

# A study on prophetic monsters in the classic of mountains and seas as disaster memory

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**Abstract:** The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shan Hai Jing) records a vast array of bizarre and exotic creatures, among which a particular category of monsters not only possesses peculiar appearances but also possesses the ability to foretell fortune or misfortune. The emergence of such prophetic monsters represents not merely the primitive mentality's exploration and comprehension of natural phenomena, but also serves as an alternative record of natural disasters within agricultural civilization. Furthermore, it embodies the quintessential application of the Shan Hai Jing as an ancient text of shamanism.

**Keywords:** Shan Hai Jing, prophetic monsters, primitive mentality, witchcraft / shamanism

## 1. Introduction

As Yuan Ke once remarked, "Among the ancient books of our country, none surpasses the Shan Hai Jing in magnificence and wonder. It is not only the origin of historical geography, but also the treasury of mythology." [1] The Shan Hai Jing encompasses a vast array of subjects, recording numerous phenomena that appear inconceivable from today's perspective. The book not only collects a wealth of mythological and legendary materials, but also serves as the inception of religion, the source of history, and a grand panorama of customs and natural products. Since its compilation, the Shan Hai Jing has been regarded as a representative work of Chinese mystical culture, owing to the excessively marvelous and absurd nature of its contents.

## 2. Delimitation of the content and nature of the Shan Hai Jing

The extant Shan Hai Jing comprises eighteen chapters with over thirty-one thousand characters, including five chapters of the Classic of Mountains (also known as the Five Treasures Classic of Mountains), eight chapters of the Classic of Seas, four chapters of the Classic of the Great Wilderness, and one chapter of the Classic of Regions Within the Seas. It may also be simply divided into two parts: the Classic of Mountains and the Classic of Seas. The creation of the Shan Hai Jing was not accomplished by a single author at one time or in one place; both the authorship and the date of compilation remain undetermined. Many scholars believe it was "composed by people from the Chu or Shu regions during the period from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods to the mid-Han Dynasty," while others hold the view that it was "a work of the Zhou royal house." [2] The compilation of its materials can be traced back to remote antiquity, and the ancient materials it preserves are exceedingly precious.

The Classic of Mountains takes mountains and mountain ranges as its organizational framework, with each mountain constituting a separate entry arranged according to the five cardinal directions—south, west, north, east, and center. It primarily records mountains and rivers, animals, plants, minerals, sacrificial rituals, and includes a small number of myths and legends. Mountains and rivers constitute the fundamental features of topography and served as a criterion for ancient regional division. Ancient geographical texts placed particular emphasis on descriptions of mountains and rivers. In the Classic of Mountains, mountain ranges serve as the structural thread running throughout; every entry begins and ends with a mountain. Consequently, numerous scholars both in China and abroad have defined the Shan Hai Jing as a geographical text. The Classic of Seas records the customs, myths, legends, and clan genealogies of regions

within and beyond the seas, as well as remote areas. Its narrative style and content differ substantially from those of the Classic of Mountains. It should be noted that the term "seas" (hai) here does not refer to "the four oceans situated beyond the earth in the ancient conception—namely, the Southern Sea, Western Sea, Northern Sea, and Eastern Sea," but rather denotes "the four peripheral regions beyond the central area inhabited by the Zhou people." [3]

In terms of its nature, the Shan Hai Jing belongs to an extremely ancient system of knowledge, bearing close resemblance to modern works of physical and human geography. However, some of its records fail to correspond with objective reality, and certain contents pertain to supernatural myths and religious beliefs, blending objective knowledge with subjective imagination in an indistinguishable mixture of fact and fiction. Therefore, the classification of the Shan Hai Jing has remained a matter of considerable controversy. The Bibliographical Treatise of the Book of Sui (Sui Shu· Jing Ji Zhi) classifies it as a geographical work; the Bibliographical Treatise of the History of Song (Song Shi· Yi Wen Zhi) categorizes it under the Five Elements (wu xing); and the Daoist Canon (Dao Zang) regards it as a religious text. In modern times, scholars have proposed more nuanced and distinctive classifications. "Regarding the nature and social function of the Shan Hai Jing, there exist various theories: the 'geographical treatise theory,' the 'ancestor of ancient and modern anomaly accounts theory,' the 'ancient history theory,' the 'geographical treatise and travel guide theory,' the 'clan society chronicle theory,' the 'moon-mountain mythology theory,' the 'shamanic text theory,' the 'mythological (or legendary) geography theory,' and the 'mythological political geography theory,' among others." [3]

