



African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

Studies on the Origin and Cultural Value of Chinese Mulberry Culture

Jian Zhang¹ , Mengyue Yu² , Zain Abbas³ , Qiqi Liu⁴  and Zijun Yin^{5*} 

¹Center for Studies of Education and Psychology of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 50533828@qq.com

²Center for Studies of Education and Psychology of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 893086414@qq.com

³Center for Studies of Education and Psychology of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: zainabbas7587@gmail.com

⁴Education Department of Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China. E-mail: 85179793@qq.com

⁵School of Fine Arts Southwest, University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 851418277@qq.com

Article Info

Volume 4, Issue 1, February 2024

Received : 14 October 2023

Accepted : 16 January 2024

Published : 05 February 2024

doi: [10.51483/AFJHSS.4.1.2024.57-68](https://doi.org/10.51483/AFJHSS.4.1.2024.57-68)

Abstract

China has been founded on agriculture and mulberry trees since ancient times. The cultural belief under the mode of "men plowing and women weaving", as the emotional link of the cultural identity of the Chinese nation, restricts this person's traditional thinking, thus creating a valuable traditional cultural form. In this study, we mainly use the method of literature analysis. By exploring and considering the origins and development of the mulberry and its associated myths, legends, and primitive religions, the cultural implications and cultural value of the mulberry in terms of mulberry rites is gained. Moreover, based on the economic and cultural environment of the present era, the ecological concept of harmonious development of heaven and man and the spirit of industrious and simple farming in farming culture are reviewed and summarized to reflect on promoting sustainable development.

Keywords: Mulberry, Culture, Harmony between man and nature

© 2024 Jian Zhang et al. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. The Origin of Chinese Mulberry Culture

1.1. Origin and distribution of mulberry culture

"Mulberry" is a pictographic character of the mulberry tree with the characters of "𣎵" "𣎵" and "𣎵" on oracle bones. There are numerous names of "Mulberry" in ancient documents, such as "red hibiscus", "Srang", "kongsang", "ZiSang" and so on. The form of the oracle bone inscription is "𣎵", Xu Hao of the Qing Dynasty mentioned in his annotation of *ShuoWenJieZiZhuJian*, that the inscriptions are "the shape of interleaving of text and image."¹

* Corresponding author: Zijun Yin, School of Fine Arts Southwest, University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 851418277@qq.com

¹ Xu, Hao. (1995). *ShuoWenJieZiZhuJian*, 221, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.

“Hua”, written in oracle bone inscription is “𠄎” , with two human shapes, one upright and the other inverted, which is extended to “the creation of all things in nature” Song version of jade chapter – dagger Department said: “alter, shift.”² “Yi · Heng” said: “ If the sun and moon follow the laws of celestial motion, they can illuminate all things for ever, and following the natural laws of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, the four seasons cycle back and forth, and can breed all things.”³

The earliest combination of “Wen” and “Hua” in Chinese history is the *Bi Gua · Yu Zhuan* of *The Book of Changes*: “It is a law of providence that hard and soft are interwoven, it is the rule of mankind that they should observe rites and exercise moderation. By observing the movements of the constellations, we can learn about the changing seasons, by observing the development of human culture, we can enlighten the people and build a civilized society.”⁴ Harmonious social relations are the fusion agents of rapid social development. Because of the organic combination of astronomy and the humanities, it can be transformed into the world. Therefore, “enlighten people through civil administration and education” refers to “culture”, That is a more accurate interpretation of the term culture in the traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

The ancient rulers set out from the institutions of heaven and earth to place morality first, to govern by the method of ceremonial rule, to place education first, to influence the people, and to form moral customs. China’s 5,000-year history of mulberry cultivation has fostered a colorful mulberry culture that reflects China’s traditional social production and life patterns. According to *Mencius*, “By planting mulberry trees next to a five-acre residential field, 50-year-olds can wear silk.”⁵ *Songs of Kingdom Wei- Acres of Mulberry Orchards* (present Shanxi Province): “Across acres of mulberry orchards, girls are picking the leaves of the young berries.” The mulberry trees form a strip of intercropping in the fields between the ten-acre plots, which not only protects the crops in the fields, but also makes the most of the space. It is not only an economic crop, but also a soil and water conserving tree species. According to records of *Historical Records of the Five Emperors’ Chronicle*: “The Yellow Emperor lived on Mount Xuanyuan and married the daughter of the Xiling Emperor, named Lei Zu, who was his legal wife. She bore two sons, Xuan Xiao and Chang Yi, both of whom succeeded to the throne and ruled the world. According to an inscription in the sacred land of Lei Zu in the Tang Dynasty:” Lei Zu pioneered methods of mulberry breeding and horticulture, as well as methods of extracting and weaving silk. And she made numerous good suggestions to the Yellow Emperor, helped the people to plant mulberry trees and raise silkworms, prescribed various dress systems, promoted wedding ceremonies, built palaces and houses, and laid the foundations of the state. The Yellow Emperor unified the Central Plains, and Lei Zu’s contribution to it did not disappear after his death. Later generations revered Lei Zu as the first silkworm god. “ *Lv’s Commentaries of History · postscript Volume 5* pointed out that: Lei Zu, wife of the Yellow Emperor, was the first to invent mulberry and sericulture and was known as “the God of the First Silkworm”. That is, the God who first taught men to carry mulberries, to raise silkworms, and to weave silk.

It can be seen that mulberry culture is not only an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, but also a way of livelihood for the vast number of working people in China since ancient times.

Mulberry trees are a habitat for silkworms, and mulberry forests promote silk development. Related research data shows that the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, Liaohe River and Haihe River basins are the focus of the origin of Chinese sericulture culture. A large number of silk relics were unearthed at eight sites in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, Liaohe River and Haihe River basin, followed by a smaller number of silkworm fabric relics in Inner Mongolia and Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Li Binhong wrote in *An Approach to the Origin of the Silkworm and Silk Weaving Industry in China*: According to a large number of ancient legends and archeological data, there are numerous places of origin for China’s sericulture and silk weaving industries. In the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, about 7,000 years ago, the Hemudu people began weaving silk by hand from the cocoons of wild silkworms. More than 5,000 years ago, people could weave silk articles using cocoon reels. Combined with the legend of the emperor’s wife, Leizu, it can be inferred that mulberry silk was produced in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River about 5,000 years ago.⁶

² Songben Yupian. (1983). *China Bookstore Publishing House*, 1210.

