

An Inquiry into the Folklore of King Lanling and the Hidden Cultural Psychology Behind It

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Abstract. For the legendary historical figure King Lanling, not many written records have been left in the official history, but the folklore about him is more than 200,000 words long. These legends, which were created and spread by the grassroots people, are legendary and romantic, although they are not contained in the history books. Not only can we see the words, deeds, character, merits and life experiences of King Lanling, but also reflect the psychological basis of the people in circulating and processing these stories. In this paper, we will analyze the legends about King Lanling that are widely circulated among the people, especially the most mysterious one about King Lanling wearing a mask in battle, and explore the reasons for these legends and the hidden cultural psychology.

Keywords: King Lanling; folklore; cultural psychology.

1. The folklore about King Lanling

King Lan Ling was the third son of Emperor Gao Cheng of Northern Qi Dynasty, and was an important general of the late Northern Qi. There are many legends about King Lanling among the grassroots people, and more than 50 of them can be collected at present. Among them, there are legends depicting King Lanling's wisdom and courage and his skillful victory over the enemy, represented by "Kill the Thief General with Wisdom", which tells that King Lanling took advantage of the enemy's slackness and unpreparedness, and used the fog as a cover to blend into the enemy camp and killed the enemy's vanguard officer in disguise. And there is folklore that King Lanling attached importance to agricultural production and cared for the common people, represented by "The Reclamation of King Lanling", which tells that King Lanling, as a member of the royal family, personally took care of the people in his own fief. In addition, "The Northern History" contains two anecdotes about him, which show that he was magnanimous: First, when he was the governor of Yingzhou, Yang Shishen, a military attaché, reported his corruption to the emperor so that King Lanling was relieved of his official duties. And later, when he conquered Dingyang, Yang Shishen was also in the army and feared reprisals. In order to prevent him from being too worried, King Lanling made a small excuse and blamed him 20 army sticks to make him feel at ease. Secondly, when he returned from the court, only one of his servants was left and the rest were missing. King Lanling returned to the mansion alone and did not punish the servant who left without authorization.

The most legendary one of these stories is that King Lanling would wear a hideous iron mask whenever he went to the war. As to why King Lanling wore a mask on the battlefield, there is a popular theory that his looks were too feminine to intimidate the enemy on the battlefield, so he made a hideous mask and wore it to chill the enemy during the battle. However, is it true that King Lanling wore a mask to the battle as the folklore says?

2. King Lanling wore a mask in battle

When the folklore that King Lanling wore a mask in battle appeared is unknown at present, but the legend was already established in the Tang Dynasty. "The Old Book of Tang" Volume 29 "Music II" records: "The big mask came from the Northern Qi. King Lanling of the Northern Qi Dynasty, who was a wise man with a beautiful face, often wore a false to face the enemy." [1] The record in "The General Canon" is also the same as that in "The Old Book of Tang". In addition, Cui Linqin of the Tang Dynasty also recorded in "The Records of the Teaching Place": "The big mask

came from the Northern Qi. The King Lanling, brave but looked like a woman, felt that he was not enough to threaten the enemy, so he carved wood as a mask, and wore it in the battle.”[2] In Duan Anjie’s “Miscellaneous Records of Music”, he further interpreted that “his face was not powerful, so every time when he entered the battlefield, he put on a mask, and then he won the battle.”[3] To the Song Dynasty, the image of King Lanling largely unchanged, Ye Tinggui’s “Hai Lu Sui Shi - Music Department” records: “The King Lanling of the Northern Qi Dynasty, had fair body and beautiful style. He put on a mask to fight the enemy, and then made several outstanding achievements. The people of the Northern Qi Dynasty made a dance to follow him, named Dai Mian Dance.”[4] The famous song “King Lanling Enters the Battlefield”, which interpreted the great victory of King Lanling at Mangshan, was performed in the song and dance drama “Dai Mian” in the Tang dynasty, the dancer playing King Lanling also wore a mask on his head, “dressed in purple, waist gold, holding a whip”[5], singing and dancing, making various gestures of striking and stabbing. In the “King Lanling Enters the Battlefield”, which has been handed down in Japan to this day, the dancer also wears a head mask. “The Explanation of Dance Musics ” describes: “The dancer is crowned in the shape of a dragon, with a sharp nose and angry eyes, a mask with a hanging jaw underneath, and dances with a thin golden beam in one hand.”[6]

