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Cross-Civilizational Comparison of Heroic Culture: Value Foundations, Behavioral Logic and Social Embeddedness

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ABSTRACT

Aiming at the limitations of traditional heroic culture comparisons characterized by a Sino-Western dualistic opposition and the homogenization of non-Western cultures, this paper, from a cross-civilizational perspective, constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of "China – the West – non-West (Japan, the Arab world)". It examines the cultural characteristics of heroic culture in these three types of civilizations from the dimensions of value foundation, behavioral logic and social embeddedness. Among them, Chinese heroic culture takes "righteousness" as its core, highlighting group orientation and moral responsibility; Western heroic culture is centered on individualism, emphasizing the breaking of conventions and a result-oriented approach; non-Western heroic culture, represented by Japan and the Arab world, focuses on loyalty to specific groups with closed ethical boundaries. Meanwhile, this paper reveals the advantages of Chinese heroic culture in cross-civilizational communicability, thereby providing theoretical support for its modern transformation, the shaping of a national image, and the promotion of global civilizational dialogue.

Keywords : Heroic culture; Cross-civilizational comparison; Value foundation; Behavioral logic; Social embeddedness

INTRODUCTION

As an important carrier of the spiritual core of various civilizations, heroic culture is not a homogeneous existence transcending regions and history. Instead, it is a value judgment and narrative system gradually constructed by a specific civilization around two core propositions—*"What kind of character is worthy of public praise"* and *"What kind of behavior should be included in collective memory"*—in the long course of historical evolution. In essence, heroic culture is not

only the recognition and admiration of individual extraordinary deeds, but also deeply embedded in the ethical norms, political order and cultural identity of a specific society, serving as a crucial symbol for defining the characteristics of a civilization and forging group consensus. The definition, shaping and inheritance of heroes in different civilizations reflect distinct survival wisdom, value pursuits and social governance logics: heroes in the context of agricultural civilizations may bear the responsibility for collective survival; heroes in maritime civilizations may embody the courage to explore the unknown; and heroes in religious civilizations are often closely linked to the adherence to faith. Therefore, if cross-civilizational comparisons of heroic culture only stay at the superficial differences in heroic images, narrative themes or forms of dissemination, they will inevitably fall into one-sided interpretations. Only by delving into the core dimensions of value foundations, behavioral logic and social embeddedness can we accurately grasp the operational mechanisms of heroic culture in different civilizations, and understand how it shapes social structures, regulates moral behaviors and defines public responsibilities through institutionalized means.

Looking back at existing academic research, cross-civilizational comparisons of heroic culture have long been plagued by obvious cognitive limitations and framework flaws. On the one hand, the inertial thinking of *"Sino-Western dual opposition"* has dominated most studies. Scholars have mostly focused on the binary comparison of *"the West vs. China"*, simplifying the complex pattern of civilizations into the confrontation and differences between two camps, while ignoring the uniqueness and important value of non-Western civilizations in shaping heroic culture (Zhang Wei, 2025). On the other hand, the cognitive misconception of *"homogenization of non-Western civilizations"* is equally prominent. Many studies have arbitrarily categorized different non-Western civilizations such as Japan, Arab states and India as *"extensions of the East"* or *"peripheral cultures"*, failing to recognize the significant differences in their historical traditions, religious beliefs and social structures, as well as the resulting divergences in the characteristics of their heroic cultures. This simplistic and one-sided research framework can neither fully present the diverse landscape of global heroic culture, nor accurately reveal the interactive logic of heroic culture across different civilizations. Consequently, relevant research struggles to explain the phenomena of civilizational exchanges in the era of globalization, creating a notable academic gap (Bi Xuling, 2023).

At a time when globalization is advancing in depth and inter-civilizational dialogues are becoming increasingly frequent and complex, breaking through the limitations of traditional research and constructing a diversified, three-dimensional framework for cross-civilizational comparison of heroic culture holds significant theoretical and practical value. From a theoretical perspective, this research can fill the existing academic gaps, clarify the generative logic and core characteristics of heroic culture across different civilizations, enrich the theoretical system of cross-civilizational comparative studies, and provide a new perspective for understanding the diversity and commonality of human civilizations. From a practical standpoint, it

can offer theoretical guidance for the modern transformation of Chinese heroic culture—in the context of contemporary society, it explores how to adapt the fine core of traditional Chinese heroic culture to the development of the times and meet the spiritual needs of the public. Meanwhile, it can also provide practical support for national image building and international cultural exchanges, help Chinese heroic culture transcend civilizational boundaries, gain understanding and recognition from the international community, and thereby promote positive interaction between Chinese and foreign civilizations. Based on this, this paper, from a cross-civilizational perspective, breaks free from the constraints of the traditional binary framework and constructs a three-dimensional comparative framework of "*China – the West – non-West (Japan, Arab world)*". With value foundations, behavioral logic and social embeddedness as the core analytical dimensions, it systematically analyzes the distinctive characteristics and common laws of heroic culture in these three types of civilizations, highlights the unique advantages and cross-civilizational communication potential of Chinese heroic culture, and provides new ideas for its modern inheritance and international dissemination.