³ Ruan, Yuan. (1980). *Shisanjingzhushu- Zhou Yi Zheng Yi*, 47, *Zhonghua Book Company*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37

⁵ Kong, Fanli. (2007). *Ancient Chinese Mulberry Culture. Guoxue*, 6, 51-52.

⁶ Li Binhong. (1989). *An Approach to the Origin of the Silkworm and Silk Weaving Industry in China. Geographical Research*, 2, 30-36.

1.2. Chinese Mulberry Rituals and Ancient Mulberry Breeding Worship

The famous British anthropologist James George Frazer, in his masterpiece *Golden Bough*, mentions that early humans worshiped trees, flowers and plants. "In the eyes of primitive man, the whole world was alive, and flowers, plants, and trees were no exception. They all have a human soul, and are treated as such."⁷

Mulberry is a plant that can stand alone as a forest. Mulberry trees have shear resistance properties. The higher they are cut, the more vigorous they become. They are tenacious and vigorous. Mulberry leaves are inexhaustible, and mulberry fruit is abundant. In consequence of these characteristics, an ancient society, which attached great importance to the inheritance of its children, was not very bright in science, submitted to the dictates of God and Providence, and lacked a strong explanation of natural phenomena. Men longed for a harvest from heaven, and gave birth to children. They chose animals or plants that could communicate with heaven and man as representatives to reach heaven through sacrifice. The ancestors chose the mulberry as the representative of fertility sacrifices. That is to say, the mulberry tree is deified and given a certain sacred connotation by the metaphorical association of the mulberry tree with the human beings of the world. Thus the mulberry tree was given a sacred connotation and a fertility cult.

Mr. Zhu Tianshun says that, according to the records of ancient Chinese books, the plants deified and worshiped by the ancients were the mulberry and the grain plants associated with agricultural production, followed by the peach, reed, yingpu, etc.⁸ The mulberry was first mentioned in ancient Chinese plant worship, according to the results of Mr. Zhu's study. In 1965, a bronze pot with a mulberry picking pattern was unearthed from the Baihuatan Middle School in Chengdu, China, during the Warring States period, showing a beautiful image of a mulberry picker in the sun (Figure 1).

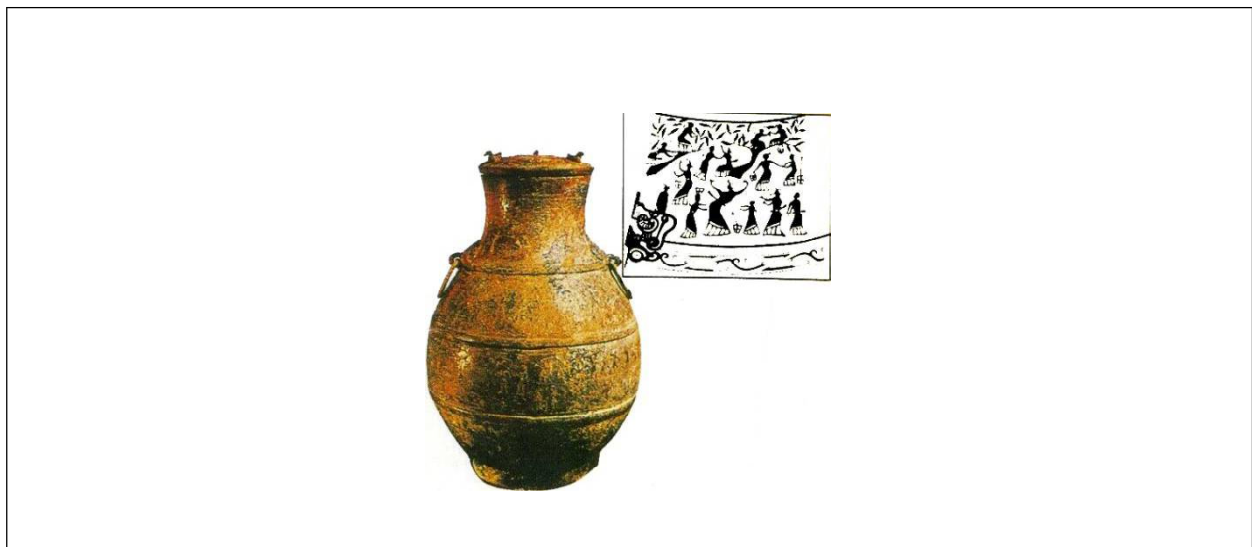


Figure 1: Mulberry Picking in the Warring States Tomb at Baihuatan Middle School, Chengdu

From the rubbing pattern (Figure 2), it appears to have a set of combined patterns of "mulberry tree and women" on its neck. Unfolding the above combined pattern forms a picture of a woman picking mulberry.⁹ *Mozi · Mingui II* said: "The State of Yan has marshes, just as the State of Qi has country, the State of Song has mulberry forests, and the State of Chu has the lake of Yun-meng. They are all places for men and women to meet and visit."¹⁰

The most fundamental worship of the ancient Chinese ancestors was the worship of life and reproduction. The mulberry tree itself is highly fertile, and the fruit of the mulberry is of great yield. Thus, in the eyes of ancient ancestors, the mulberry had a fertility cult, and the mulberry became a symbol of vitality and fertility.

⁷ James, George Frazer. (1987). *The Golden Bough*. Chinese Folk Literature and Art Publishing House.

⁸ Zhang, Daoyi. (2001). *Chinese Patterns for Five Thousand Years: Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period*. Art Design Technology Co., Ltd.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Sun, Yirang. (1954). *Reference to Mozi: Zhuzijicheng*. Zhonghua Book Company.



