

ANT 5335 Magic, Myth and Supernatural Final Paper

**When Dracula meets Chinese vampire-
the cross cultural study of vampire
folklores**

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Introduction

Vampire folklores exist in both western and Chinese culture. Vampire is also one of the hottest topics in Hollywood and Hong Kong horror movies, even children's comic books or TV program. Dracula and Chinese vampire are fearsome but very entertaining characters, thanks to their overwhelming images. However, Vampirism is not universal; many communities do not have the concept of vampire, such as the Native Americans and indigenous Oceania people.

Folklorists try to classify all cultural materials into three categories: 'elite culture, mass or popular culture and folklore' (Dundes 1998: 159). The vampire is one of the topics that exist in all three hierarchies.

The encyclopedic Vampire book in 1994 provides a precise definition: 'a vampire "is a reanimated corpse that rises from the grave to suck the blood of living people and thus retain a returned to life" or "a peculiar kind of revenant, a dead person who returned to life and continued a form of existence through drinking the blood of the living"' (Dundes 1998: 161). Jacob Grimm provided another definition for vampire: 'dead men come back, who suck blood' (Dundes 1998: 161).

In this paper, I would employ a summarized and simplified definition of vampire, which is applicable for both Western and Chinese folklore, that is ***the living death or the half death creature***. Vampires are deviant demons because they are neither human being nor death; they cannot fall into any categories.

Referring to the western history, it is supposed that the vampirism started from medieval period of Eastern Europe. However, it can hardly find the time of origin of

Chinese vampire. In the era of new millennium, some people still persist their belief in vampires. It is impossible to prove if vampire is real or not. Instead, I am going to demystify the western and eastern vampire folklores. Through the cross-cultural comparison, I try to portray the similarities and differences between the western and eastern vampires legend, and also the implication and morality behind. Modern vampires in Hollywood scary movies, European legends, and vampires in Chinese literature and Hong Kong movies would be applied as case studies.

The origin of vampire

Western Vampire

In his book *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, Paul Baber mentioned the principal theory of vampire from many scholars:

‘...the “vampires” were people who were not actually dead but merely in a coma and who, on being discovered “coming to life” as they were exhumed, so frightened people that they were then killed’ (Baber 1989: 98)

Later, scholars provided another biological explanation for the origin of vampire. They claimed that people misunderstood the decomposed process of corpse led to the legend. Retarded decomposition, or internal decomposed process of dead body can cause the symptoms of ‘vampire’, such as fresh blood from mouth of a corpse, the growing finger nails and hair, bloating body, the groaning sound makes the corpse looks vivid, etc.

Second, the presence of and plague, and the absence of knowledge of germ and contagious disease also ‘contributed’ to the development of vampirism. In the middle ages, the victims of plague were buried in great hurry; their bodies were only

covered by a thin layer of earth. People sometimes even heard the rumbling sound in night; they supposed it was the groaning sound of vampires. Surely, it also caused by the bloating and bursting corpse during decomposition. Such shallow burial made the disgusting odor emitted out from the decomposed body easily. People supposed the foul odor came from vampires and caused the death of living. The smells usually attracted wolves and dogs to dig the body up. It then explains why wolves (sometimes even dogs) are perceived as demonic animals, or the metaphoric form of vampires.

According to the idea of 'to fight fire with fire' (Baber 1989: 131), it was supposed to use other strong smell substance to fight against the power (the odor) of vampires, garlic is the most typical apotropaics in western culture. According to Philip Tilney, flower and incense using in funeral also have similar function.

Paul Barber commented that there is a great difference between folklore and fictional vampire (like Dracula) is their appearance. The original folklore vampire was a typical peasant; he had clumsy and bloating body when becoming a revenant. However, Hollywood vampires are slender, handsome, seductive, and with fair skin after rejuvenated. Dracula was not more a down-to-earth peasant but the Transylvanian prince; he wore a sophisticated tuxedo with a black cloak every night. Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt act as a pair of irresistible bloodsuckers in *Interview with the vampire*. Exorcists should use cross, holy water, garlic and wooden pin to kill the vampires. I suggest that the refined outlook of vampire in fiction and movie aims to fulfill appetite of audience and readers. Modern vampires are sentimental, they have love and hatred towards living one, no one is willing to see how an ugly demon seducing sexy women, and it is not convincing that witch looking old female

vampires can attack male victims successfully. However, one point should be noted that, Dracula - the Transylvanian vampire was not created by Bram Stoker, it existed long before the creation of the novel.