Historical Background

The cross-civilizational differences in heroic culture and the limitations of traditional comparative studies are both rooted in specific historical and cognitive contexts. Since modern times, the rise of Western industrial civilization has propelled the global dissemination of its cultural concepts, and a Western-centric cognitive framework has gradually taken shape. Coupled with the historical circumstance of the passive modernization of Eastern countries in modern times, this has directly solidified the research mindset of Sino-Western dual opposition, and the diverse values of non-Western civilizations have long been overlooked.

From the perspective of historical formation, the core characteristics of heroic culture in the three types of civilizations are deeply bound to their own civilizational evolution: the core of "*righteousness*" in Chinese heroic culture was nurtured by the collective collaboration needs of agricultural civilization and the social structure of "*state-family isomorphism*"; the individualistic core of Western heroic culture stems from the tradition of civic autonomy in ancient Greece and the awakening of humanism; the heroic cultures of non-Western civilizations such as Japan and the Arab world have formed their unique characteristics of loyalty to specific groups by relying on the samurai system and Islamic religious ethics respectively.

Since the 20th century, although globalization has promoted inter-civilizational exchanges, the limitations of traditional research have not been fundamentally overcome. The ideological confrontation during the Cold War further reinforced the binary cognition, and the misconception of "*the homogenization of non-Western civilizations*" has persisted. Against this backdrop, sorting out the generative logic of heroic culture based on historical context and constructing a diversified comparative framework have become an inevitable choice to adapt to the needs of inter-civilizational exchanges in the era of globalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As an important carrier of the core values of civilizations, the cross-civilizational comparative study of heroic culture has long been a focal point of multidisciplinary research including cultural studies, sociology and political science. Existing studies mainly focus on the connotation, historical evolution, value foundations and cross-cultural differences of heroic culture, but on the whole, they still face limitations in research frameworks, insufficient understanding of non-Western civilizations and a lack of systematicity in cross-civilizational comparisons. Under the four-dimensional framework of "China – the West – non-West – cross-civilizational comparison", this section sorts out and reviews relevant studies, thereby providing theoretical support for this research.

(1) Studies on Chinese Heroic Culture

Domestic academic research on Chinese heroic culture focuses on the deconstruction of its value core, historical evolution, and social embeddedness. In terms of monographs, Qian Mu (2010) analyzed the spirit of *"taking the whole nation's affairs as one's own responsibility"* embodied in traditional Chinese heroes from a historical perspective, pointing out that this spirit is deeply integrated with Confucian ethics. Yu Yingshi (2003) emphasized the moral responsibility and social mission of heroes from the scholar-official class. Chen Pingyuan (1992) examined the evolution of the swordsman archetype and identified *"righteousness"* as its core value symbol. Luo Guojie (2008) interpreted the ethical foundation of heroic culture from a philosophical perspective, highlighting the cultural trait of *"valuing righteousness over material gains"*. Ye Shuxian (2005) expounded on the role of heroic culture in shaping social moral norms from a holistic cultural perspective.

In terms of journal articles, most studies focus on heroic culture in specific historical periods or of specific types. Zhao Yancai (2007) analyzed the expanded connotation of *"righteousness"* amid modern social changes. Hu Bocheng (2022) explored the practical orientation of the behavioral logic of heroes. Han Yunbo (2021) revealed the shaping effect of official ideology on heroic culture. Guo Yan (2009) underscored the potential of Chinese heroic culture in international ethics. Ding Ran and Wang Lixia (2022) analyzed the collectivist essence of Chinese heroic culture from the perspective of social structure. Red heroic culture has also attracted scholarly attention: For instance, Fei Yingqiu (2021) and Zha Yiling (2025) conducted research on this topic from the angles of its historical formation and its connection with national spirit respectively. Contemporary studies further emphasize the influence of digital media and youth groups on the inheritance of heroic culture, pointing out that media convergence, interactive narration, and youth identification constitute the core of its dissemination in the new era (Fu Anling & Qin Shaoqing, 2022; Ni Lin, Liu Yuxin et al., 2021).

