On the Well Imagery and Its Cultural Implications in Zibuyu

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Abstract. Zibuyu is one of the three major collections of classical Chinese fantasy novels in the Qing Dynasty. The imagery of wells in many of its works is eye-catching. Wells were originally used for drawing water, and participated in all aspects of the daily life of the ancients. The imagery of the well in Zibuyu expresses through absurd writing that the well can carry all things because of its illusory nature, its static nature can be a permanent reference item, and its allegorical nature can carry Daoism and virtue. By exploring the rich ideological culture of ancient China reflected in the well imagery in Zibuyu, it will help to inherit and spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture and provide a unique perspective for the protection of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Zibuyu; imagery of well; cultural connotation.

The well is one of the oldest existing artifacts in Chinese history. The original meaning of a well is a water well [1]. Zibuyu (taking Zibuyu and Sequel to Zibuyu as the main body of the study, hereafter referred to as Zibuyu) is one of the three major collections of classical Chinese fantasy novels in the Qing Dynasty. It is an artistic process of things that are shocking to the heart... record and save them. Its content is rich and complex, as well as the collection of style records, and it has written rich well imagery. The philosophical thoughts contained in it are a reflection of the society at that time and a window to observe ancient culture. The following is a detailed analysis of the well imagery in Zibuyu, and on this basis, the cultural connotation and practical significance of the well imagery will be discussed.

1. The imagery of the well in Zibuyu

It can be seen from many literary works in ancient my country that wells were involved in people's lives everywhere in ancient times. In addition to their basic function of drawing water, wells were endowed with more ideological connotations under the guidance of the author's consciousness. Research on the imagery of well includes the well hexagram in Zhouyi and sitting in a well and looking at the sky in Zhuangzi-Qiushui. In Tang poetry and Song Dynasty, well is used to refer to hometown, expressing the sorrow of leaving one's hometown. The common people class appeared for the first time in the dramas of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, and the novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties contained bloody wild histories of concubines and maidservants who died by throwing themselves into wells because they refused to see the humiliation. [2] The imagery of well in Zibuyu has different and rich interpretations.

Imagery can refer to conceptual imagery and aesthetic symbolic imagery. Under the guidance of rational concepts and abstract thinking, the abstract concepts, philosophical artistic images and philosophical concepts expressed can be interpreted. The following will discuss in detail the imagery of well in Zibuyu based on the theory of imagery.
1.1 The Well of Illusion—the container that holds all things

Ancient wells in China can be roughly divided into earth wells, tile wells, brick wells and stone wells. They are mainly composed of well bodies, well platforms and well circles. The shapes and construction methods of various wells are different, but most of them are cylindrical inside. For example, the wells excavated in Beijing from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the early Western Han Dynasty were tile-tube wells, and the walls of the wells were stacked with ceramic well rings to form a cylinder shape. A Northern Song Dynasty water well was excavated in Xiamen. The cross-section is like an inverted wine bottle. The well wall gradually expands the diameter of the well downwards. The space circled by the well wall extends to the bottom of the well to form a concave space with water and sediment. It can be regarded as a limited space container with the wellhead as the only entrance and exit. When the entrance and exit are closed, the space naturally becomes a space with confinement and isolation characteristics. In Zibuyu, it is recorded that there is a well in Hong County of Sizhou, which was the place where King Yu locked the witch branch to pray, and the iron rope still exists (Sizhou Weird Monument) [3]500. According to legend, Bao Gong trapped demons in a black well and covered it with iron plates (Wutai) [3]279. There is a well in the back garden filled with green poisonous water (Old Minion Shi Chong) [3]45. The water-drawing function of ordinary wells was abandoned, and the nature of the water container was emphasized, turning it into a well that seals evil spirits and contains poisonous water, creating the imagery of a well with the characteristics of confinement and isolation.