It is precisely because of the excessive complexity of the Shan Hai Jing's content and nature, as well as the vast amount of cultural information it encompasses, that we are able to glimpse knowledge from multiple disciplines within its pages. For instance, the numerous exotic and bizarre creatures recorded in the Shan Hai Jing constitute objects of study not only for biology, but also involve the domains of literature and religion. They provide significant insights into human civilization at its primitive stage and the characteristics of collective thinking under specific social formations.

### **3. Harbingers of calamity and auspiciousness: prophetic monsters**

The Japanese scholar Ito Seiji divides the world depicted in the Shan Hai Jing into an inner world and an outer world. People inhabited a very limited inner space, gathering and cultivating small amounts of crops, occasionally capturing small animals at the periphery of this inner space. They dared not venture deep into the outer world, for it was a domain where wild beasts roamed rampant, insects and serpents flourished, and various terrifying, invincible monsters lurked that could claim human lives. These monsters possessed bizarre appearances, often combining the physical characteristics of two or more animals—for instance, the strange bird on Zi Mountain with a human face, a macaque's body, and a dog's tail; or the creature named Fei, which resembled an ox with a white head, a single eye, and a serpent's tail. Beyond their peculiar appearances, some of them also possessed miraculous supernatural abilities, such as the "prophetic monsters," whose very appearance would foretell the occurrence of disasters or auspicious events.

The Shan Hai Jing's records of prophetic monsters are concentrated primarily within the Classic of Mountains, comprising forty-eight varieties in total, of which forty-six bear names. Among these forty-eight monsters, twenty-five foretell natural calamities such as drought, flood, fire, windstorm, and insect plagues upon their appearance; twenty foretell human-made disasters such as warfare, pestilence, corvée labor, and terrifying events; while only a very small number—three monsters—can foretell auspicious signs.

#### **3.1. Monsters foretelling natural disasters**

The monsters foretelling drought and flood are the most numerous, totaling twenty varieties—nearly two-fifths of all prophetic monsters. From this, one can readily infer the frequency and devastating power of drought and flood disasters in ancient times.

##### *3.1.1. Monsters foretelling drought and deluge*

The Shan Hai Jing records eleven varieties of monsters capable of foretelling drought, of which nine bear identifiable names. As for monsters presaging flood disasters, the text documents nine varieties in total, of which eight possess recorded names.