(2) Studies on Western Heroic Culture

Research on Western heroic culture has an earlier start, with an emphasis on individualism, the breaking of conventions and a result-oriented approach. In *Eight Lectures on Mythology*, the heroic narratives in ancient Greek mythology are

analyzed in depth, and the evolutionary trajectory of the basic heroic archetypes in Western culture is systematically sorted out (Yang Jing, 2020). Nietzsche (2020) put forward the philosophy of the *Übermensch*, emphasizing that heroes transcend secular ethics to realize self-value. Weber (2010) analyzed the shaping effect of Protestant ethics on heroic behaviors. Freud (2016) explored the psychological roots of hero worship. Campbell (2016) proposed the narrative model of "*departure—initiation—return*". Fromm (1987) underscored the spirit of freedom embodied in modern individualistic heroes.

Domestic journal studies explore Western heroic culture and its cross-cultural implications from various perspectives. Some scholars have conducted a corpus-based comparative analysis of the cultural orientations of Chinese and Western heroism, pointing out the differences between the two in the expression of individual and collective values (Yu Leijian & Ni Jiaqi, 2022). Other studies have compared the cultural and spiritual differences of heroic images between China and the West from the perspectives of classical mythology and literary history (Zuo Danhong & Wang Yaguang, 2015). In addition, by sorting out the evolution of heroic images in foreign literary works, it can be observed that individualistic heroes show a rising trend in modern narratives (Li Xiaofan, 2014). From the contrast of Chinese and Western classical texts, the heroic concepts in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Iliad* reflect the different constructions of heroic values by distinct cultural traditions (Wang Huifang, 2013). In the research of modern popular culture, scholars have analyzed the similarities and differences of heroic images against different cultural backgrounds through a comparison of classic Chinese and Western film and television works (Yang Yuan, 2010). From a narratological perspective, the "hero's journey" narrative model in fantasy literature also reflects the interactive relationship between socialization and individual growth (Fang Xiaoli, 2024).

(3) Studies on Non-Western Heroic Culture

Domestic research on non-Western heroic culture remains relatively weak, and monograph studies rely heavily on the achievements of foreign scholars. Among them, Maruyama Masao systematically sorted out the value of *loyalty and righteousness* in Japanese culture and its connection with political practices, which helps clarify the origin of *Bushido* spirit in traditional heroic culture (Maruyama Masao, 2022). As a classic work of postcolonial theory, *Orientalism* provides important insights into the cultural construction of the Islamic world and the historical and power relations behind heroic behaviors (Said, 2019). *Chinese Islamic Culture*, a work by Chinese academic circles, can also supplement the understanding of social ethics and value orientations against the backdrop of Islamic culture (Religious Research Center of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, 1996).

In terms of journal articles, domestic scholars mainly analyze non-Western heroic culture and its modern continuity from the perspectives of literature, history and sociology. For example, Japanese heroic culture is regarded as having shaped a heroic value system centered on *loyalty and righteousness* under the influence of

Bushido spirit (Gao Xiaoyan, 2006). In *Antar's Epic*, a classic of Arab civilization, the narrative of the hero's fate is not limited to eulogizing individual heroic deeds, but also integrates multiple cultural elements such as fate, resistance and social responsibility in the construction of the hero's image (Gu Jian & Guo Yun, 2019). Studies on Indian heroic culture show that the heroic archetypes in Indian epics are deeply embedded in Hindu doctrines and have exerted an impact on modern national identity and ethical values (Wang Zhiguo, 2015). The narrative logic of African folktales profoundly embodies the community ethics and collective values of African grassland civilization, thus influencing the representation of heroic images (Li Beilei, 2023). On the whole, research on the heroic culture of non-Western civilizations still needs to be further expanded and deepened.

(4) Cross-Civilizational Comparative Studies on Heroic Culture

Existing cross-civilizational studies on heroic culture are mostly trapped in the cognitive limitation of *Sino-Western dual opposition*, lacking a systematic perspective for diversified comparisons. In recent years, relevant domestic research has focused on the interpretation of heroic culture from a multi-civilizational perspective. For instance, Xu Xinjian (2018), based on the context of multi-civilizational interaction, explored the diversified coexistence and modern transformation path of heroic culture. Zhou Ning (2011) continued the vein of cultural interpretation and conducted an in-depth critique of the cognitive biases of Western academic circles toward Chinese heroic culture. Le Daiyun (2021) improved the theoretical framework for cross-civilizational dialogue regarding heroic culture from the perspective of mutual learning between civilizations. In addition, scholars such as Wang Hui (2015) and Yang Yi (2013) have also carried out in-depth discussions on the integration and coexistence of indigenous heroic culture and diverse civilizations in the process of modernization, further advancing the diversified turn of cross-civilizational research on heroic culture.