Figure 2: Mulberry Trees and Women

Integrating the myths and legends about mulberry trees, such as “Yi Yin was born in Kongsang” and “Confucius was born in Kongsang”, we found that they have the following common characteristics: first, the way of pregnancy is similar, and second, the birthplace is associated with mulberry trees.¹¹ In a cultural sense, this suggests that the mulberry was a symbol of the ancient concept of fertility worship, representing life and fertility, and thus the myth of the mulberry giving birth to people could be generated.¹²

Some scholars have pondered why the ancestors of the pre-Qin dynasty worshiped the mulberry. For example, Zhao Guohua argues that mulberry worship originated from fertility worship. Discussing the symbolism of floral motifs, he noted that they were based on patterns of flowers and plants on painted pottery. Combined with material from *The Book of Songs*, We speculate that ancient Chinese ancestors used various plants as symbols of female genitalia. The symbol is a woody plant, or mulberry. Having discovered the secret of the origin of the worship of the god of fertility, we may perhaps understand that the worship of the ‘mulberry grove’ by the Yin-shang is the worship of the god of fertility.¹³ “The origin is also due to the fact that the ancestors of the Yin and Shang dynasties used the mulberry to symbolize the vulva and worship it.... Mulberry leaves are covered with leaves and fruit, so there is no mystery as to why it was chosen by ancient humans as a symbol of female genitalia.”¹⁴ The ancestral worship of the mulberry may not only be classed as a fertility cult, but the significance of the mulberry to human life cannot be substituted. Mulberry provides food, the mulberry leaves feed the silkworms and indirectly provide food and clothing again, mulberry trunks can be used to make bows and arrows, repair houses, and more. It is precisely because people live with the mulberry day and night, in production and in life, that a detailed understanding of the mulberry exists. While focusing on mulberry’s utility value, they also see it as vigorous and renewable. It is only in the contemplation of its own life and reproduction that one sees it as the embodiment of life and reproduction.

In 1956, two highly realistic portraits of Eastern Han courtiers were unearthed in Xindu, Chengdu, showing scenes of coitus between men and women.¹⁵ The academic circles named it: “Secret drama diagram”, “high media diagram”, “Commit adultery diagram”, “Mulberry Forest commit adultery diagram”. With the birds jumping and singing, the apes climbing and playing, it ends with a secular climax of yin-yang traffic, joy and harmony (Figure 3). Its cultural connotation is the evolution and focus of reproductive worship and life consciousness.

By prolonged-term observation of the growth properties of the mulberry, the mulberry gradually became a symbol of fertility and reproduction in the minds of the ancestors, and a strong correlation between the

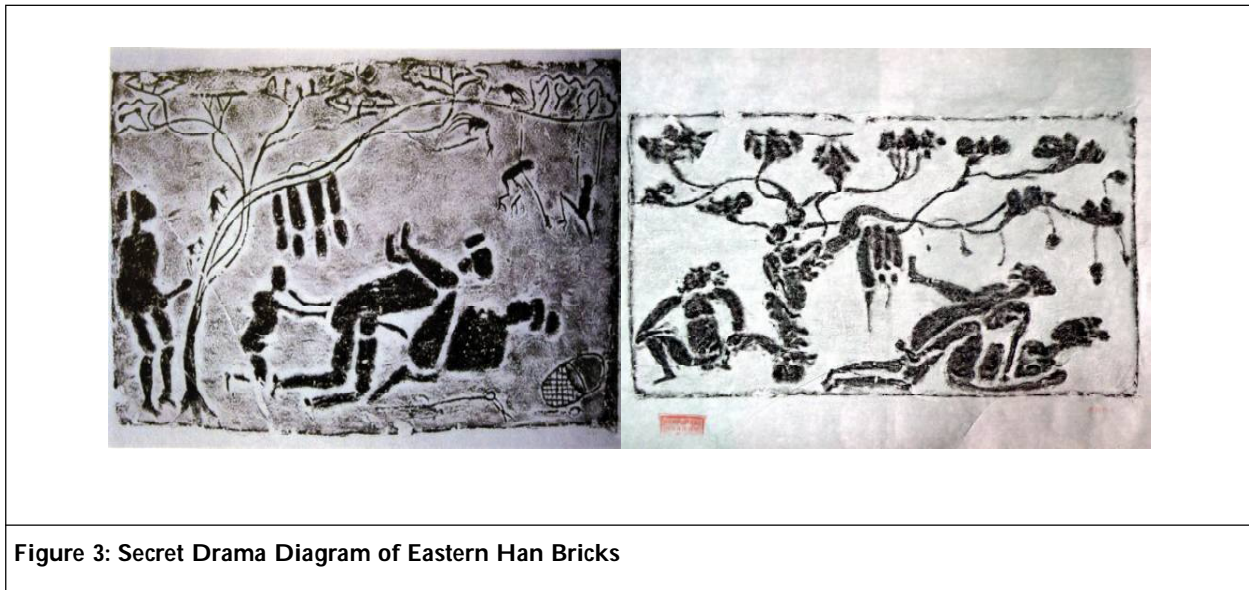
¹¹ Chen, Qing-ji. (2001). *On Mulberry Image in Chinese Ancient Literature. Journal of Dalian University of Technology (Social Sciences)*, 2, 53-57.

¹² Liu, Huairong. (1995). *The Cultural Origin and Historical Evolution of the ‘Gathering Mulberry’ Theme*, 2, 52-55. The Liberal Arts Press.

¹³ In accordance with Wen Yiduo’s analysis in “An Analysis of the Gaotang Goddess Legends,” the mediation deities venerated by the Xia people are the Shenshan (i.e., Nuwa); those worshipped by the Yin and Shang people are Jian Di; while the Zhou people venerate Jiang Yuan.

¹⁴ Zhao Guohua. (1990). *The Theory of Reproductive Worship*, China Social Sciences Press.