Table 1 Monsters Foretelling Drought and Deluge in the Shan Hai Jing

Name	Mountain Classic	Physical Characteristics	Prophetic Content
Bo Yu	Third Classic of the South	Resembles a crucian carp with pig's bristles; sounds like a piglet.	Its appearance foretells great drought throughout the realm.
Fei Yi	Classic of the West	A serpent with six feet and four wings.	Its appearance foretells great drought throughout the realm.
Ji Niao	Third Classic of the West	Resembles an owl with red feet and straight beak yellow markings and white head; sounds like a swan.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
—	Fourth Classic of the West	A bird resembling a swan with human face pheasant body and dog's tail; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
—	Third Classic of the North	A great serpent with red head and white body; sounds like an ox.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
Shu	Classic of the East	A bird resembling a chicken with rat's fur.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
—	Classic of the East	Resembles a yellow serpent with fish fins emitting light when emerging and submerging.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
Pie Pie	Second Classic of the East	A beast resembling a fox with wings; sounds like a wild goose.	Its appearance foretells great drought throughout the realm.
Bo Yu	Fourth Classic of the East	Resembles a snakehead fish with one eye; sounds like "ou."	Its appearance foretells great drought throughout the realm.
Yu	Fourth Classic of the East	Resembles a fish with bird's wings, emitting light when emerging and submerging; sounds like mandarin ducks.	Its appearance foretells great drought throughout the realm.
Ming She	Second Classic of the Center	Resembles a serpent with four wings; sounds like a chime stone.	Its appearance foretells great drought in the settlement.
Chang You	Second Classic of the South	A beast resembling a macaque with four ears; named Chang You; sounds like chanting.	Its appearance foretells great flood in the commandery and county.
Man Man	Third Classic of the West	A bird resembling a mallard with one wing and one eye; must pair to fly.	Its appearance foretells great flood throughout the realm.
Sheng Yu	Third Classic of the West	A bird resembling a pheasant and red in color, feeding on fish; sounds like "lu."	Its appearance foretells great flood in the state.
Ying Yu	Fourth Classic of the West	Fish body with bird's wings; sounds like mandarin ducks.	Its appearance foretells great flood in the settlement.
Ling Ling	Second Classic of the East	A beast resembling an ox with tiger stripes; sounds like "qin"; named Ling Ling; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells great flood throughout the realm.
He Xiu	Fourth Classic of the East	A beast resembling a pig with human face, yellow body and red tail; named He Xiu; sounds like a baby devouring humans, also feeds on insects and serpents.	Its appearance foretells great flood throughout the realm.
Hua She	Second Classic of the Center	Resembles a human face with jackal body, bird's wings and serpent's locomotion; sounds like shouting.	Its appearance foretells great flood in the settlement.
Fu Zhu	Third Classic of the Center	A beast resembling a white deer with four horns.	Its appearance foretells great flood in the settlement.
—	Classic of the East	Resembles Kua Fu with pig's bristles; sounds like shouting.	Its appearance foretells great flood throughout the realm.

### 3.1.2. *Monsters foretelling conflagration*

Fires ignited by lightning strikes could incinerate forests, grasslands, crops, and homesteads, threatening human safety and disrupting productive development. The Shan Hai Jing records two varieties of such monsters. The Third Classic of the West states of Bi Fang: "There is a bird resembling a crane with one-foot, red markings and blue-black body with white beak; it calls its own name; its appearance foretells conflagration in the settlement." The Eleventh Classic of the Center describes Ji: "There is a beast resembling a membrane-dog with red beak, red eyes, and white tail; its appearance foretells fire in the settlement." These two categories of monsters share a common physical characteristic: both possess red integumentary features—the very color of fire.

### 3.1.3. *Monsters foretelling windstorms and locust plagues*

Gales can demolish dwellings and crops, disrupting transportation. Wherever locusts descend, grain harvests are utterly devastated—the disasters they bring cannot be disregarded. The Classic of the North describes the monster You: "Resembles a dog with human face, skilled at throwing, laughs upon seeing people, moves like the wind; its appearance foretells great wind throughout the realm." The Eleventh Classic of the Center describes Wen Lin: "Resembles a pig with yellow body, white head, and white tail; its appearance foretells great wind throughout the realm." The Second Classic of the East states: "There is a beast resembling a rabbit with bird's beak, owl eyes, and serpent tail; sleeps upon seeing people; named You Xian; calls its own name; its appearance foretells devastation by locusts."

## 3.2. **Monsters foretelling Human-made disasters**

In the conceptual world of the ancients, warfare, pestilence, corvée labor, civil engineering projects, and social turbulence were all subject to the control of mysterious forces. Regarding warfare in particular, "for those living in enclosed rural communities, military chaos was not perceived as a product of human agency. Just as drought, flood, and locust plagues were believed to be, the calamity of war was thought to be the deliberate malevolence of supernatural beings. For village communities, whether the conflict was civil or foreign invasion mattered little; when war descended, people suffered hardships as profound as those inflicted by natural disasters, and compelled to seek causes for their suffering, they would naturally, after exhausting all explanations, turn to demons lurking behind the war." [4] Here, to distinguish from the "natural disasters" (tian zai) discussed earlier, we classify warfare, pestilence, corvée labor, and the loss of talented individuals as "human-made disasters" (ren huo).