Materials and Methods

With the cross-civilizational comparison of heroic culture as its core theme, this study selects research materials with a balance of representativeness and diversity. In terms of textual materials, it covers heroic narratives in traditional Chinese classics (such as historical biographies and folk epics), classic Western heroic texts (such as ancient Greek mythology and modern and contemporary literary works), and representative heroic culture materials from non-Western regions (Japan and the Arab world) (such as documents related to *Bushido* and tribal heroic legends of the Arab world). Meanwhile, academic monographs and journal articles in the fields of cross-civilizational comparison and cultural anthropology are referenced to provide theoretical underpinnings for this research.

The comparative research method serves as the core of this study. A three-dimensional comparative framework of "*China – the West – non-West*" is constructed, and through three core dimensions—value foundations, behavioral logic and social embeddedness—the study systematically analyzes the distinctive characteristics and common laws of heroic culture across different civilizations. In

addition, the literature research method is integrated to clarify the historical formation context of heroic culture in various civilizations by sorting out and examining various types of textual materials. A cross-disciplinary research perspective is also adopted as a supplement, drawing on relevant theories from cultural sociology and ethics to enhance the depth and scientificity of the study, thus laying a solid foundation for reliable arguments to reveal the cross-civilizational communicability advantages of Chinese heroic culture.

V. Chinese Heroic Culture: Value Foundations, Behavioral Logic and Social Embeddedness

The core characteristics of traditional Chinese heroic culture are rooted in its stable and clear value structure: it has always regarded "*righteousness*" as the supreme criterion, and deeply integrated heroic behaviors into the family-state, clan and social order, thereby constructing a highly ethical and institutionalized heroic paradigm. Within this paradigm, the sublimity of a hero is not determined merely by the outcomes or achievements of their deeds, but rather by their commitment to public responsibilities, adherence to moral principles, and maintenance of social order.

(1) Value Foundations: The Priority of Morality Based on "*Righteousness*"

"*Righteousness*" constitutes the fundamental value basis of Chinese heroic culture, directly determining the legitimacy of heroic behaviors and the core criteria for social evaluation. In the pre-Qin ideological system, the value orientation of "*righteousness*" had already been clearly established. *The Analects* states that "*the gentleman understands righteousness, while the petty man understands profit*" (Yang Bojun, 1980), elevating the distinction between righteousness and profit to a core dimension of personal character and social evaluation. This indicates that the sublimity of a Chinese hero does not stem from the scale of their personal achievements or the height of their prestige, but from whether their behaviors conform to moral principles and bear public ethical responsibilities.

Mencius further elevated the value of "*righteousness*" to the utmost, asserting that "*Life is what I desire; righteousness is also what I desire. If I cannot have both, I will forsake life for righteousness*" (Yang Bojun, 2019). This statement clearly defines the transcendence of moral principle over individual life. It not only established the morality-centered evaluation logic of Chinese heroic culture, but also provided the core theoretical basis for the social legitimacy of heroic deeds throughout history. For instance, the dedication and sense of duty embodied by Zhuge Liang in *Chu Shi Biao* (*Memorial on Taking the Field*), characterized by his resolve to "*do one's utmost to the end, and give up only when one breathes one's last*", reflect not only his personal wisdom and strategic acumen, but also the moral height of the "*righteousness*"-centered value system through his commitment to fulfilling his obligations and safeguarding national interests. Yue Fei's historical image of "*absolute loyalty to the country*" is another quintessential example—the legitimacy of his deeds stemmed from his conscious commitment to national and social responsibilities, rather than from mere military victories or personal glory.

The "*righteousness*"-centered paradigm is not merely an abstract evaluation criterion; it has also profoundly shaped the dissemination and identification logic of Chinese heroic culture. In ancient Chinese narrative literature, traditional operas, storytelling and other cultural carriers, the portrayal of heroic figures has always centered on the fulfillment of public responsibilities and the upholding of moral principles, rather than relying on the splendor or legendary nature of their achievements. This value orientation has endowed Chinese heroic culture with strong stability and continuity, providing members of society with an identifiable behavioral paradigm while forming an enduring ethical standard that has been passed down through historical evolution.

(2) Social Embeddedness: Group Orientation and Deep Integration into the "State-Clan" Network

Traditional Chinese heroic culture presents a distinct group orientation. Heroes are not isolated "lone warriors"; instead, they are always situated within multiple relational networks such as the state, clan and community. Their value evaluation is highly dependent on their contributions to group order, public interests and social stability. The maxim "*Cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the state, and pacify the world*" put forward in *The Great Learning of The Book of Rites* (Wang Wenjin, 2016) clearly delineates the logic of individual behavior expanding layer by layer into the community structure, a logic that runs directly through the evaluation system of Chinese heroic culture.

