnan.

6. Gao Xin, A Comparative Study of the Cowherd and Weaver Girl and Orpheus Myth [D]. Shanxi University, 2020. DOI:10.27284/d.cnki.gsxiu.2020.000986.

Yi ethnic folk myths has positive practical significance for practicing core socialist values and realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

4.1 Cultivating Correct Aesthetic Concepts

Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has attached great importance to the important value of aesthetic education for personal and social development. "It thrives in poetry, stands in ritual, and is achieved through music" ("The Analects of Confucius · Tiber"). Throughout ancient Chinese society, beauty was used as an intermediary to teach people to move upwards towards goodness and beauty, ultimately achieving the ultimate goal of "not exceeding the limits of what one desires from the heart". Beauty is an important source of pure morality and rich spirit. Different eras have different aesthetic ideals and tastes, and truth, goodness, and beauty are indispensable for personality development and life growth. The primitive ancestors used myths as a medium to present their standards of judging good, evil, beauty, and ugliness, reflecting people's ideological cognition and expectations of values at that time. The portrayal of female images in Yi mythology includes appearance, clothing, speech and behavior, demeanor and temperament, knowledge and wisdom, emotional personality, and moral personality. Female beauty is a combination of these traits, showcasing the overall beauty.

In the traditional concept of the Yi people, the beauty of women is their robust physique, rosy face, and lively eyes. The beauty of female characters such as Ani, Pumuniyi, and intelligent women in Yi mythology is not only reflected in their appearance, but also in their excellent qualities. For example, in "Zizi Niza", the depiction of a beautiful woman's appearance and voice, with a demeanor that is "like the bright moon on an autumn night" and a tone that is "like the voice of a lark in the wilderness," vividly captures the image of a beautiful woman. In the story of "Zhigearu", the portrayal of Pumuniyi's weaving movements is unique, showcasing her skilled weaving skills through the use of "weaving knives look like eagle wings flying", which shows the beauty of confident and elegant labor. By describing their appearance, posture, movements, and clothing, the standards of beauty contained in Yi traditional culture can be conveyed to readers, which helps people form a healthy and positive aesthetic taste. The image of a "wicked woman" showcases the beauty of others by denying herself, while also reflecting the complexity and versatility

of female images. These female images are of great significance for aesthetic cognition and experience.

A beautiful soul, a perfect personality, a spirit of dedication, and a sense of patriotism are inherent beauty that not only nourishes individual value and happiness, but also nurtures the source of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, that is, a relatively stable and vigorous state of "beauty" presented by individuals and society as a whole. Women can hold up half of the sky, and different women from different eras have their own shining lights. In "Floods Over the Sky", the intelligent, kind, and helpful ancestor of the Yi nationality, Ziyi Ani, is portrayed, while in "Zhigearu", the mother of heroes, Pumuniyi, combines wisdom, diligence, and bravery. By portraying its external image and internal emotions, it can bring joy to people, provide spiritual enlightenment, encourage them to pursue goodness, beauty, and truth, and promote their comprehensive development and self-realization. The excellent qualities possessed by these female images are another way of presenting national qualities.

4.2 Inheriting the Spirit of Labor

Labor creates people, satisfies the needs of human survival and development, and promotes social development in the process of transforming nature and the reality of transforming nature. According to "Guoyu Lu Yu", "When the people work hard, they think, and when they think, their hearts are good." The depiction of the ancient laboring people's hard work, pioneering spirit, and willingness to contribute contains the content of encouraging labor, praising labor, and creating a better life through labor. It is a spiritual force condensed in labor practice and a reflection of the labor spirit of the laboring people. The female images portrayed in Yi ethnic myths fully reflect their traditional virtues of wisdom, kindness, diligence, bravery, and selfless dedication. Yi women are skilled in spinning and weaving, and have a deep understanding of agricultural affairs. For example, Midnight Ani brought grains, livestock, and other items from heaven to the human world, and taught the technique of spinning and weaving to future generations for the benefit of them.

In the ancient records of the Yi nationality, it can be seen that the weaving machine design during the Pumuniyi era was relatively complete, and the weaving skills were already quite mature. These all reflect the wisdom of ancient Yi women, reflecting

their perseverance, hard work, and pragmatic behavior. They are also a tribute and praise to the labor spirit of ethnic women.

4.3 Cultivating Sentiments and Improving Personality

The female images in Yi myths have significant moral education functions in terms of moral norms, ideological character, behavioral norms, and value orientations.

The female images in the folk myths of the Kangba Yi nationality demonstrate their resilient qualities. In myths, women often play strong and brave roles, able to persevere in the face of various difficulties and challenges. This tenacious quality has significant implications for contemporary education. Educators can guide students to come into contact with these mythological stories, inspiring them to overcome difficulties and bravely face challenges with courage and perseverance.

Secondly, the female images in the folk myths of the Kangba Yi nationality demonstrate a tenacious sense of survival and the pursuit of self-worth. In these mythological stories, women not only exhibit a desire and pursuit for survival, but also a search and pursuit for self-worth. This spirit of pursuing self-worth also has important enlightening significance for contemporary education. These myths can guide people to understand their own values and missions, and cultivate their positive and upward life pursuits.

5. CONCLUSION

In contemporary society, women play important roles in the family, workplace, and society, and they need to face various challenges and pressures. The female images in the mythology of the Kangba Yi nationality demonstrate qualities of resilience, wisdom, courage, and kindness, which can inspire contemporary women to bravely move forward and become the masters of their own lives without fear of difficulties. The female images in myths demonstrate rich life wisdom and moral principles, which can guide teenagers to establish correct views on life, values, and the world. These images in myths can provide guidance for ideological enlightenment and personality shaping for young people through education and cultural inheritance.

In today's multicultural social environment, communication and integration between different ethnic cultures have become particularly important.

As an important component of Yi culture, Kangba Yi myths showcase the unique charm and rich connotations of Yi culture to the outside world through education and cultural inheritance, promoting mutual understanding and respect between different ethnic cultures. Through the dissemination of Kangba Yi myths, the diverse development and common prosperity of ethnic culture can be promoted.

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