¹⁵ Gao Wen, Wang Jinsheng. (2002). *The Complete Collection of Bashu Picture Bricks in the Han Dynasty of China*. International Hong Kong and Macao Publishing House, 4, 70-75.



mulberry and reproductive prosperity was established on its psychological level. Transfer to the cultural sense, the mulberry has achieved the significance of a fertility cult. She explained the origin of life and the beauty of reproductive power. They had a cult of the mulberry grove as having a reproductive significance, and thus chose to make sacrifices in it, which were accompanied by substantial acts of intimacy. Based on mulberry worship and sacrifice in mulberry groves, a unique Chinese silkworm culture was formed. Men and women meet in the mulberry groves to worship the god of fertility, and thus to ask for offspring.

1.3. Mulberry in the Chinese Pre-Qin Classic

Descriptions of the mulberry are common in ancient Chinese books and records, as well as numerous myths and legends about the mulberry, such as the legend of "Kongsang": "ZhuanXu, the ancient emperor, was born in Ruoshui, lived in Kongsang, and then ascended the throne (*Lv's Commentaries of History. Ancient Music*). The legend of "Fusang (*Hibiscus Rasa-Sinesis* Linn)": "In the northern part of the Heichi country there grows the Fusang tree, the bathing-place of the ten suns. There was a huge tree in the water, with nine suns living on the lower branches, and the remaining ones on the upper ones" (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas - Overseas - East*). The legend of "Srang": "Huan Mountain is rich in gold and jade, and at the same time there are three mulberry trees (Srang) without branches" (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas - The Classic of the Northern Mountains - Chapter 2*). The legend of "Emperor's daughter mulberry": "There was a mulberry-tree on Mount Xuan. Its trunk was fifty feet in circumference. Its branches are criss-crossed in every direction. Its leaves are more than a foot long, with a red texture, yellow flowers, and blue calyx. It is known as the Emperor's Daughter Mulberry (The tree which grew after the death of the Emperor's daughter). (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas - The Classic of the Middle Mountains - Chapter 11*)."¹⁶ The legend of "mulberry grove": "Tang, the king of Shang, prayed to God in person in the mulberry grove", and said: "If I am guilty, harm no one; even if all were guilty, the blame would fall on me alone. Let not the gods of heaven injure the lives of men, for I am not wise." Thus Tang cut off his hair, squeezed his fingers with a wooden clip, and used his body as a sacrificial object to pray for the blessing of the Celestial Emperor. The people were overjoyed, and the rain fell in torrents. It may be said that Tang was thoroughly acquainted with the changes of spirits and gods, and the causes of the transfer of persons" (*Lv's Commentaries of History. Relying on the Multitude*). To sum up, Taken together, the contents of the myths are closely related to influential people in history or things that are relevant to the future of the country.

The Classic of Mountains and Seas is a precious cultural classic that focuses on reflecting ancient history. Its contents reflect the social environment and appearance of the time. Many of them, however, are attributed to

¹⁶ In the "Taiping Yujian" (a comprehensive encyclopedia of ancient China), volume 921 quotes from the "Guangyi Ji" which states: "The daughter of the southern red emperor attained immortality through her studies of the Dao and resided on a mulberry tree in the mountain of E in Nanyang. (The red emperor) burned the tree with fire, and the daughter ascended to heaven, hence the name 'Empress Mulberry'. "Biyang County", known as Biyang during the Han Dynasty, belonged to Nanyang Prefecture. Therefore, Xuan Mountain and its Empress Mulberry were located in the same area as the mountain of E and its Empress Mulberry. The red emperor's daughter resided on this mulberry tree which was burned by fire, hence the tree was named after her. The book continues: "Today, people burn magpie nests on the 15th day of the month to make ash juice to bathe silkworm eggs, imitating this practice."

myths and legends. The coexistence of history and myth is inevitable in the initial stages of culture formation, a reflection of the social realities of the time, and an important material for the study of cultural sources. There are many accounts of mulberry trees in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas – Overseas – East* records that: In the northern part of the Heichi country there grows the Fusang tree, the bathing—place of the ten suns. There was a huge tree in the water, with nine suns living on the lower branches, and the remaining ones on the upper ones. Mr. Guo Pu noted that Fusang is a kind of wood. Mr. He Xin believes that Fusang's (扶桑) "Fu(扶)" has no fixed character in ancient books, and its meaning is not in the shape of the character, but in its pronunciation.¹⁷ In the article *Mulberry Worship in Ancient China*, Mr. Zhong Nian disagreed with Mr. He who meant "Fu(扶)" as "Pu(溲)". The word "Pu(溲)" is overly elegant in Chinese characters. In fact, "Bo(搏)" and "Fu(扶)" are their more popular homonyms – "Fu(浮)". The pronunciation of "Bo(搏)", "Fu(扶)" and "Fu(浮)" is "Fu". He believes that in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* system, "Bo(搏)", "Fu(扶)" and "Fu(浮)" have the same pronunciation - "Fu". So, Fusang(扶桑), Bosang(搏桑) and Fusang(扶桑) are the same. A sacred tree floated in the vast East China Sea in the imagination of the ancients, and this agrees with the account of the Fusang in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*.¹⁸

Mr. Zhong Jingwen once pointed out that: "Fusang(扶桑), or Bosang(搏桑) and or Fusang(浮桑), was perhaps a tree of divinity in the minds of the primitive people, the world-tree of mythology."¹⁹ World tree or cosmic tree, is "The center of the world is the wide range of themes in the myth and folk-tales of the nations without words, especially those of Asia, Australia, and North America, which enable them to connect the divine world with the sacred land, and to understand the world and the world.... In one form, the tree is the vertical center that unites heaven and earth; in another form, this tree is the center of life at the source of the horizon."²⁰ The forefathers believed that Fusang was the sun tree, the tree of the universe, and the tree of life. It could communicate with the three realms and contact people with all the supernatural things. It is recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas – The Classic of the Middle Mountains*: "Three hundred miles to the north-east is a mountain called Yuyang Mountain. There was a great deal of gold and jade in the mountains, and a great deal of green paint at the foot of the mountains. The trees in the mountains are mostly catalpa and mulberry. Forty miles to the south-east is a mountain called Ji mountain. The mountain is covered with beautiful catalpa and mulberry trees in abundance. Most of the grass in the mountains is leek. Fifty-five miles to the east is a mountain called Hsien Mountain. Falling water originates from this hill and flows southeast into the water. The water was full of water dragons. There was a mulberry-tree on the hill. The tree was five feet wide. Its branches are criss-crossed in every direction. Its leaves are more than a foot long, with a red texture, yellow flowers, and blue calyx. It is known as the Emperor's Daughter Mulberry."²¹ It can be seen that the mulberry grove was closely associated with the life of the ancestors in ancient times.