Heroic narratives in historical records fully confirm this kind of group embeddedness. The folk swordsmen recorded in *Biographies of the Knight-errants in Records of the Grand Historian* derived the legitimacy of their deeds from the community responsibility of "*helping the endangered and rescuing the oppressed without fearing power*" (Sima Qian, 1982). They gained social recognition by making up for institutional deficiencies and maintaining grassroots order. Even Xiang Yu, who was renowned for his exceptional military prowess, his historical evaluation still focused on whether he abided by obligations, fulfilled alliances and upheld social order, rather than merely on his military achievements. This indicates that the group orientation of Chinese heroic culture essentially requires heroes to be symbols and maintainers of social norms, and their behaviors must be deeply aligned with public goals.

Group orientation also runs through the education and inheritance mechanisms of heroic culture. Confucian classics, history textbooks and folk stories have repeatedly emphasized the alignment between heroic behaviors and social responsibilities, making heroic culture an important carrier of social moral education. For example, the portrayal of figures such as Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* not only highlights their personal wisdom and talent, but also places great emphasis on their decisions and actions in the context of state-family responsibilities and public obligations. This educational and narrative approach further strengthens the social function of heroic culture, turning heroic images into vivid embodiments of ethical order.

(3) Behavioral Logic: Ethical Motivation Driven by Moral Responsibility and Public Duty

Chinese heroic culture takes assuming public responsibility as the core driver of behavioral logic, and regards moral commitment as the key criterion distinguishing heroes from ordinary people. As stated in *The Great Plan of Yu* in *The Book of Documents*, "*Only virtue moves heaven; its reach knows no bounds*" (Kong Anguo, 2007), which emphasizes the transcendent appeal of moral responsibility. In the logic of Chinese heroic culture, the legitimacy of a hero's deeds does not stem from the mere achievement of goals, but from the joint support of ethical legitimacy, public recognition and social trust.

Liang Qichao also pointed out in *Methods of Historical Research in China* that traditional Chinese historiography takes people as the mainstay of history, and its core function lies in "*illuminating the way of humanity*"—that is, to manifest the spirit of history by recording and praising figures who bear moral responsibility (Liang Qichao, 2009). This assertion accurately reveals the high consistency between hero evaluation and public ethics. Such consistency ensures that heroic culture can continuously intervene in realpolitik, social governance and cultural identity, providing stable ethical support and value reference for social development.

Moral commitment is further reflected in the strong normative nature of heroes' behavioral choices. Typical heroic figures in history, such as Yue Fei, Wen Tianxiang and Lin Zexu, acted not to pursue personal glory or short-term achievements, but to proactively take on public responsibilities and moral obligations in critical historical contexts. This value logic of "establishing fame through virtue and fulfilling deeds through duty" has made Chinese heroes guardians of the public ethical order, while strengthening the moral binding force of society through behavioral demonstration. This trait also constitutes one of the core identifiers that distinguish Chinese heroic culture from Western individualistic heroism and non-Western heroism with bounded ethics.

VI. Western Heroic Culture: Value Foundations, Behavioral Logic and Social Embeddedness

Individualism constitutes the core of Western heroic culture and shapes its distinctive value orientation. Here, the sublimity of a hero is not tied to the maintenance of public ethics or group order, but to the outburst of individual strength, the exercise of free will, and the dedication to achievements. It embodies the distinctive trait that "*rules can be broken and victory is justification*". This logic runs deeply through the narrative vein of Western culture from ancient times to the present.

(1) Value Foundations: The Core of Individualism and the Priority of Personal Glory

Individualism constitutes the fundamental value basis of Western heroic culture, running through heroic narratives from the classical to the modern and contemporary eras. The fulfillment of personal glory and self-worth serves as the core criterion for evaluating heroes. In contrast to the absolute obedience of Chinese heroes to collective ethics, the heroes in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—the great epics

of ancient Greece—focus more on the assertion of individual vitality. Take Achilles and Hector in *The Iliad* as examples: their sublimity stems first and foremost from their extraordinary prowess on the battlefield and their relentless pursuit of personal honor. Within this value system, victory and excellence are morality in their own right. Although they also shoulder group responsibilities (e.g., Hector's defense of Troy), such responsibilities are often fulfilled through the realization of personal value. This renders Western heroes more inclined to be individual champions with social responsibilities, rather than mere enforcers of moral order (Homer, 1994).

Although the heroic culture of the Roman period was closely linked to state politics, its individualistic core remained unchanged. The evaluation of the heroism of Roman generals and statesmen evolved into a practical logic of political utilitarianism—its value criteria centered on conquest achievements, power accumulation and the building of personal political capital, rather than the safeguarding of public ethics or institutional order. Within this framework, the heroic image of Caesar in his conquest of Gaul derived its legitimacy from the demonstration of his military genius and the accumulation of his political accomplishments, not from adherence to universal ethics or the fulfillment of social responsibilities.