### 3.2.1. *Monsters foretelling warfare and pestilence*

Warfare emerged concomitantly with human society, representing violent conduct undertaken by different groups or organizations concerning contested rights and interests. War not only exhausts the populace and depletes resources, but also entails massive mortality. Following warfare or natural disasters, pestilence frequently erupts, as the accumulation of corpses fosters the proliferation of bacteria and viruses, generating potent pathogenic microorganisms that spread rapidly. Early humans, constrained by limited medical knowledge and technology, often could only watch helplessly as pestilence ravaged their communities. Thus, warfare and pestilence constitute critical factors in demographic collapse. The Shan Hai Jing records twelve categories of monsters foretelling these two types of calamities: eight presaging warfare, and four presaging pestilence.

Table 2 Monsters Foretelling Warfare and Pestilence in the Shan Hai Jing

Name	Mountain Classic	Physical Characteristics	Prophetic Content
Fu Xi	Second Classic of the West	A bird resembling a rooster with human face; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells military conflict.
Zhu Yan	Second Classic of the West	A beast resembling an ape with white head and red feet.	Its appearance foretells great warfare.

Da E	Third Classic of the West	Resembles an eagle with black markings and white head, red beak and tiger claws; sounds like a morning swan.	Its appearance foretells great military conflict.
God of Huai jiang Mountain	Third Classic of the West	Resembles an ox with eight feet, two heads, and horse tail; sounds like "Bo Huang."	Its appearance foretells military conflict in the settlement.
Xie Yu	Fourth Classic of the West	Resembles a cod.	Its movement foretells great military conflict in the settlement.
Fan Lang	Ninth Classic of the Center	A beast resembling a fox with white tail and long ears.	Its appearance foretells military conflict within the state.
Ju Ru	Eleventh Classic of the Center	A beast resembling a silent rat with white ears and white beak.	Its appearance foretells great military conflict in the state.
Liang Qu	Eleventh Classic of the Center	A beast resembling a wildcat with white head and tiger claws.	Its appearance foretells great military conflict in the state.
Jie Gou	Second Classic of the East	A bird resembling a mallard with rat's tail, skilled at climbing trees.	Its appearance foretells pestilence in the state.
Fei	Fourth Classic of the East	A beast resembling an ox with white head, one eye and serpent tail; causes water to dry up and grass to die where it passes.	Its appearance foretells great pestilence throughout the realm.
Qi Zhong	Tenth Classic of the Center	A bird resembling an owl with one foot and pig's tail.	Its appearance foretells great pestilence in the state.
Hou	Eleventh Classic of the Center	A beast resembling a nest, red as cinnabar fire.	Its appearance foretells great pestilence in the state.

### 3.2.2. *Monsters foretelling corvée labor and earthworks*

The ancient adage "oppressive government is more ferocious than tigers" illustrates how onerous corvée labor could destabilize the foundations of society and become a catastrophe. From a contemporary perspective, corvée obligations were imposed upon commoners by the ruling class, yet the ancients could not comprehend this reality. Consequently, the Shan Hai Jing records three varieties of monsters foretelling corvée labor and earthwork projects. The Second Classic of the South states that on Gui Mountain, "there is a beast resembling a pig with spurs, sounding like a dog's bark; named Li Li; its appearance foretells extensive earthworks in the county." On Yao Guang Mountain, "there is a beast resembling a human with pig's bristles, dwelling in caves and hibernating in winter; named Hua Xiang; sounding like wood-chopping; its appearance foretells great corvée labor in the county." The Second Classic of the East describes "a creature resembling a mandarin duck with human feet; calls its own name; its appearance foretells extensive earthworks in the state."

### 3.2.3. *Monsters foretelling social turbulence*

The appearance of such monsters portends social instability, moral decline, the occurrence of terrifying events, and the emergence of criminals.

Table 3 Monsters Foretelling Social Disorder in the Shan Hai Jing

Name	Mountain Classic	Physical Characteristics	Prophetic Content
Suan Yu	Third Classic of the North	A bird resembling a serpent with four wings, six eyes, and three feet; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells terror in the settlement.