With the exception of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the cultural significance of *The Book of Songs* is richer and more far-reaching. *The Book of Songs* one of the five classics, contains 305 poems that reflect the pre-Qin mulberry culture in all aspects and have had a profound impact on later generations. According to the statistics of the works written by the singers in *The Book of Songs*, there are 12 songs in *Airs of the States*, one in *Psalms Major*, four in *Psalms Minor* and one in *Chants*.

The content of the poems relating to the Sang in *the Book of Songs* employs rhetorical devices such as metaphor and Bixing. Among them, "Mo(莫)", "Sang" and "Xu(蕘)" are full of warm praise symbols.^{22,23} In the metaphorical sense of Sang. "Wo Ruo(沃若)" and "Huang Erfei(黄而隕)" of "Sang" in the poem *Vagrant*

¹⁷ He, Xin. (1986). *The Origin of the Gods*. Joint Publishing.

¹⁸ Zhong, Nian. (1996). *On the Worship of Mulberry in Ancient China*. *Studies in World Religions*, 1, 115-122.

¹⁹ Zhong, Jingwen. (1982). *Folk Literature: A Collection of Essays (Volume 1)*, Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House.

²⁰ Qin, Guangguang. (1988). *Dictionary of Culturology*, China Minzu University Press.

²¹ Wang, Fu. (1984). *Shanhajing Cun*, Hangzhou Ancient Books Store, (2), 40-42.

²² Mo: A type of grass, also known as sour dock or sheep's sorrel. It is a perennial herb with a sour taste.

²³ Xu: Medicinal plant, known as Zexie grass. A perennial, marshy herb with underground tubers, commonly used as a vegetable.

are used to describe different stages and situations of life. To repose one's affections on the Sang. The tree in *The Wood of the Mulberry* has become an important prop in the prelude to the marriage. It describes the whole process of meeting attractive women that men like. With the change of time and place the emotion deepened step by step. Narrative with Sang. *July* describes all the labors of the peasantry during the year, from the beginning of spring to the approach of winter, such as the spring ploughing, the spring planting, the hunting, the tanning and paying of tribute, the payment of taxes, and the office of magistrate.

2. The Value of Chinese Mulberry Culture

2.1. Cultural Identity in the Sericulture Ritual System

In the production and practice of life, our forefathers studied chronometers, geography, and sociology, and realized that the waxing and waning of the Yin-yang variety was influenced by the celestial hosts of the age, materials may be obtained anywhere. Through the process of visualizing and abstracting primitive natural objects, it is not only the spiritual infusion of the Chinese nation, but also the process of materializing nature. Through people's commemoration, we can explore the experience and history of that time, the emotions and ideas to be expressed. After generations of human inheritance and modification, these memories are finally preserved and handed down.²⁴ *The Book of Songs-Psalms Minor* said that "To the mulberry and catalpa we must be respectful". It is an unchanging tenet of Chinese cultural identity (fallen leaves return to the roots, to revert to one's origin). This is an unchanging creed in the Chinese cultural identity – ye luogui and returning to his roots and ancestry. The ancestral mausoleum surrounded by his native place (Mulberry and Catalpa) is the destination of every wandering spirit. Over time, Mulberry and Catalpa have become material symbols of ancestral reminiscence.

According to *The Book of Rites-The Meaning of Archery*, "in ancient times, when a man was born, he used mulberry for his bow, and grass for his arrow, to shoot across the world, symbolizing his ambition to grow up. It is a symbol of the ambition of children. At present, this custom is still preserved in northern Han areas". Mulberry groves were also a gathering place for clan cohesion due to the clan re-breeding caused by mulberry grove sacrifices. It has left a sense of attachment, longing, destination and memory for a particular place or region from the beginning of a person's consciousness. This is the so-called "love of Sangzi (Mulberry and Catalpa)". In Zhang Heng's *Ode to the southern capital*, the use of the Sangzi as a metaphor for home is actually a continuation of the attachment of the Sangzi to the reproductive sites of ancient groups, and a change in maternal attachment.

According to the records of *Lü's Commentaries of History-Relying on the Multitude*, After the destruction of the Xia Dynasty by the Shang Tang: "The weather was very dry, and there was no harvest for five years. Tang prayed in the mulberry grove."²⁵ According to the *Records of the Historian*, during the period of Taiwu (the great-great-grandson of Tang), "At the beginning of the decline of the Shang Dynasty, an mulberry trees that foretell good or bad luck was born in the capital of Bo. It had grown very thick overnight, Taiwu cultivated his virtue, and the strange tree withered and disappeared". Here the abnormal growth of the mulberry has become a sign of the decline of the national fortunes, and the mulberry seems to be regarded as a spirit representing the deified consciousness of kingship. However, in the legend of Yi Yin's birth at Kongsang, Sang has undoubtedly become a cultural symbol of life and has been given a strong divine color. Compared to the worship of Heaven and the gods in the Xia and Shang dynasties, the Zhou people were more concerned with practicality, and the Zhou people respected etiquette. The purpose and meaning of this etiquette is to stabilize the country and enable people to make a living. From time immemorial to the present three generations, the material existence of the overall image of Sang is closely related to his spiritual existence. This actually reflects the inheritance and succession of cultural identity and the formation of sacred beliefs in the process. The rites of the three dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou were infused with the word sincerity, which was followed by the public. This is what *The Book of Rites-Li Qi* said above: "The rites of the three dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou were infused with the word sincerity, which was followed by the public". The main purpose of the ancient mulberry forest ritual sacrifice consisted of three aspects. First, praying for good weather, second, hoping to get the protection of the ancestors' gods, and third, seeking the "tree with luxuriant foliage" of the descendants. As a

²⁴ Wang, Mingke. (1997). *The Edge of China: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity*, Asian Culture Publishing Co., Ltd.