Modern and contemporary thought has further reinforced this value foundation. Thomas Carlyle argued in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* that the essence of history is "the biography of great men". Heroes drive social change through extraordinary will, and their value evaluation hinges on personal choices and the outcomes of their actions, rather than compliance with social norms (Thomas Carlyle, 2010). After the rise of the Romantic movement in the 19th century, heroic images trended toward extreme individualism, transforming into "exceptional beings" who transcended social, legal and traditional norms. Their sublimity became entirely dependent on the ultimate expression of individual ability and will.

(2) Behavioral Logic: Value Motivation Driven by Norm Transgression and Result Orientation

The behavioral logic of Western heroic culture centers on norm transgression and result orientation. Heroes often transcend established norms in the guise of "exceptional beings", and the legitimacy of their actions is ultimately determined by outcomes rather than ethical processes. This logic has been consistently inherited from classical epics to contemporary popular culture: in the classical era, Achilles could refuse to join the war out of personal honor, disregarding the collective interests of the Greek coalition forces. His motive for returning to the battlefield was not group responsibility, but the personal desire to avenge his close friend. In the end, he achieved the ultimate fulfillment of personal honor at the cost of his own life. The legitimacy of his deeds was entirely underpinned by the outcome of "successful revenge" and the process of "displaying extraordinary valor".

Heroic behaviors in the modern and contemporary periods have further highlighted the transgression of established order and the pursuit of achievements.

The romantic heroic archetype of Napoleon has been endowed with legendary overtones in European culture. Although his conquests and political reforms violated traditional order and ethical boundaries, he was evaluated as a hero because of his achievements in advancing historical progress and accumulating personal prestige. The legitimacy of his actions rested on the fulfillment of his personal will and the attainment of historical effects, rather than inherent commitment to public ethics.

Superheroes in contemporary Hollywood film culture have further reinforced this behavioral logic. Characters such as Spider-Man, Batman, and Iron Man mostly appear as "rule-breaking saviors". While their heroic deeds aim at just goals, their behavioral paradigm focuses on the immediate effects of personal initiative in intervening and resolving crises independently, rather than the long-term maintenance of social order and institutional safeguarding (David Graeber, 2023). This narrative model of "individual solutions under extraordinary circumstances" pushes the logic of "norm transgression" and "result orientation" to an extreme, and also forms a sharp contrast with the ethics-driven logic of Chinese heroism characterized by *"establishing fame through virtue and fulfilling deeds through duty"*.

(3) Social Embeddedness: Tensions Between the Individual and Order, and Contractual Correlation

Unlike Chinese heroes who are deeply embedded in the "state-clan" network, the relationship between Western heroes and social order presents distinct tensions. Their social embeddedness is not about integration but game-playing, which is mainly manifested as a contractual correlation between the individual and order. The heroic narrative of *Heracles* in ancient Greek mythology is quite representative: he accepted punishment for accidentally killing his family members. The process of completing the Twelve Labors was not only a compromise to the theocratic order, but also a process of proving his own value and gaining social recognition through individual actions. His connection with social order was not based on ethical obligations, but derived from the contractual logic of "punishment—redemption", with his individual independence maintained throughout.

The contractual spirit of modern and contemporary Western society has further shaped the embeddedness mode of heroes and social order. For heroic figures such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson during the American Revolutionary War, the legitimacy of their actions did not stem from loyalty to the monarch or family, but from the practice of concepts such as "natural rights" and "social contract"—promoting the reconstruction of social order through individual actions, and achieving a contractual unification of individual demands and public interests. This mode of embeddedness enables Western heroes to interact with order always in the posture of "individuals": they may be challengers of the existing order or builders of a new order, but they never lose their core status as individuals.

The narrative logic of contemporary superheroes further highlights the characteristics of this tension-based embeddedness. Most of them are not attached to the official order; some even come into conflict with it. However, they gain social

recognition by safeguarding citizens' interests and upholding fairness and justice. Their connection with social order is entirely based on a temporary contract of "crisis resolution", rather than long-term binding ethical obligations. This mode of embeddedness also results in an inherent tension between "individual freedom" and "group order" that runs through Western heroic culture, which is essentially different from the embeddedness characteristics of Chinese heroes who integrate into the group and uphold order.

