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## МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ НARRАЦИЯ В РОМАНЕ МО ЯНЯ «СТРАНА ВИНА»

### THE MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVE IN THE NOVEL *THE REPUBLIC OF WINE* BY MO YAN

В романе Мо Яня «Страна вина» вино выступает ключевым элементом модернизации и насилиственной деконструкции традиционных китайских мифов. Используя многолинейную структуру и новаторскую нарративную стратегию, автор раскрывает духовное опустошение и отчуждение власти, с которыми столкнулось китайское общество в начале реформ и открытости. Одновременно, опираясь на существующие исследования и современные теоретические рамки, роман демонстрирует локализацию магического реализма, обнажая дилеммы китайской литературы и предлагая инновационный путь для деконструкции традиционных мифов в современном Китае.

**Ключевые слова:** Мо Янь; «Страна вина»; мифологическая нарратив; мифологическое пространство; деконструкция.

*The Republic of Wine* by Mo Yan takes wine as the core element and wine as the entry point, and adopts a multi-linear structure and pioneering narrative strategy to modern and violently deconstructed traditional Chinese myths, revealing the spiritual deprivation and power alienation faced by Chinese society in the early period of reform and opening up. At the same time, based on the existing research and current theoretical framework, the localization of magic realism reveals the dilemmas faced by Chinese literature, and provides an innovative path for the deconstruction of traditional myths in contemporary China.

**Key words:** Mo Yan; *The Republic of Wine*; mythological Narrative; mythological Space; deconstruction.

*The Republic of Wine* is one of Mo Yan's most controversial works, and since its release in 1992, it has attracted strong reactions in both Chinese and foreign literary circles due to its sharp social criticism, multidimensional narrative structure, and magical realism. "Since Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, the re-reading of *The Republic of Wine* and the reminiscence of Mo Yan's 'disgruntled' voice have continued to unfold amidst the heat of the award" [1], and in less than a decade since then there have been hundreds of critical articles on *The Republic of Wine*.

Wine is the core element in *The Republic of Wine*, and before analyzing *The Republic of Wine*, one needs to have an understanding of Chinese wine culture and wine. Wine had a profound significance in ancient China, not only used for rituals (*The Book of Rites*, 'the goodness of fine and sweet wines is used to honour the

ancestors'), and as a medium of communication between people and the gods of heaven and earth, but also an important vehicle for literati and ink writers to honour the ancestors. It also became an important carrier for literati to express their inner feelings. The birth and development of wine in the Chinese people, with a deep historical memory, "the history of China's brewing, drinking Long-standing, wine culture has become an important part of Chinese culture, its roots deep into all corners of the social fabric" [2]. Throughout the thousands of years of China's history, the invention and birth of wine is not only the crystallization of labour and wisdom, but also closely related to the gods and goddesses in traditional Chinese mythology. Chinese forefathers combined wine with gods and star worship, believing that there was a heavenly god of wine, the 'Wine Flag Star' in the sky dedicated to the management of wine (*Book of Jin*). As history evolved, Chinese folk regarded Du Kang as the 'god of wine' and the inventor of winemaking.

This is also confirmed by later discoveries, "as chemical analyses of ancient organics absorbed into pottery jars from the early Neolithic village of Jiahu in Henan province in China have revealed that a mixed fermented beverage of rice, honey, and fruit (hawthorn fruit and or grape) was being produced as early as the seventh millennium. have revealed that a mixed fermented beverage of rice, honey, and fruit (hawthorn fruit and or grape) was being produced as early as the seventh millennium before Christ (B.C.)" [3]. With the development of agricultural productivity, grains became the main raw material for brewing wine, and a mature brewing process was developed in China during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (*Book of Rites*). China's modern brewing materials have diversified and the drinking base is huge, and the phenomenon has gradually formed four major wine capitals, namely Yibin in Sichuan, Renhuai in Guizhou, Fenyang in Shanxi, and Suqian in Jiangsu. Based on the culture of wine, the important position of wine in China's historical lineage, subconsciously influencing Mo Yan's conception and creation, giving wine in *The Republic of Wine* not only a social symbol, but also a social function and cultural symbol.

Through the fictional literary terrain of the 'Jiu Guo' in this novel, Mo Yan creates a mythic space with localized colours, "the myth being an overarching metaphorical world in which everything in it is potentially unified, as if they are all in a single infinite whole" [4]. This mythic space is hardly distinguishable from real-world social organizational structures, except that nearly all socio-political carrying out and interpersonal interactions in the city of Wine Country are closely linked to wine. In this mythic space, wine replaces the people as the keystone of society by covering the sky and the earth.

However, "*Republic of Wine* does not become an appendage of politics, but rather completes its examination and amplification of reality and human nature with the support of a cultural core that not only maintains a certain distance from the social and political, but also is able to elevate the height of the work's critique by integrating the writer's forward-thinking understanding of the future under the revelation of a certain cultural commonality" [5]. Using the city of Jiu Guo as a spatial carrier, the fictional narrative maps out a microcosm of modern Chinese

society, creating an antagonistic conflict between the sanctity of wine and its secularization, and is viewed as a modern mythological tale that reveals the alienation of human nature and the corruption of power.