Zhu Ru	Second Classic of the East	A beast resembling a fox with fish fins; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells terror in the state.
Yong He	Eleventh Classic of the Center	A beast resembling an ape with red eyes, red beak, and yellow body.	Its appearance foretells great terror in the state.
You Bei	Second Classic of the East	A beast resembling a horse with sheep's eyes, four horns, and ox tail; sounds like a howling dog.	Its appearance foretells an increase of cunning guests in the state.
Gao	Second Classic of the South	A bird resembling an owl with human hands; sounds like "bi"; calls its own name.	Its appearance foretells an increase of exiled scholars in the county.

### 3.3. Auspicious beasts

The Shan Hai Jing also records monsters foretelling auspicious signs. These creatures lack the terrifying characteristics found in other monsters. For instance, the descriptions of the phoenix (Feng Huang) and the Luan Niao convey a sense of beauty and solemnity, serving as symbols of hope.

Table 4 Auspicious Beasts in the Shan Hai Jing

Name	Chapter	Physical Characteristics	Prophetic Content
Feng Huang (Phoenix)	Third Classic of the South	A bird resembling a chicken with five-colored markings, named Feng Huang. The head bears the character "virtue" (de), the wings "righteousness" (yi), the back "propriety" (li), the breast "benevolence" (ren), and the belly "trustworthiness" (xin). This bird eats and drinks naturally, singing and dancing of its own accord.	Its appearance foretells peace and tranquility throughout the realm.
Feng Niao (Phoenix Bird)	Classic of Regions Within the Seas	The head bears the character "virtue" (de), the wings "obedience" (shun), the breast "benevolence" (ren), and the back "righteousness" (yi).	Its appearance foretells harmony throughout the realm.
Luan Niao	Second Classic of the West	A bird resembling a pheasant with five-colored markings, named Luan Niao.	Its appearance foretells peace and tranquility throughout the realm.
Wen Gun Yu	Third Classic of the West	Resembles a carp with fish body and bird wings. dark markings, white head, and red beak. Constantly travels the Western Sea, roams the Eastern Sea, and flies by night. Sounds like a luan chicken; tastes sour and sweet; consuming it cures madness.	Its appearance foretells great abundance throughout the realm.
Jiao	Third Classic of the West	A beast resembling a dog with leopard markings and ox horns. named Jiao; sounds like a barking dog.	Its appearance foretells great abundance in the state.

## 4. Origins of prophetic monsters

The prophetic monsters recorded in the Shan Hai Jing serve as symbols of natural disasters, human-made calamities, and auspicious hopes. Their emergence can be attributed to the following factors:

#### 4.1. Primitive mentality's exploration and explanation of natural phenomena

From the Shan Hai Jing, we can perceive the descriptions, cognitions, and reflections of our ancestors regarding natural environments and conditions of existence. When modern ethnologists, anthropologists, or explorers penetrate into relatively backward primitive tribes, they may achieve proficiency in these tribes' languages and comprehend what the tribal people intend to express, yet they cannot grasp their modes of thinking. Regarding the understanding of identical phenomena, enormous discrepancies exist between primitive and modern peoples. This outcome is engendered by fundamentally divergent mentalities.

The British anthropologist E. B. Tylor, who proposed the theory of "animism," believed that in the cognition of primitive peoples, all living beings and natural phenomena possess "souls" or "spirits." Primitive peoples regarded fragments and scenes from dreams and fantasies as objectively real. Tylor maintained that this psychological mechanism determined the mode of thinking characteristic of primitive peoples. The Chinese mythologist Yuan Ke observed that "the attribution of souls to all things represents the initial anthropomorphization by primitive peoples of natural objects; suspecting that the natural entities surrounding them could bring either harm or benefit to humans, they consequently developed nature worship, constituting primitive fetishism. Fire, water, the sun, the moon, stones, great trees, oxen, serpents, and others could all become objects of their veneration." [5] It may be said that the monsters recorded in the Shan Hai Jing were fashioned by our ancestors through imaginative processing of their knowledge regarding living environments, flora, and fauna, infused with sentiments of awe. When they could not explain various meteorological phenomena, they attributed such occurrences to the manipulation of spiritual beings.