VII. Non-Western Heroic Culture: Value Foundations, Behavioral Logic and Social Embeddedness

Non-Western heroic culture is primarily represented by Japanese Bushido and Arab tribal heroic culture. Its core characteristics prominently feature "loyalty to specific groups and the closure of ethical boundaries". It is not only distinct from the value orientation of Chinese heroic culture characterized by "righteousness-centeredness and universal public ethics", but also different from the core logic of Western heroic culture marked by "individualism and result orientation". The sublimity of such heroes stems from their loyalty and sacrifice to specific groups (lords, tribes), rather than the practice of universal morality or the realization of individual values.

(1) Three-Dimensional Characteristics of Japanese Bushido Heroic Culture

From the perspective of value foundations, Japanese Bushido heroic culture is rooted in hierarchical loyalty, with ethical boundaries strictly confined to the feudal hierarchical relationship of *"lord-vassal"*. The core value system of *Bushido* (loyalty, duty, honor) revolves entirely around specific lords and families. The value evaluation of heroes is fully dependent on the adherence to this hierarchical ethical relationship, rather than the commitment to universal social and public interests. Nitobe Inazo clearly pointed out that the warrior spirit requires individuals to be highly embedded in the established hierarchical ethical system, and the value of their behaviors is mainly reflected in loyalty to their lords and the willingness to sacrifice their lives to fulfill their duties. This value logic constitutes the core of the behavioral evaluation of warriors (Nitobe Inazo, 2009). Such hierarchical loyalty does not stem from universal ethics, but is a product of identity bondage under the feudal lord system. It is essentially different from the public ethics embodied in the Confucian concept of *"righteousness"* in China, and further distinguished from the universal ethical extension logic of Chinese heroes characterized by *"cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world"*.

In terms of behavioral logic, modern Japanese thought exhibits the feature of absolute loyalty, where the legitimacy of behaviors is completely anchored in the fulfillment of responsibilities to lords and the hierarchical order. Whether it is Oda Nobunaga's military and political strategies or Tokugawa Ieyasu's establishment of the Edo Shogunate, the legitimacy of their heroic deeds derives from loyalty to their lords and families as well as the maintenance of the established hierarchical order, rather than the active commitment to universal public ethics. The sacrificial behaviors under this logic essentially transform the originally universal Confucian

virtue of "loyalty" into a closed, one-dimensional identity obligation. As Karatani Kojin revealed, the modern Japanese ideological system and Confucian discourse have been formed under specific historical and intellectual contexts, rather than a natural continuation of the Chinese Confucian ethical tradition centered on moral consciousness and public responsibility. Therefore, the ethics of "loyalty" in the Japanese ideological tradition presents cultural characteristics distinct from those of Chinese Confucian ethics under its discursive construction (Karatani Kojin, 2005).

From the perspective of social embeddedness, Bushido heroes are deeply bound to the feudal hierarchical network, with highly rigid ethical boundaries. The social identity and behavioral legitimacy of warriors are largely dependent on the hierarchical subordinate relationship of *lord-vassal*, and their social roles and value confirmation are strictly confined within the framework of hierarchical ethics (Maruyama Masao, 2022). This embeddedness model is a cultural mirror of the Japanese feudal lord system. Through this ethical system, the warrior class achieves identity recognition and value confirmation, thus failing to form the public order embeddedness logic of Chinese heroes as embodied in "*cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world*". This results in the Bushido heroic culture being unable to generate universal public ethical effects that transcend hierarchical boundaries, and it has always been confined within the ethical system of the feudal ruling class.

(2) Three-Dimensional Characteristics of Arab Tribal Heroic Culture

At the level of value foundations, Arab tribal heroic culture is rooted in kinship-based loyalty, with ethical boundaries strictly confined within the tribal community. From the theoretical perspective of Ibn Khaldun, the authoritative basis of a hero or leader is often built on the cohesion of the tribe or group, and the legitimacy of their value derives from safeguarding the security, dignity and resources of their own group (Ibn Khaldun, 2014). Moreover, the early society of the Arabian Peninsula was centered on blood-related tribes, forming a survival and political community that relied on tribal alliances. Under this organizational model, heroic behaviors were mainly dedicated to the security and interests of one's own tribe, and their ethical boundaries were restricted by internal tribal norms, rather than abstract morality or public ethics across tribes (Na Zhong, 1997). Therefore, the sublimity of Arab tribal heroes has always been limited within the tribe, failing to generate the cross-group and cross-regional universal ethical validity embodied in the concept of "*righteousness*" in Chinese heroic culture.

