

Example of essay on the history of east asia before 1800

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Compare and contrast the reading and discuss the cultural, political, and religious influence/impact the foundation myths had in the shaping of Chinese, Japanese and Korean society and history.

Introduction:

The foundation myths in China, Korea and Japan differed somewhat although they also had some similarities especially in the inscriptions discovered in various tombs. In China there were great strides made in inscriptions whilst in Korea the emphasis was more on the she bear who bore Tangun with all its mythological implications. The Japanese myth is different and is more sexually explicit as we shall observe later.

Discussion:

'Di's role as a sender of difficulties, moreover was not limited to the floods, droughts and crop failures of the natural world, he could also on occasion stimulate an enemy attack' (De Bary p 20)

The discovery of the Oracle Bone inscriptions in 1989 in Chengjia Village in the Jiangxi Province in 1989 threw a whole new light on the practices of the Late Shang Dynasty. This tomb also provides an inextricable link between the Wucheng site which is also an important link to the Shang Dynasty and which was also discovered in the area. The remains shed new light on this late Bronze Age culture in Southern China.

Conversely one could also glean information on the High God who was extremely important in Chinese Bronze Age culture. The extensive inscriptions on Chinese tombs of this period actually personify this culture. In Divination and Legitimation, the author attempts to tackle the concern the

Chinese had with legitimizing their deities as bodies of worship.

‘ According to the Korean Foundation Myth, Hwanung came down to the world of man and married a she bear who bore Tangun, the first ruler of the age of theocracy’ (De Bary, p 487)

In the Foundation Myth of Korea, the author discusses how the Bronze Age tribes travelled to the Korean peninsula and developed their own Bronze Age culture which relied heavily on mystic influences. Illustrations which were found at the Wu Family Shrine in Shangdong actually depict the foundation myth of Korea which is better known as the Tangun legend which was also recorded in Iryon’s Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms.

Conversely in the Foundation Myth of Japan we are confronted with stories that have a strong sexual element. The creation of Japan as a country actually took place as a cosmic incest between two deities which is followed by another deity flinging rice at a young maiden who dies whilst striking her genitals.

‘ In this account from the Nihongi, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu is identified not as the first of the gods or the creator of the world but simply as the Sun Maiden or Sun Princess, one among the many off spring of the primal pair Iznagi and Iznami’ (De Bary, p 633)

This mythic heritage may perhaps appear to be very crude but is the basis on which the myth of the creation of Japan rests. These stories are documented in ‘ Birth of the Land’ and ‘ Birth of the Sun Goddess’.

Conclusion:

All three foundation myths have differing aspects but are sensational in that they provide a different vision of society at the time. The Japanese is perhaps the most fantastic while the Chinese is the more mystical. The creation of Di as a God is also an important element of Chinese Bronze Age literature and religious study and this compares well with the Korean myth of Tangun.

Works Cited:

Holcombe; A History of East Asia (2011) Theodore Debary; Sources of East Asian Tradition (vol. one) (2011).