### **I. The Structure of the Novel with Multiple Parallel Lines**

“The classical nature presented in *The Republic of Wine* is not a simple inheritance of classical Chinese literature, but a conscious blending of classical Chinese literary techniques into a pioneering narrative, which is prominently demonstrated in the structure of the text” [6]. In the novel, a number of parallel threads are used to advance the storyline, namely the investigative experience of Ding Gouer, an investigator, who travelled to Jiu Guo; Mo Yan’s correspondence with Li Yidou, a doctoral student in Jiu Guo; and what Mo Yan saw and heard when he was invited to Jiu Guo. These story lines are not independent of each other and unrelated, but are intertwined, not only driving the storyline and dissolving the boundary between fiction and reality, but also exposing the sensitive topic of corruption to the light of day.

The provincial investigator Ding Hooker, as the first character to appear on the scene, does not have the so-called protagonist’s aura, but because of the hitchhiking fiasco, she was scolded by the female driver as “You are a secret agent!” [7], as a specialized government investigator, what he does before the mission begins is dramatic and at the same time, ironic.

The correspondence between Li Yidou, a doctoral student in Jiu Guo City, and Mo Yan already appeared in the first chapter of the novel. According to the development of the story in the novel, Dinghou’er is only a character in Mo Yan’s writing, and he has a predetermined developmental destiny, which should not be affected by the will of the outside world. But in Li Yidou’s letter to Mo Yan, we can see that “Jiu Guo City, some corrupt and humane cadres cooking babies is true, and it is said that some people are investigating the case, and once it comes out, it will shake the world” [Ibid], and “Eating baby boys and drinking ape wine are two important things, and now it’s also the time for the city of Jiu Guo to have a major crisis. are now the very same major events in the city of Jiu Guo, or the two keys to unravelling the mystery of Jiu Guo” [Ibid]. The span from page 16 of the novel, when Ding Gouer receives orders from his superiors to investigate, to the ambush laid in the letters on page 192, makes the overall reading of the work more difficult while at the same time contributing to the inextricable link between the two story lines.

Mo Yan travelled to Jiu Guo not only because of Li Yidou’s frequent invitations, but also because of the influence of society of interpersonal connections that have been passed down in China for thousands of years, and this outcome was inevitable. Mo Yan overlaps with Ding Gouer in Jiu Guo and sinks into the hospitality of Jiu Guo as Ding Gouer does, and this to be identical scene becomes the end of the novel, which makes the novel’s plot echoing the beginning and the end of the novel into a complete closed loop.

“Although these texts are self-contained and relatively independent, they are also characterized by openness and intertextuality, and it is the existence of this

characteristic that creates an intrinsic connection between the different texts, forming an organic narrative whole" [8]. *The Republic of Wine*'s multiple parallel structures have long since transcended simple formal innovations, and are a bold innovation of the novel's content. Through artistic processing, Mo Yan intertwines official corruption, literary dilemmas, and the magic of reality, constructing a tension-filled space of literary significance.

## II. Modern Deconstruction of Traditional Myths

### 1. Double Metaphors of Taotie Cannibalism Myths

"From the 'cannibal feast' in the memory of the past to the 'baby feast' in the fictional world, the author borrows the medium of writing and literary narrative to realize the conversion of the carrier from oral memory to written text, revealing the dynamic construction process of the interaction between individual memory and group memory, and ultimately pointing to the traditional cultural proposition of what makes a human being" [9]. In the *Classic of Mountains and Rivers*, the myth of Taotie, one of the four great beasts of the past, is recorded as a cannibalistic creature with great power and an insatiable desire to eat. In *The Republic of Wine*, the baby boy is served as a special dish for honored guests and named "Kirin bestows child" [7], while the Kirin is a divine creature representing justice in traditional Chinese mythology. Mo Yan's treatment has a double meaning: on the one hand, he writes that the leading officials of Jiu Guo, led by Jing Gangzuan, are consumed by desire and alienated into the power of the Taotie's evil camp; on the other hand, he also sets a dark and depressing tone for the whole novel in advance, in which the Kirin, a symbol of righteousness, is eroded and defeated by the Taotie's camp, and the transcendent power of the traditional divinity is degraded to become an tool for the exchange of power and interests.

### 2. Capital control and industrialized dismemberment

In both Chinese and Western mythology, babies are symbols of life and hope, but in the novel babies are seen as special commodities and food. The staff in the novel asks the father of the baby "So you are selling a special commodity, not a child, right?" [7] and also grades the quality of the babies according to a so-called standard, using the phrase "one hundred yuan per catty for special grade" [Ibid]. "Behind these mixed with both good and bad and even a bit vulgar depictions lies a reference to the spiritual situation of human beings at this time, which is precisely a concentrated outbreak of some kind of resistance or anxiety, and also an effective expression of the underlying emotions hidden behind the material prosperity and physical awakening of society" [10]. This is a disregard for life, a disintegration and dismemberment of traditional myths by capital-controlled industrialization, revealing the devouring of the ethics of life by the commodity economy.