Chinese vampire

According to Chinese tradition, people had strong belongingness their root – their homeland. There is a Chinese idiom: Products are added value when they leave homeland, and men are devalued when they leave homeland. It is full of sorrow for an individual die in a foreign place. The origin of Jiang Shi - Chinese vampire (殭屍) came from Shang Si(湘西). When a person passed away outside their own village, his/her relatives would hire a Taoist Priest to bring the corpse back. Shang Si is the place with mountainous landscape, it is ineffective to use coffin to transport the dead body. Therefore, Taoist priest would perform several ritual, and use a charm to mobilize the corpse. He then lead this ‘walking zombie’ to jump back to ‘its’ motherland. It is interesting that this kind of ‘body transportation’ do save time and energy!

Giang Shi(s), like western vampire, are living deaths. However, they do not blood, some folklore claims that they absorb energy from moon (the Yin energy). They cannot walk but hopping and popping around, it is because when they become corpse, the joints in limbs are inactive and then stiff as a board, and with their arm outstretched in front of the body. (Sometimes they would use their arms to suffocate the living). Only Taoist priest can immobilize them by charm, or attack them by special ritual or coins sword. These walking zombies are not attractive as the western one, they dress in Ching dynasty custom, with pale face and large dark eye circles. They are bulky and mindless, and are usually manipulate by bad Taoist

priest to attack the living (like stupid and fragile robots in many scientific fictions).

Psychological implication behind the folklore

Western Vampire

1. General interpretation

Vampires usually appear in individual's nightmare, and attacking people while they were sleeping, they replace the monsters in many legends and folklore, and are replaced by UFO's aliens in the 20th century. It projected the fear of human vulnerability in this miserable universe, people believe that some creatures with super power will appear anywhere at night and attack anyone.

2. Freudian approach

In Eastern Europe people believe vampires like to attack their beloved friends or family members. A Greek idiom even stated: 'The vampire hunts its kindred' (Dundes 1998: 163).

Freud suggested that the belief of vampire was caused by the projection and denial of sentiment from living to beloved deceased. The survivors may have ambivalent feeling of love and hate towards the dead. They may feel guilty about towards the deceased, and frustrate that they had been abandoned by the deceased. The livings further deny the feeling of hostile and love and then project to the deceased (i.e. the deceased also have hostile and love feeling towards the survivors). Therefore, the livings have trembling fear about the revenge from the deceased in form of vampire.

3. Psychiatric and psychoanalytic approach

Some psychiatrists suggest that vampirism bases on the clinical case of psychosis,

psychopathic and schizophrenic patients, who drink their own blood or blood from others victims. Clinical vampirism refers the blood drinking activities can release the sexual excitement of those problematic individuals.

Psychoanalytic analysis emphasizes the sexuality aspect of vampire myth: vampirism is emerged from the repression of sexual desire since childhood (the phantasy to mother in the theory of Oedipus complex, and the tendency of oral sadism), for example, such complicated desire would be presented in form of love bite, even blood sucking to achieve the sexual excitement.

Chinese vampire

Unlike Hollywood vampires, Chinese vampires never, or had no ability to seduce their victims, but there is another kind of demon has strongly sexual power, that is Fox spirit. Fox spirit also exist in some vampire movies, they usually attack the young men. In Chinese culture, young girls who died before marriage tend to become ghosts, it is because they are no longer belong to their natal family after death, no one would worship them. Gradually, some of them would become fox spirits, they usually transform as beautiful charming women and seduce young male intellectuals, who are in the way to the public examination, and have sex with the young man until all his energy (semen) had been drained out, and the demon depend on the semen to sustain their power. Needless to say, this kind of myth is just a psychological projection of man's fantasy.

Cultural implication behind the folklore

Western Vampire

1. Religious interpretation

Montague Summers, the scholar who follows the school of literal-historical interpretation of vampirism, indicated that 'For the haunting of a Vampire, three things are necessary: the Vampire, the Devil, and the Permission of Almighty God' (Dundes 1998: 162). It shows that vampire is the representative of profaned; the war between exorcists and vampire symbolizes the battle between sacred and profaned.

2. Symbolic interpretation – 'The blood is life'¹

There is an overwhelming discovery of vampire belief by Ernest Jones: in some place (e.g. The German Alp and Romania), vampires drink milk rather than blood. Alan Dundes then raised an essential question for all vampire folklorists: 'Why is the vampire a "bloodthirsty revenant"?' (Dundes 1998: 163).

According to Greek ideology, they conceive living is wet and death is dry. Richard Broxton Onians also claimed that life is a process of dehydration until died. It is obvious that in all skin care ads, moisturizers are presented as they could penetrate moisture and water into skin and make it supple. In this context, we can understand that blood acts as a life force of rejuvenation and immortality; vampires need blood from living to nourish their lives.