In terms of behavioral logic, tribal heroes are driven primarily by tribal protection, exhibiting the dual traits of bravery in resisting enemies and generosity in benefiting clan members, with the moral extension of their behaviors always stopping at tribal boundaries. The tribal heroes recorded in *One Thousand and One Nights* mostly focused their deeds on defending tribal resources, resisting external invasions and winning glory for the tribe, gaining group recognition by practicing the ethical norms within the tribe. The inward-looking altruism model centered on blood ties, which took shape in the early tribal society of the Arabian Peninsula,

meant that the hero's bravery and generosity were mainly dedicated to the survival and interests of their own tribe, while having weak constraints on cross-tribal public ethics (Peng Shuzhi, 2002). However, such behaviors lack the cross-group ethical extension logic of Chinese heroes characterized by "*uniting people through righteousness*", making it difficult to naturally transform into universal public values that transcend tribal boundaries.

In terms of social embeddedness, Arab tribal heroes are deeply bound to the tribal kinship network, displaying the feature of absolute dependence on the tribal community. In the nomadic social structure, the tribe was the sole carrier for the hero's survival and value realization. Heroes' behaviors always centered on tribal interests, and their interactions with other tribes and external societies were mostly based on conflicts or competition, lacking the logic of embedding into cross-group public order. This embeddedness feature is deeply linked to the natural environment and production methods of the Arabian Peninsula. The arid and semi-arid natural environment shaped a social structure with tribes as the basic survival unit, which made competition for resources among tribes a normal state, thereby strengthening the value logic of blood relations and tribal loyalty (Guo Yingde, 1997). This is essentially different from the embeddedness mode of Chinese heroes who "*integrate into public order and maintain the overall stability of society*", and it also determines the limitations of their ethical influence.

(3) Brief Reference to Heroic Culture in Other Non-Western Civilizations

Beyond the typical paradigms of Japan and the Arab world, heroic cultures in other non-Western civilizations such as Africa and India also exhibit similar characteristics of "*bounded ethical boundaries*". In the tribal societies of sub-Saharan Africa, the tribe serves as the fundamental social unit, and heroic behaviors primarily revolve around the security, resources and order within the ethnic group. The legitimacy of their value is grounded in recognition from within the tribe, rather than universal ethics across tribal boundaries. This structural feature shares similarities with the kinship-oriented ethical tendency of Arab tribal heroes (Liu Hongwu, 1997).

The heroes in the Indian epic *Mahabharata* (e.g., Arjuna) derive their sublimity from their embedding in religious doctrines and the system of family responsibilities, with their behavioral choices constrained by caste ethics and family obligations (Ji Xianlin, 2010). Their ethical boundaries are mainly confined to the religious-family community. While emphasizing group responsibilities, this model differs fundamentally from the universal public nature embodied in the concept of "*righteousness*" in Chinese heroic culture.

VIII. Conclusion: The Characteristics and Contemporary Value of Chinese Heroic Culture from a Cross-Civilizational Perspective

With individualism as its core, Western heroic culture follows the logic of "*norm transgression and result orientation*". Whether it is the extreme pursuit of personal honor by Achilles in ancient Greek mythology or the "rule-breaking salvation" by contemporary superheroes, there is always tension between the

individual and social order, making it difficult to truly carry universal public ethics. Non-Western heroic culture, on the other hand, often falls into the shackles of "bounded ethics": the loyalty in Japanese Bushido is confined to the hierarchical network of "lord and family", and the commitment of Arab tribal heroes stops at the boundaries of blood-based communities. Although they emphasize sacrifice and group responsibility, the closed nature of their ethical boundaries prevents them from generating a paradigm of cross-group public responsibility.

In stark contrast to this, the uniqueness of Chinese heroic culture lies in the value guidance of "*righteousness*" and its deep embedding in public ethics. First of all, the principle that "*the gentleman understands righteousness*" anchors the sublimity of heroes in the adherence to morality, rather than utilitarian achievements. Secondly, the logic of "*cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the state, and pacify the world*" integrates individual behaviors into the state-family isomorphic order, making the value evaluation of heroes inherently oriented toward the maintenance of public order. Finally, the spirit of commitment embodied in the maxim "*only virtue moves heaven*" establishes the core ethical criterion for proactively undertaking public responsibilities. Historical paragons such as Zhuge Liang's dedication to "*doing his utmost till his heart stops beating*" and Yue Fei's sincere devotion to "*absolute loyalty to the country*" vividly illustrate how Chinese heroes transcend the self and integrate individual destiny into the universal righteousness of the world.

This unique value structure endows Chinese heroic culture with strong cross-civilizational communicability and ethical universality. It neither relies on the extreme display of individual ability nor is restricted by the boundaries of specific groups, but takes "*assuming due responsibilities and safeguarding public justice*" as its core criterion. This not only distinguishes it from the heroic narratives of other civilizations, but also provides a solid value foundation that transcends narrow interests and emphasizes shared responsibility for China's contemporary cultural confidence, national image building, and global inter-civilizational dialogue.

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