²⁵ Wang, Liqi. (2002). *Annotations and Commentaries on the Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals*, Bashu Book Publishing House.

result, mulberry grove became a sacred place for the Yin and Shang ethnic groups and several other ancient ethnic groups to worship their ancestors and gods.

In the ancient Chinese production and living practices of mulberry planting and picking, a systematic and sacred set of ritual activities for mulberry grew up. *The Book of Rites*· Yue Ling said: "In March of the lunar calendar, the empresses and concubines would fast, and go themselves to the East to gather mulberries. Women should be forbidden to visit and play, their chores should be reduced, and they should be encouraged to gather mulberries and raise silkworms." It could be seen that its etiquette were mysterious and dignified. The ancients believed this to be a gift from God to the world, reflecting the reverence Chinese people had for the production of sericulture in the agricultural era. In the *Book of Han*· biography of Wang Mang: "the Empress dowager leads the ladies of the Empress, Marquises, and Generals to gather mulberry leaves", And *Tongdian*: "in spring, the mulberry begins to grow, and the queen herself raises the mulberry in the yard and the silkworm in the silkworm room" and so on. The queen privately raised mulberry trees, set an example, and played a leading role in the production of the mulberry industry in the world. Empresses and imperial concubines are not allowed to collect mulberries until they fasted. This was a grand ceremony held before the ancient people began to collect mulberry. It completely reflects the piety and respect of the ancients for Sang. Of course, "In the third month of the lunar calendar, when the empress and the imperial concubines were personally gathering mulberries to persuade the silk-worms to cultivate, the intention of a group of aristocratic ladies with fertility personally picking mulberry to persuade silkworms is to emphasize the symbolic nature of their behavior results."²⁶ What the silkworm ceremony teaches is still the simple perception of life and fertility of the ancestors, which shows the common cultural tradition of the Chinese nation.

2.2. Unity of Heaven and Man – Ecological Thinking in China

2.2.1. Unity of Heaven and Man

The Origin of Chinese Characters said: "The Chinese character 'tian(天)' means the top of the head. It is the highest, and nothing is higher than it. Its font consists of two parts: the Chinese character 'Yi(一)' and the Chinese character 'Da(大)'." *The Book of Changes*· I-Ching· XiCi said: "submit to the will of Heaven and be content with one's lot". Therefore, the Chinese character "tian(天)" refers to the objective concrete and the law behind the objective concrete.

The Origin of Chinese Characters said: "Man is the noblest creature on earth. ... The shape resembles a figure with arms hanging down and legs straight."²⁷

The Book of History· QinShi said: "Others have abilities, and are as happy in them as they are in their own. *Lv's Commentaries of History* – Ju Nansaid: "A gentleman is strict with himself, lenient with others, and does not demand perfection in others." *Mencius*· WanZhangXia said: "In order to understand a literary work, it is necessary to examine the author's experience of thought, and to avoid subjectively adhering to the author's intentions in isolation." To sum up, man is not merely an individual in the biological sense of the word, but refers to the ideas and faculties which distinguish him from animals.

Our ancestors and contemporary scholars also had their own ideas about the relationship between heaven and man.

Lv's Commentaries of History – the first month of spring said: "In the first month of spring, the sun is in the camp (constellation) position, it stays in the mid sky (due south) in the evening, and it stays in the mid sky in the morning. This month, Lezheng (Music Officials of the Zhou Dynasty) was ordered to lead children from Gongqing into school to learn music and dance. Prepare for the sacrificial rites, and also for the worship of the mountains, forests, rivers and streams. Do not use female animals as sacrifices. It is forbidden to cut down trees, overturn bird nests, kill young insects and young birds, kill deer and young birds, gather large groups of people, build or repair walls, and bury exposed bodies." It means that people should conform to the will of Heaven in their activities.

Dongzhongshu, a Western Han scholar, said in his book *ChunqiuFanlu*: "There are four seasons in heaven, and the king has four policies. These four policies, like the four seasons, are connected and shared by heaven

²⁶ Gandhi, M.K. (2007). *Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi*, Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, (5), 66-69.

²⁷ The Editorial Committee of the Great Chinese Dictionary (1991). *The Concise Edition of the Great Chinese Dictionary*, Sichuan Dictionary Publishing House, (2), 44-47.

and humanity. As there is spring, summer, autumn, and winter in the heavens, there should be festivities, rewards, punishments, and chastisements for kings. This is the viewpoint of the interaction between heaven and man, aiming to establish a world that is ruled by the king, and the king's system is the same as the order of heaven.

Zhang Dainian also discussed the idea of the unity of heaven and man. According to him, this idea in traditional Chinese philosophy contains complex contents, including both right and wrong views. For example, the Song-dynasty philosophers theory of "the unity of heaven and man" contains reasonable thoughts such as "man is a part of nature", "nature has a universal law, and man also obeys this universal law", but it is wrong to confuse moral principles with natural laws and to make moral principles absolute. He attached great importance to the idea that we must follow the laws of nature, and lead men to act according to them in *the Book of Changes*. He argues that this is a relatively comprehensive view, and that we should not only transform nature to meet human aspirations, but also follow its laws and not upset the ecological balance.²⁸

Fang Keli further summarized the above ideas in his article "*the unity of heaven and man*" and *the ecological wisdom of ancient China*, saying that the interdependence of man and nature is the same perspective rather than the opposite. Heaven and man are one unified organic whole, and man is an essential part of all that is in nature. Man differs from all things in the world by his subjective initiative. One can actively participate in nature, become a part of it, and form an overall relationship with it. At the same time, man must follow the laws of natural development. This is a simple dialectical view of the unity of heaven and man.