The French sociologist Lévy-Bruhl provided a further interpretation of the thought characteristics of primitive peoples, arguing that their thinking was influenced by the "law of participation." This primarily manifested as "the indistinguishability between subject and object; a lack of logical reasoning and indifference to contradictions; representations could mutually permeate and interconnect, allowing the same entity to exist simultaneously in two or more places, permitting the unity of singular and plural, part and whole, etc." [6] Based on these principles, when examining the monstrous images in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, it is not difficult to uncover clues. For example, the Bifang, which could foretell fires: "It resembles a crane, has one foot, red patterns on a green body with a white beak, and its call is its own name. Wherever it appears, there will be wildfires in that region." Its image is set as a bird, resembling a "crane," with colors of "red patterns on a green body" and a "white beak." Its call is its name, "Bifang." Analyzing according to the "law of participation," the "red and green" colors of the Bifang represent the colors of flames at different temperatures, while the "white beak" similarly associates with firelight or brightness. Soaring flames, fire spreading or swaying with the wind, viewed from afar, resemble a large bird dancing in the sky, and the crackling sound of burning dry wood is none other than the call of the Bifang bird. Through the mutual permeation and interconnection of representations such as color, shape, and sound, and restructuring according to primitive thought patterns, the fire monster—Bifang—is created.

The numerous prophetic monster images represented by the Bifang bird are merely reflections of how primitive humans used their unique mode of thinking to understand, explore, and explain nature.

#### 4.2. Alternative records of natural disasters in agrarian civilization

Agriculture is a production activity fundamentally based on natural reproduction, and it is most closely related to the natural environment. Factors such as temperature, precipitation, sunlight, and wind direction are critical to crop yields. Various forms of severe weather, geological disasters, and pest infestations pose significant obstacles to agricultural development. However, China is also one of the few countries in the world where natural disasters occur very frequently, with a wide variety of disaster types and severe disaster-related losses. Among weather-related disaster losses, drought and flood pose the greatest threats to agriculture. According to data provided by the Chronicle of Natural and Man-Made Disasters in China Through the Dynasties, from the late Warring States period in 243 BC to the end of the Western Han Dynasty in AD 8, there were 34 major droughts (including four particularly severe ones that led to tragic "cannibalism"), 22 major floods, 12 locust plagues, and 34 other types of natural disasters (including earthquakes, hailstorms, gales, frost damage, plagues, landslides, fires, and low temperatures). Sometimes, multiple natural disasters would occur alternately within a single year. For instance, in the second year of the

Yongxing era of Emperor Huan of the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 154), the capital area experienced an earthquake in spring, a locust plague in summer, and a drought in September. Alternatively, the same type of natural disaster could strike consecutively for several years, such as the severe droughts that occurred in AD 75, 76, and 77 during the reign of Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty.

The frequent occurrence of natural disasters led to reduced or total crop failure, causing immense suffering among the people and shaking the foundations of the state. Descriptions of various disasters can be found in early myths, legends, and literature. Records of floods can be traced back to deluge myths passed down among many ethnic groups. For example, the story of "Noah's Ark" in the Bible, or the legends of "Fuxi and His Sister" among China's Yao, Mu lao, and Bouyei ethnic groups, the Yi people's myth of the "Flood Overwhelming the Heavens," and the A chang ethnic group's creation myth Zhepama and Zhemimaall recount the devastation of all things and the suffering of living beings after great floods. As for descriptions of droughts, the Dayusection of the Classic of Poetryincludes the poem "Yunhan": "The drought is so severe, / It desiccates the mountains and rivers. / The drought demon runs rampant, / As if scorching and burning." This is a poem of King Xuan of Zhou praying to the gods for rain, which also records the severity of that drought and the people's condemnation of the drought demon's atrocities. Another example is from The Annals of Lü Buwei, "Following the People": "In the past, Tang conquered Xia and brought order to the world. There was a great drought, and for five years there were no harvests. Tang then offered himself as a prayer in the mulberry forest, saying: 'If I alone am guilty, let it not extend to the myriad people. If the myriad people are guilty, let the blame rest on me alone. Do not, because of the folly of one man, cause the gods and spirits of Heaven to harm the lives of the people.' Thereupon, he cut off his hair and bound his hands, using his own body as a sacrifice to pray for blessings from Heaven. The people were greatly pleased, and the rain then fell abundantly." This great drought, which resulted in no harvests for five years, if left unchecked, could easily lead to famine-driven uprisings and the collapse of a dynasty.

