

A Study of Female Immortal Images in the "Chaoyuan Xianzhang Tu" (朝元仙仗图)

From the Perspective of The Mythic-archetypal Criticism

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to apply the mythic-archetypal critique to study the concept archetypes of human collectives and the archetypes in Taoist literature and mythology corresponding the feminine immortal images in the "Chaoyuan Xianzhang Tu." By means of image and word juxtaposition, the study investigates the emotional impacts of female immortal images on modern audiences as well as their contribution to current feminist movements. Aiming to clarify the several metaphors and underlying logic of the development of Taoist female immortal images as a symbolic system, this study analyses the Song Dynasty Taoist painting "Chaoyuan Xianzhang Tu," based on the mythic-archetypal criticism, attempting to visually reproduce mythological archetype images in the portrayal of characters in the image. The study examines the various metaphors in Taoist imagery related to the mythic-archetypal perspective, forming three hierarchical functions: "Great Mother Goddess- The Queen Mother of the West (王母) - Flowers and Fruits," "Anima-Female Immortal Worship-Female Immortal Head Portrayal," and "Eternal Life-Feathered Being-feathered sleeves," all of which allude to the ideological implications of Taoist female immortal worship. Frequently, the symbolic, artistic, and meaningful aspects of Taoist art surpass the literal intent of the surface. The "myth-archetype" theory can be used to interpret these images, thereby guiding contemporary viewers to obtain insights into themselves through Taoist visual arts and providing a potential solution to death anxiety. Additionally, the interpretation of female immortal images offers a novel possibility: the integration of yin and yang, which eliminates traditional male dominance and the concomitant "one-sided, self-centered" feminism. This perspective is applicable to the development of contemporary feminist theory.