In fact, what King Lanling wore in battle was not a mask, but a kind of helmet. This helmet was not the common helmet that could show his face, but blocked his face together. The descriptions can be found in historical materials such as “The book of the Northern Qi and “Zi Zhi Tong Jian”. By analyzing these historical materials, we can know that this kind of iron-faced armor was indeed popular in the armies of Eastern Wei, Western Wei, and Northern Qi, not only for the royal generals, but also for the ordinary soldiers. From the point of view of Gao Huan with marksmen specializing in shooting the eyes of the iron-faced army, this iron-faced armor can only reveal two eyes after wearing it, which can be said to be armed to the teeth. When the army of Southern Liang saw Hou Jing’s iron-faced army, they fled without a fight, seemingly because they had never seen such a hideous appearance and special army equipment armed to the teeth, and fled in shock. Thus, it seems that this kind of iron-faced armor was popular in the Eastern Wei, Western Wei and Northern Qi, and was not adopted by the Southern Dynasty army.

Therefore, what King Lanling wore when he entered the battlefield was not purely a mask, but a derivative of art. According to the “iron face”, the mask was derived, and then the legend that King Lanling used a mask to cover his face because he was afraid of not being able to deter the enemy because of his beauty was derived.

3. The reasons for the formation of the folklore and the hidden cultural connotation behind it

3.1 The King Lanling fought bravely

During the period of Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties, there were frequent fights and wars among various countries, and people were in the midst of chaos, displaced and could not live and work in peace and happiness. The rulers of each country hoped that there would be a brave general who could lead their own troops to win the war, so as to gain more strength. At the same time, the people deeply hoped that there would be a savior who was heroic enough to save them from the wars. King Lanling led his army to victory in several battles, especially the battle of Mangshan, which was a heroic and surprising victory. In this battle, King Lanling led 500 cavalry into the Zhou’s army formation. At the gates of Jinyong, “he removed the armor and show his faces”[7], so that the defenders who recognized the arrival of friendly troops dispatched crossbowmen to fight. Inside and outside cooperation, only 500 people won the battle of Mangshan, so he won the appreciation of the people. In addition, King Lanling was heroic in fighting, which made the people’s heroic complex, that is, the feelings of admiration and praise of heroes, had a suitable projection object. Inspired by the emotional factors of love and worship in people’s hearts, things would be exaggerated in people’s memory and imagination. So, the King Lanling, who was

already extremely brave, would naturally get an enlarged image and become a victorious general in the process of communication. In this context, many legends about King Lanling's bravery in battles would naturally be made, and with the oral transmission by the people from generation to generation, King Lanling's deeds would become more and more divine.

3.2 King Lanling had deep affection with common people and soldiers

It is mentioned in the tombstone inscription of King Lanling that after he was crowned as the Founding Prince of Lecheng County, King Lanling began to personally organize farmers to reclaim wasteland, build irrigation facilities, and lead his soldiers to irrigate the dry land while drilling among the thin land of the river bank, turning a barren year into a bountiful one. And he distributed the harvested food to the old, weak, widows and orphans in the vicinity, showing deep affection with the people. In addition, "The Northern History" records that: "As a general, he was diligent and careful. Whenever he got a sweet taste, he would share it with his soldiers even though a melon and several fruits." [8] In other words, he shared joys and sorrows with his soldiers, even if he occasionally got a melon and fruit, he would share it with everyone, which made the soldiers moved and unforgettable. In the era of King Lanling, the minority groups unified the north and gave rise to constant wars. The Northern Qi regime established by the Xianbei tribe was highly barbaric, and the rulers respected the Xianbei customs which were capable of killing and violence. They paid more attention to grazing than agriculture in production, and ignored the Han civilization, which resulted that a large area of land was barren and uncultivated, and people were displaced and miserable. In such an environment, the people looked forward to a ruler who respected their culture and cared about their production to save them from the fire. As a member of the royal family, King Lanling was open-minded. He realized the importance of agricultural production to the survival of the country, so he organized farming personally and took care of his soldiers, which naturally got the praise of the people and soldiers who were looking forward to a peaceful and happy life. Further, they made stories about King Lanling to spread.