Such concept also existed in the film *Dracula*. Dracula left Johnathan Harker to feed

¹ Dracula shouted out 'The blood is life' when he sent his soul to the demonic power and transformed himself to be a vampire.

three female vampires, they sucked his blood everyday. Harker was then getting older and had grey hair after he escaped from the castle.

Ernest Jones provided another critical symbolic explanation about the burial and death. In his essay in "Psychoanalysis and Anthropology" in 1924, Jones claimed that the death is 'a reversal of birth act leading to a return to the pre-natal existence within maternal womb' (Dundes 1998: 168). Through the live and death transactional process, the deceased is waiting for the rebirth of another new life. The earth is a mother, and the tomb/coffin symbolizes as the womb of mother. If the deceased cannot pass through to the next new life and become the vampire, he/she would 'rebirth' every night and would be searching for blood (symbolizes as milk) from others to sustain his/her life. Some scholars even tried to relate blood-sucking action as erotic breast-feeding activity, and this concept can further explain why do vampire transform to bat or werewolf (both are mammals), but not mosquito (even it is a blood-sucking bud).

It is fascinating that Ernest suggested another contradicting explanation of blood. He explained that in some vampire folklore, female vampires tasted blood from male victim, and blood in that case is a symbol of 'semen'. Many scholars criticize Ernest about this male-biased interpretation, and the contradictory of two extreme polarized explanations. However, I think it is unnecessary to constraint a substance for carrying more than one symbolic meaning. Although the two symbolic meaning seems contradicting, they are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, milk and semen had one common characteristic: both of them are unique from one, not both sex.

Chinese Vampire

Same as the western vampire folklore, Hong Kong vampire stories also provide a moral teaching about the binary opposition between the brightness and darkness. However, I do not agree that Chinese vampire is a symbol of demon. Rather, (usually) the bad Taoist priest who manipulates the walking zombie is the representative of profaned side. It ridiculously shows that the living may even cruel and inhuman than the death. Clearly, the good Taoist Priest represents the brightness side in the movies.

Although the traditional Chinese Jiang Shi(s) are not blood-suckers, but in Hong Kong movies, some vampires bite the livings and drink blood. I do not think that the blood sucking behavior of Chinese vampires implies any sexual meaning as the western one. I suggest that such phenomenon, like Cha Chen Tang (the tea-meal cafeteria²) in Hong Kong, is a hybrid mixture of western and eastern culture, to draw the western elements in local movies, which makes the movies more dramatic. Generally speaking, the Hong Kong styled Chinese vampire is a product of globalization.

Social implication behind the folklore

Western Vampire

Vampire usually emerges during the transitional period. In the book *the vampire: a case book*, du Boulay stated:

‘...there is a special type of case in which a person is thought to have been, between

² The discussion of Cha Chen Tang in the article of *We are what we eat* by Carina Cha, in April 3, 2002, SCMP.

death and burial, taken over by the devil in such a way as to become a true “vampire”. This event involves not only the body but also the soul – a soul becoming in some way so crucially involved with this demonic influence...’(du Boulay 1998: 87).

There are two main reasons for the deceased to become vampire in Greece: whose death ritual had been neglected and who had unabsolved sin, like unbaptized infants. Referring to the first reason, it reflects that the disrespect of death ritual will cause misfortune and disaster.

Second, vampire has strong relation with darkness and demonic power. In Ambeli, villagers believed that the uncorrupted body of deceased was not a sign of vampire, but its sinful soul. Like the fiction *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, Dracula betrayed the Christian God and became a demon. Therefore, there are three basic ‘elements’ for the emergence of vampire: half death, sinful and undecomposed body.

There is another social implication of vampirism in Greek: the destruction of social obligation. Sometimes, deviant (the one without friends or relatives) or old people were usually neglected by the public, no one was willing to perform the death rituals for them, and their soul had high tendency to be collected by demon and would be transformed as a vampire. The belief of vampire thus has a social function: it triggers off people sheer fear of revenge and hatred, emphasizes the importance of social obligation and kinship relation, and further achieves the social conformity.

Some anthropologists, like Levi-Strauss had studied the cyclic pattern (of dance) in death rituals and marriage alliance in Greek tradition, it was discovered that this anti-clockwise direction of cyclic pattern was the origin of vampire belief. The

cyclic dancing pattern strongly relates to two important stages of life: marriage and death. In marriage alliance, the wrong cyclic pattern means the return of blood, that means the practice of incest. Boulay further mentioned:

‘The body thus passes through a vital transition from the moment of death until the moment when it is prepared for the visiting of the community: the pollution of death, seen categorically as one of blood, is washed away by water and wine ... By this time the change from pollution to holiness has become so extreme that the body is, as it awaits burial, conceived in the same terms as that used for the relic of the saints – “the holy relics”’ (du Boulay 1998: 92).