2.2.2. Idea of "Unity of Heaven and Man" in the Ecosystem of the Mulberry Fish Pond

The canonical case of "the Unity of Heaven and Man" cannot fail to speak of "the ecosystem of the mulberry fish pond".

According to historical records, the formation of the mulberry fish pond system began with the construction of water conservation projects in the Taihu Lake basin during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, with a history of about 2500 years. It is a unique model of creative depression and ecological circular economy, which conveys the Confucian ecological ethics of the unity of heaven and man. It is the world's traditional model of circular ecological farming and a valuable cultural heritage.

The ecosystem of the mulberry fish pond, an agricultural ecosystem, organically combines mulberry cultivation, sericulture and fish culture to form a virtuous cycle of eco-agricultural development patterns in which mulberries, silkworms, fish and mud are interdependent and mutually adapted. Its internal mechanism is to achieve harmonious coexistence between man and the natural environment through an artificial ecological circulation system. The mulberry-tree, the mulberry-bed, the silk-worm, the silk-worm chrysalis, the silk, the silk-worm sand, the fish, the water, the sunlight, all these are objective beings in nature. They have an inherent law of mutual growth and existence, and have contrived to use nature skillfully without compromising any particular objective existence.

As an artificially developed integrated ecosystem, the mulberry fish pond uses pond mud to fertilize the mulberry, mulberry leaves to raise silkworms, silkworm sand to feed the fish, and fish manure to fertilize the pond, tightly connecting the various links and forming a low-input, low-cost, high-efficiency circular development model. It deserves to be the rare instance in the world of a virtuous cycle.²⁹ It is the relation of man to nature, formed by ancestors who followed the natural laws of heaven, and in cultivating, fishing, hunting, or governing the country, followed the order of human relations, adapted to the operations of heaven and earth. The conduct of the people conforms to the laws of nature and the manners of civilization, and at last constitutes a great condition of harmony between heaven, earth, and man. In the ecosystem of mulberry fish ponds, pond mud is used as fertilizer and silkworm excrement is used as a feedstock, so that the fertilizer can be recycled without environmental pollution. The entire biological system has been effectively protected, which is a centralized embodiment of the ecological morality of "love for all people and animals" in the ecological ethic idea of "the unity of heaven and man". In this process, starting from holistic thinking, people integrate their agricultural production activities with the natural and social environment, turn waste into treasure, make full use of various resources, achieve resource conservation and energy conservation through the material and energy cycles of nature itself, and reduce environmental pollution caused by human activities.

²⁸ Zhang, Dainian. (1996). *The Complete Works of Zhang Dainian*. Hebei People's Publishing House.

²⁹ Deng, Fen. (2003). *Mulberry-Fish Ponds: The Main Agricultural Feature of the Pearl River Delta*. *Agricultural Archaeology*, (3),193-196+201.

This is of great ecological and cultural value for us to learn from today as we advocate modern ecological agriculture.

The ecosystem of mulberry fish ponds has been formed by the accumulation of thousands of years of sericulture. Primitive beliefs and simple notions of religion are everywhere found in the folk customs of birth, death, marriage, and burial. In the cultivation of the mulberry and in the cultivation of sericulture, men united their conceptions of nature and of man in primitive religious beliefs derived from the daily operations of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. This religious culture is rooted in the people of the Pearl River Delta's deep understanding of the processes of life, from birth and pregnancy to old age and death, and their deep worship of agricultural civilization. In addition to the wide range of primitive religious beliefs, additional beliefs related to the water culture of Tianhou, Longmu, Beidi, Hongsheng and mulberry fish ponds have also emerged, playing a positive role in enriching the spiritual life of the people of the Pearl River Delta.

2.3. Industrial Value of Mulberry

The development of mulberry groves has contributed to the breeding of silkworms. In addition to culture, sericulture led to the development of ancient economies. People began to use silk to make clothes and circulate abroad. In ancient China, the sericulture economy referred to the production and operation of silkworms, mulberries, and silk, and a type of activity derived from these products with the fundamental purpose of preserving traditional Chinese medicine. Sericulture includes both the silk industry and the sericulture economy, such as tourism, health products, feed, and other industries. Nowadays, the connotation of sericulture economy is particularly rich, not only as silk but also closely related to sericulture products in many industries, such as the food industry and cosmetics industry. The development of culture drives economic development, which further promotes culture.

Culture, on the other hand, is a non-renewable resource. Both the loss of culture and the forgetting of culture are disasters for a people. As mentioned in Wang Mingke's concept of community memory: If this medium declines, when the landscape disappears, the memory is easily lost because it has lost its appendage carrier.³⁰ Mulberry culture is an ecological culture rich in traditional Confucian morals. It asserts the spiritual nature of the unity of heaven and man, of things and me. It is of great guidance for the sustainable development of modern agriculture. Chinese sericulture and silk weaving techniques have been added to UNESCO's list of representative works of human intangible cultural heritage, marking the official entry of the ancient sericulture custom culture into the world-class cultural palace. Nowadays, mulberry ritual activities are carried out in many places, integrating spirit, culture, art and economy, and integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture and virtue education into mulberry cultural activities, which not only enriches people's material and cultural life, but also promotes social, cultural, economic and trade development.

3. Conclusion

In early primitive societies, the home of man was the forest. As humans evolve, people gradually begin to have subjective consciousness and begin to use tools to transform and dominate the world. Mulberry groves have provided material security for human existence and nourished the development of human culture from famine to modern times. Fraser pointed out that "in the primitive mind, the whole world is alive, including plants and trees. They all have souls like men, and therefore they treat them like men." As all things have spirits, so the worship of God contributed to the formation and development of primitive religion.

In a sense, farming and weaving culture is a symbol of hard work and reward. There is no doubt that the culture of the Chinese nation was shaped in the context of natural economy, with farming and weaving at its core, and in the context of farming beliefs.