3.3 The King Lanling himself was mysterious

In the history books, there is no information about King Lanling's birth mother. The mothers of his brothers were all recorded, but his mother was the only one who did not leave a single word. There were rumors that his mother was a temple nun or a prostitute, so her status was too humble to be recorded. It made the origin of King Lanling a little mysterious, which easily aroused the curiosity and creative inspiration of the people. In addition, King Lanling died young because he was involved in the power struggle of the Northern Qi royal family and poisoned by the emperor when he was less than thirty years old. According to "The Book of Northern Qi", King Lanling returned to the imperial court after the Battle of Mangshan, and was told by the Emperor of Qi that: "you went into the battlefield too deep and would regret you defeat" [9]. Therefore, he was suspected. In order to save himself, he even corrupted himself to eliminate the suspicion from the emperor. After the Battle of Huainan, King Lanling tried to avoid being the commander of the southern expedition so as to eliminate the suspicion, but he failed finally. In the fourth year of Wuping times, the Emperor Gao Wei ordered Xu Zhifan to poison him at the age of about thirty. Thus, the death of King Lanling was also covered with a mysterious veil. It could be said that the life and death of King Lanling were all legendary, leaving ample room for the people to make up legends.

3.4 The dissemination of the Song of "King Lanling Enters the Battlefield"

After King Lanling was killed, the dance music "King Lanling Enters the Battlefield", which praised his bravery and wisdom, was still widely circulated among the people. Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty issued an imperial edict to collect the dance musics of the previous dynasties, and "King Lanling Enters the Battlefield" was collected as one of the dance musics of the Sui Palace. Many historical books of the Tang Dynasty, such as "The Records of the Church Square", "The

General Canon”, “The Miscellaneous Records of Music” and “The Old Book of Tang”, all recorded this song. To the seventh year of Zhenguan times, Emperor Li Shimin made “The Map to Break Dance ”on the basis of traditional music, and “he ordered Lv Cai to coordinate the music and rhythm, Li Baiyao, Yu Shinan, Chu Liang, Wei Zheng to make song words”. It was said that this dance music sounded beautiful and elegant and sad and generous, and the formation was spectacular and powerful, and the characters were vivid so that the ministers cheered all together after watching this dance. This dance was so popular among the people that was widely spread. In the Qing Dynasty, “The Revision of the Records of the Church Square ” recorded this scene: “This dance was popular in the early Tang Dynasty, especially in the palace. During the period of Empress Wu, King Wei once played King Lanling on the stage at the age of five.” In the Northern Song Dynasty, Dasheng House, the department that produced music at that time, rearranged the old music into new songs, which not only had lyrics, but also filled in the scores, and was said to be very popular. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, many operas about the King Lanling began to appear, vividly interpreting various legends and stories of the King Lanling. While enjoying these performances and the spiritual feast, the public also discussed the legendary experiences of the main character, further spreaded and rendered the heroic deeds, and re-created these stories through imagination at the same time. As a result, the image of King Lanling became more and more divine.

4. Summary

The King Lanling was a legendary figure, and many legends about him are still in circulation. Nowadays, the legendary stories of King Lanling have widely penetrated into all areas of our culture. Not only are there rich legends and dances of King Lanling, but the stories of King Lanling have also been adapted into various opera genres and television programs, such as Beijing Opera, Hebei Opera, Gezai Opera and so on. The hidden cultural connotation behind the folklore not only reflects the psychological pursuit and rich imagination and creativity of the general people, but also expresses the moral standards and heroic spirit of Chinese, which is accepted and inherited by the people. It is our treasures.

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