It clearly shows that blood symbolizes as secular and pollution in Greece. Anti-clockwise direction in rituals is a metaphor of the circulation of blood, in this unstable transition period, if participants perform it in opposite direction, which implies as the return of blood, which make the deceased unholy.

It is very interesting that Greek also believed a vampire will be created if a cat passes across the body. Actually ‘a cat across the body’ is just a generalized expression of anything stepping or passing over the body. Between the death and burial, the soul is in the middle between the earth and the sky, and waiting for angel to take its soul from nostrils. If anyone or anything violates the death ritual, the angel cannot achieve the duty, and then the soul will be taken by demon, which further leads to reanimation.

Cat is chosen as a negative and evil symbol because it is ‘being domesticated and yet at the same time unsocialized’ (du Boulay 1998:103). Such concept definitely matches with the pollution theory from Mary Douglas. Cat is in between two

categories and cannot be classified. Villagers also believed that if an old person was neglected and die alone, cats would eat up one's body.

Moreover, In the medieval time, vampire was the 'victim' of scapegoating, similar as witches. They are the one to be blamed for others unexplained death.

Chinese vampire

The emergence of Chinese vampire has similar social implication as the western vampires. In the Hong Kong film *Mr. Vampire I*, the Yam's family suffered from bad luck, it was discovered that their grandfather had been buried in improper way and very poor Feng shui (geomancy), which was arranged by a bad Taoist priest intentionally. The grandfather was then transformed as a vampire and attacked his descendants. This shows that death ritual and the method of burial of ancestor had a great influence to the livings.

On the other hand, as in the movie *Mr. Vampire*, Chinese vampire folklore has strong relation with geomancy. Geomancy likes a kind of magic, which explains one's dignity, e.g. how does one have good fortune but another suffering from misfortune. People can improve their luck by geomancy also. Feng shui also serves as a linkage between the ancestor and descendants. The location of an ancestor's cemetery can influence his/her descendant's fortune. It means that the death can manipulate the living's lives. Therefore, Feng Shui reinforces the importance of social obligation: descendant should look after the ancestor even they passed away already. Referring to the business term, it is a 'win-win' strategy if the graveyard of the ancestor can be placed in a good position; it is because the ancestor can 'rest' in a comfortable place, while descendants can enjoy the good fortune.

Structural implication behind the folklore

Western Vampire

Similar to myth, the vampire folklore also consists of the binary structure of opposite elements. In this part, I will focus on the case study of the novel *Dracula* and the Hong Kong movie *Mr. Vampire I and II*, the diagrams of the dichotomous structure would be shown in the following content, and several aspects are chosen to analyze specifically.

Dracula

1. Live and Death

Needless to say, similar to many religious myths, the novel indicates the binary opposition of live and death, the anxiety towards death is the universal human nature; the immortality of Dracula tries to deny this binary boundary. There are two separate parts in the novel, the bright, urban area (London) and the dark, abandoned area (Transylvanian), and the living place and the death (the coffin or Dracula's castle). Dracula could metaphorically transform from human being to animals (such as bats and werewolf), passed through the live and the death, and transported between London to Transylvanian. Although Dracula was belonged to the demonic side, but he broke the boundary between the binary fields, he was both the living and the death, he experienced the abnormal cycle of birth, death and rebirth everyday. Moreover, Dracula is a hybrid between human and demon, he is cruel, inhuman but sentimental at the same time, he still missed his late lover Elizabeth and fell in love with Mina.

2. Paranormal vs. science

It is interesting that even the novel was written in 1897, it already reflects the Enlightenment scientific critique. It portrayed the existence of skeptical and

paranormal discourse in the ideological arena. Maybe it is the pioneer of New Age movement. In the story, there is an overwhelming character – Dr. Van Helsing. Like the exorcist in the movie *the Exorcist* (1973), Van Helsing is a paranormal hero; he is a professor in university and also an exorcist at the same time. Compares with another character – Lucy's fiancé Dr. Seward, Van Helsing understood the limitation of science. When Dr. Seward commented that Lucy experienced 'unnatural loss of blood' (Stocker 1897), Van Helsing explained that medical science could not discover the reason between it was the demonic power torturing Lucy.