From the standpoint of the rational mind, Laozi describes such a dream nation as follows: people in this nation enjoy simple food, are satisfied with their simple clothing, content with their simple dwellings, and pleased with their simple customs. TaoYuanming's poem in the peach blossom garden gives people a feeling of shaking the past and shining the present.

The ancients respected heaven and earth, and advocated harmony between heaven, earth, and man, and thus they developed in harmony. *Xunzi* said: "Heaven has its seasons, Earth has its resources, man has his culture. This is what is meant when it is said that man is able to form a trinity with Heaven and Earth."

³⁰ Wang, Mingke. (1997). *The Edge of China: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity*, Asian Culture Publishing Co., Ltd., (7), 23-25.

To co-operate with heaven, earth, and man, and then to adapt to "opportune time, geographic advantages, and the unity of the people". Thus, the country will prosper, society will be harmonious and the people will be rich. "Tian" means "Follow the opportune time" and "Respect for the objective existence of nature", in ancient times, it was mainly used in agriculture, such as when to sow and harvest. The basic idea of "Di" is to "fully use favorable geographical position", that is, fully unleash the productive potential of land and increase the value of production and output. Of course, we need to rely on "human conditions" when we are "in opportune time" and "fully use favorable geographical position." "Human conditions" refers to the power of both individuals and groups, and the key to give full play to the power of groups is "the unity of the people".

In ancient times, the primitive consciousness of respect for heaven and love for earth was especially strong among the ancestors, because the unknowability of the universe coincided with the extraction of the means of life from the earth. We may, of course, understand that the primitive consciousness of respect for heaven and earth originated in the primitive religious spirit of animism, but we can see from the solemnity and solemnity of the sacrifice that it undoubtedly enlightened the hearts of the people and affirmed the cultural spirit of the agrarian faith.

The belief in the unity of heaven and man is not unsuitable for today's society. Man and nature should be one. Man is only a part of everything. The hard-working people of ancient times have given enlightenment and example to modern mankind.

However, today's social development blindly pursues economic value and does not hesitate to destroy the ecological environment. Break the virtuous circle of ecosystems and put man and nature in an antagonistic situation. Reconstructing a harmonious society of heaven, earth and man has become our top priority. The reconstruction here is not a copy and paste of the glorious history, but based on the new-era of rapid development, implement the new idea of sustainable development, absorb the spiritual nutrition of silkworm culture, and promote the harmonious coexistence and development of ecology and economy in China and even the world. China is a large agricultural country, and agriculture is the foundation of the national economy. It is of great strategic importance to continuously enhance the sustainable development of agriculture and build a sustainable agricultural development model that is in line with China's national conditions for implementing sustainable development and building a well-off society in an all-round way.

Conflicts of Interest

Authors declared that there are no conflicts of Interest.

Funding

This work is supported by Project of the Key Research Base Project of Chongqing Humanities and Social Science "Silk Road Cultural Value" [Grant No.16SKB002] and Project of Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Engineering "cultural values of Sea Route of Silk Road" [Grant No.4412190231].

References

- He, Xin. (1986). *The Origin of the Gods*, Joint Publishing.
- James, George Frazer. (1987). *The Golden Bough*, Chinese Folk Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Kong, Fanli. (2007). *Ancient Chinese Mulberry Culture*, *Guoxue*, (06), 51-52.
- Li, Binhong. (1989). *An Approach to the Origin of the Silkworm and Silk Weaving Industry in China*. *Geographical Research*, (02), 30-36.
- Li, F., Li, M. and Xu, X., et al. (2000). *Taiping Yulan Zhonghua*, Zhonghua Book Company, (4), 55-57.
- Liu, Huairong. (1995). *The Cultural Origin and Historical Evolution of the 'Gathering Mulberry' Theme*, (02), 52-55. The Liberal Arts Press.
- Qin, Guangguang. (1988). *Dictionary of Culturology*. China Minzu University Press.
- Ruan, Yuan. (1980). *Shisanjingzhushu- Zhou Yi Zheng Yi*. Zhonghua Book Company.
- Songben, Yupian. (1983). *China Bookstore Publishing House*.
- Sun, Yirang. (1954). *Reference to Mozi: Zhuzijicheng*. Zhonghua Book Company.
- The Editorial Committee of the Great Chinese Dictionary (1991). *The Concise Edition of the Great Chinese Dictionary*. Sichuan Dictionary Publishing House.

- Wang, Fu. (1984). *Shanhaijing Cun*. Hangzhou Ancient Books Store.
- Wang Liqi. (2002). *Annotations and Commentaries on the Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals*. Bashu Book Publishing House.
- Wang Mingke. (1997). *The Edge of China: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity*. Asian Culture Publishing Co., Ltd.
- Wen, Y.D. (1930). *Selected Works of Wen Yiduo*, Sanlian Bookstore, (4), 66-68.
- Xu, Hao. (1995). *ShuoWenJieZiZhuJian*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, (3), 43-45.
- Zhang Dainian(1996). *The Complete Works of Zhang Dainian*. Hebei People's Publishing House.
- Zhang Daoyi(2001). *Chinese Patterns for Five Thousand Years: Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period*. Art Design Technology Co., Ltd.
- Zhao, Guohua. (1990). *The Theory of Reproductive Worship*. China Social Sciences Press.
- Zhong, Jingwen. (1982). *Folk Literature: A Collection of Essays (Volume 1)*. Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House.
- Zhong, Nian. (1996). *On the Worship of Mulberry in Ancient China*. *Studies in World Religions*, (01), 115-122.
- Zhu, T.S. (1982). *An Initial Exploration of Ancient Chinese Religion*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, (7), 54-57.

Cite this article as: Jian Zhang, Mengyue Yu, Zain Abbas, Qiqi Liu and Zijun Yin. (2024). *Studies on the Origin and Cultural Value of Chinese Mulberry Culture*. *African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 57-68. doi: 10.51483/AFJHSS.4.1.2024.57-68