Therefore, numerous monsters associated with natural disasters appear in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, reflecting and offering an alternative record of historical calamities experienced by human civilization during its primitive stages. However, this form of record is marked by fear and reverence. Those bizarre-looking creatures capable of summoning wind and rain, and bringing about natural and man-made disasters, are unmistakably embodiments of various natural calamities. People relying primarily on agriculture were deeply rooted in their native lands. They could neither migrate in search of new water sources and fertile pastures like nomadic peoples, nor were they capable of resisting various natural disasters. The only thing they could do, before becoming sufficiently strong, was to document the painful lessons of history, maintain vigilance, and detect early signs of disasters, thereby warning future generations to avoid or mitigate the damage caused by such calamities. This reverence for and preparedness against natural disasters can still be seen in later literary works. For example, the Book of Rites: Monthly Ordinancesstates: "If the ordinances of summer are observed in the first month of spring, the rain will not fall in its proper season, plants and trees will wither prematurely, and the state will frequently face alarms. If the ordinances of autumn are observed, the people will suffer from great epidemics, violent winds and torrential rains will prevail, and thorns, weeds, and wild grasses will grow in abundance. If the ordinances of winter are observed, floods will cause ruin, heavy frost and snow will be severe, and the first sowings will fail. "In contrast, the content of the Classic of Mountains and Seasrepresents a qualitative leap, moving beyond the realm of mythology and progressing toward rational thought and objective laws.

### **4.3. The classic of mountains and seas as a reflection of ancient witchcraft texts**

As mentioned earlier, some scholars regard the Classic of Mountains and Seas as an "ancient witchcraft text," a view with which the author concurs. Witchcraft culture emerged during the primitive stages of human civilization. In ancient times, shamans held a highly esteemed position, serving as messengers between humans, spirits, and deities, as well as representatives of knowledge and culture. The vast array of "knowledge" recorded in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, spanning from astronomy to geography, originated precisely from the need for shamans to possess the most advanced and comprehensive understanding of their time. For instance, when various natural disasters occurred, shamans were required to explain the causes to rulers and the populace, and correspondingly, propose solutions.

During the Warring States period, extensive land reclamation and deforestation increasingly disrupted the balance of the ecosystem. At that time, natural disasters such as floods, droughts, locust plagues, earthquakes, and epidemics occurred continuously, intensifying the conflict between overexploitation and ecological equilibrium. People, however, did not recognize the underlying reasons, believing instead that they had offended the interests of the spirits. Consequently, they resorted to sacrificial rituals to appease the anger of deities and ghosts, offering gifts to compensate for the resources they had taken from the mountains and rivers. Shamans presided over these sacrifices, selecting and organizing various monsters, spirits, and deities from the mountains and rivers, and assigning them new identities. For example, the mountain god of Huai jiang from the *Western Mountains Classic* 3 ("It resembles an ox but has eight legs, two heads, and a horse's tail. Its cry sounds like the call of the bohuang. Wherever it appears, there will be war in that region") was transformed into a protective deity of the state during this process. Through this systematization, various monsters gradually became more organized and functionally defined. Simultaneously, shamans used the "knowledge" they possessed to remind rulers to pay attention to the fortunes of the state, prepare for defense or relief efforts, and thereby consolidate their own status.

## 5. Conclusion

As a classic text that has been passed down for millennia, the *Classic of Mountains and Seasholds* far more allure than what we currently perceive. Much of its cultural information has been lost to the passage of time, yet precisely because of this, it leaves us with vast space for imagination and exploration. Numerous questions regarding the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* remain to be answered, and it is hoped that scholars will devote greater attention and effort to its study and discovery.

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