3. Virgin vs. carnal woman

There is a prominent motif reappears in the novel; it contains a moral lesson to female. Mina and Lucy experienced different dignity. Lucy presented as a sexually aggressive woman, she was attractive, out-going and always wanted some men to love her, while Mina was traditional, decent and quite. According to Anne Cranny Francis, Mina is 'always accepts patriarchal ideology and remains sexually passive, submissive, receptive' (Gelder 1996: 78). Mina always envied on Lucy's attractiveness, but she also confessed to her hidden excess sexual desire.

Lucy is the poorest character in the movie because she was seduced and killed by the werewolf (Dracula). Later she became a cold-blooded vampire. When Van Helsing asked Dr. Seward to kill the vampire Lucy, he said she became the concubine of demonic god. Finally, she suffered from brutal mutilation; she had been stacked by a wooden pin through the heart and decapitated. Obviously, the brutal attacks act as a punishment to her behavior. The story portrayed the female characters as dependent, helpless and weak, they had to receive help from the male, and it tends to provide women a lesson of how to behave proper in this society.

However, Elaine Showalter commented that Mina was the representative of 'new woman', the idea from late-Victorian feminist. At the later part of the novel, Mina became more independent to choose to fall in love with Dracula. Therefore, some scholar had the opposite interpretation that Stocker was also the yardstick of feminism.

4. Men vs. Women

In the novel, male vampire (Dracula) only sucked blood from female (Mina and Lucy) but not male. In opposite, when Johnathan Harker was trapped in Dracula's castle, he was seduced and attacked by three female vampires. It is interesting that both male and female did not attack people with the same sex.

5. Love and hatred

The boundary between these two aspects is comparatively bizarre. Mina had an ambivalence sentiment towards Dracula, because he was her lover but also the one killed her best friend Lucy.

Diagram of the dichotomous relationship

Sacred	Profaned
Women	Men
Love	Hatred
Virgin	Slut
Live	Death
Exorcist	Scientist
Brightness	Darkness

Urban	Remote
White	Red
Wife	Concubine
Rapture/ecstasy	Suffering

Chinese vampire

Same as *Dracula*, there is also the binary structure of the story in *Mr. Vampire I and II*, and the boundary between the opposite elements is more prominent and simple.

1. Live and Death

Obviously, the walking vampire is the representative of death side. Like *Dracula*, they were also the one who broke the boundary between the lives and the death: when the charm on their forehead had been removed, they could be reincarnated again.

2. Sacred and profaned

In the *Mr. Vampire I*, the good Taoist priest represented the sacred side of the world, he helped the Yam's family to combat with the demonic vampire. However, in my opinion, it was the bad Taoist priest instead of the vampire (the grandfather who had been buried improperly) represented the dark side. The grandfather was also a victim, he had been transform as a tool to attack his descendants, and he had no consciousness and was manipulated by the bad Taoist priest. It also delineates that sometimes the live may even cruel and inhuman than the death.

In the *Mr. Vampire II*, it is interesting that there was the materialistic professor (looked like an archaeologist) with his two assistants performed the profaned side in the

movie. They discovered three corpses; two adults and one child in a cave, and they brought them to the lab and was going to resell them to customers as antiquity. One of the assistants was very silly and removed the charms on the corpse and made them alive, the three Giang Shi(s) escaped from the lab and influenced the whole territory. The good priest helped the police to destroy (burn) the vampires, but the archaeologist tried to stop him because he would lose his great valued business. It is fascinating that there is no more bad Taoist priest; instead, the good Taoist priest should compete with the materialistic and greedy person.

Diagram of the dichotomous relationship

Live	Death
Sacred	Profaned
Taoist Priest	Vampire
Consciousness	Non-consciousness
Materialistic	Spiritualistic
Modern	Ancient

Conclusion

Modern vampires are the mixture of human, animals and demon. They have enormous supernatural power; they can transform to bats or werewolves, they are suffering from the sentimental feeling like human. Their dramatic life (or after life) full of sorrow, their love and hatred never end. Hollywood vampire movie is a blend of horror, sex and love.

Ironically, Hong Kong vampire movies in 80's to 90's are not as serious as the

western one. The films combine elements of horror, humor and Kung Fu. Giang Shi are not attractive as Dracula, it is mindless, ugly and blind. It reflects that although the concept of *living death* exists across different culture, it is presented in very different ways.

Finally, I find one interesting similarity between Dracula and Giang Shi in the screen. Both of them can resist the force of gravity. Dracula can slide from one point to another point smoothly, like ice-skater in skating ring; while Giang Shi can pop up to several meters high before it reaches the land again. Are these the indications of their supernatural power, or just the special motion effects to scare theatre audience?

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