### 3. The Destruction of Justice and the Demise of Chivalry

In analyzing the novel's multi-stranded structure, representative characters such as Ding Gouer and the Fish-Scaled Youth emerge. Ding Gouer, as an investigator who accepts the mission of his superiors, from the absurd behavior on the way to the mine, to the drunkenness that delays the investigation process, to the

loss of faith and perseverance, and finally to the death in the cesspool, “compared to the limitation of verbal irony, situational irony pursues a kind of holistic effect, which is highly hidden, but this kind of untraceable paradox also gives the text a broader space for interpretation” [11]. The period seems to be close to the truth of the event, but ends in failure. In essence, it is Mo Yan’s interpretation of the myth of ‘Kuafu Chasing the truth,’ that the cesspit is not only a burial place for Ding Gouer’s body, but also for Ding Gouer, who eventually “sank to the bottom of the latrine” [7], and that his hero’s end is not only an irony of heroism, but also an end to the myth of enlightenment. “In addition to the irony of heroism, his hero’s end is more like the end of the Enlightenment myth” [12], which is a ruthless dismantling of the traditional Chinese redemption myth.

The Fish-Scaled Youth, as another representative character, appears more frequently in the ‘*Rouhai*’ and ‘*Shentong*’ chapters of the novel, and the origin of the Fish-Scaled Youth is blurred, to make him more mysterious, and he combines a child’s body with extraordinary intelligence and strength, which is in line with the traditional image of the Chinese chivalrous warrior. Although the Fish-Scaled Youth tries his best to free the imprisoned children, but due to the smallness of his power, he can only end up in failure, and his individual power is unable to carry out real redemption. the Fish-Scaled Youth defying danger but eventually to return empty-handed, “eventually disappeared without a trace” [7]. Although the ending of the Fish-Scaled Youth is not explicitly stated in the novel, it can be seen from the ending of Ding Gouer’s death. Mo Yan’s repeats the same mistake, and the promotion of the main officials in Jiu Guo City, that the Fish-Scaled Youth must end up in failure, which also symbolizes that the traditional chivalry is annihilated in the corrupt and degenerate society. annihilation in the corrupt and degenerate Jiu Guo.

### **III. Reflections on Literary Dilemmas**

“In *The Republic of Wine*, human emotions are deeply suppressed by the material space, which is the hidden disadvantage of Jiu Guo, and also the worries and calls conveyed by the novel” [13]. Literature is the artistic presentation of human emotions and thoughts, taking into account both academic exploration and popular entertainment. Although the audience of literature has a wide range, it does not mean that the purity and sanctity of literature can be tainted. In the novel, whether it is Li Yidou’s correspondence with Mo Yan, or Li Yidou blatant mixing of artistic creation, such as acting blatantly ‘giving gifts’ and showing off his family’s status, such behaviour is the corruption and defilement of literature.

Excellent literature can react on the productive forces, and then pull the development of the economy. The famous wine ‘Eighteen Mile Red’ derived from the literary work ‘*Red Sorghum*’ could have become one of the classic cases of literature pulling the development of the economy, but it has been stolen by the power of the capital of the fruits of literature, which led to the ‘Eighteen Mile Red, which is made by Gaomi Winery’ has become one of the most popular wine in the world. “The Eighteen Miles of Red made by the Gaomi Winery is now illegal” [7].

In literary research, appreciation and creation, it is crucial to master the method of literary criticism, but in the novel, Li Yidou does not correctly understand the meaning of literary criticism, let alone the dialectical interaction between criticism and self-criticism, and even threatens that “I don’t know if one day these two boys, Zhou Bao and Li Xiaobao, will run into the muzzle of my gun!” [7]. By adding the story line of Li Yidou’s correspondence with Mo Yan, the story shows the erosion and alienation of literature by capital and secular forces, and reveals the dilemma of literary research.

*The Republic of Wine* seems to be a sharp attack on the officialdom and power in the early period of China’s reform and opening up, but in fact it is a narrative revolution against the spiritual and cultural deprivation of the Chinese people after a special period of Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, Mo Yan actively invokes traditional Chinese mythological archetypes; on the other hand, he uses pioneering Mythological Narrative strategies to modernise and deconstruct traditional myths, pointing out the nature of ‘blasphemy’ (渎神) in modern Chinese society. When myths and legends no longer play a role in guiding spiritual culture, but are instead downgraded to become tools for exploitation and oppression by power and capital, literary creators and literature should actively take social responsibility for criticism and self-criticism, actively engage in cultural exchanges, and gradually answer the traditional cultural proposition of what makes a human being a human being in depth, improve the framework of theoretical research on contemporary Chinese literature, and promote the benign interaction between social reality and traditional cultural resources, so as to provide a constant force for the development of the society and the enrichment of the spiritual world of the general public.

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Поступила в редакцию 24.04.2025