When people look to the bottom of the well, there are only water waves swaying in the darkness, but no one can see the bottom of the well through the water. The bottomless well space extends infinitely with the blessing of people's imagination. It seems to be an infinite space, which further expands people's imagination. Zheng Bo defeated Duan in Yan mentioned that Zheng Zhuanggong vowed not to be inferior to Huangquan and regretted it after meeting his mother Jiang Shi. Ying Kaoshu offered advice that if the ground and the spring meet each other through a tunnel, who would say otherwise? [4] The water in the underground well is called the underworld, because the internal space of the well accommodates the endless underworld. The well space has also grown into an infinite space container in people's minds. In Zibuyu, it is said that the bottom of the well is where ghosts and gods live, and the magistrate of Fengdu went in and out of the underworld from the well to pray for the people (Magistrate of Fengdu) [3]7. There is a story about Liu Prefect taking a ghost out of a well and entering the underworld (Liu Prefect's Strange Dream) [3]33. Jiang Taishi dreamed of entering the underworld and saw two wells next to the Palace of Hell, one containing heaven and the other containing hell (Jiang Taishi) [3]200. With the blessing of people's imagination, the well space can contain heaven, hell and underworld, and its space is not small. Another man's rotting corpse was fished out of a well (The real dragon figure turns into a fake dragon figure) [3]88, and a murderer killed someone and threw his body into the well (The Good Pig) [3]30. Some people ignore social ethics, and their bad thoughts make the well space accommodate the evil in people's hearts.

It can be seen that due to the illusory characteristics of its internal space, the well has evolved into a container that can carry all things (including people’s imagination) in people’s concepts, and it also reflects people’s rich imagination and creativity.
1.2 The Well of Stillness - a constant reference item

The oldest well discovered so far is the wooden well at the New Age site in Hemudu, Yuyao, Zhejiang. [15] It is about six or seven thousand years old and is one of the most enduring ancient buildings in China. Most Chinese buildings stand on the ground and are easily lost in the long river of history. However, the well is different. The wellhead on the ground is only part of it, and the other part goes deep into the ground. Although it may be buried, it can exist forever. There have been excavated wells from the Shang Dynasty, wells from the Eastern Zhou Dynasty to the early Western Han Dynasty, wells from the Northern Song Dynasty, etc. Their special structure is the basis for the long-lasting existence of the wells. If a well exists in the long river of time, it must have stillness relative to time.

In ancient times, water was closely related to the production activities of the ancients. As one of the important sources of daily water for the ancients, well water was also worshiped by the ancients. As an ancient custom with a long history, the Five Sacrifices include sacrificing wells. The purpose is to pray that the wells and springs will not dry up, and it expresses the ancients' yearning for a better life. The ancients' emphasis on well water derived from the importance of wells, so that the wells were abandoned but not blocked, leaving them on the surface of the earth. Du Mu, a writer in the Tang Dynasty, questioned this custom and wrote article on plugging abandoned wells, which regarded abandoned wells as a bad habit. However, this also proved that wells in ancient life would not disappear easily on the surface of the earth. It is a common situation for dry wells to remain in place despite being abandoned, which reinforces the stillness of the wells. At the same time, as a special building, the immovable nature of the well can also be regarded as stationary relative to the geographical location. As one of the most durable ancient buildings on the earth, the well with its dual stillness has gradually been recognized and utilized by people for its own attributes.

Zibuyu says, There is a stone well under Baochu Pagoda, and there is a rich man's grave to the west of the well (Grave Digging Report) [3]185. My concubine's body is still buried by the well on the east wall of this building (Tang Hanlin) [3]185. Now at which mountain and temple are there in Yunqi? There is a pine tree and a well outdoors. If you remember this, you might as well go and visit. [3]508 (Shi Kui and Di Hui) and so on. It is mentioned that one of the references indicating the location of something or someone is a well. The graves of ancient rich people were buried underground in order to be able to sleep underground. They have the same characteristics as the corpses buried underground. They have the characteristics of not disappearing and being immovable under natural circumstances. The dual stillness of the well is consistent with this. It is also consistent with the immovable characteristics of a certain mountain and temple in Yunqi and has become one of the references for its position indication. It can be seen that the dual stillness of the well has been valued, and its function has expanded from simply drawing water to a reference object as a position indicator. The meaning of the well imagery here—the symbol of an everlasting reference is derived from this, and it is also the carrier and reflection of history and culture.

1.3 The well of allegory—the link between literature and Daoism

Water is the source of life, and well water is one of the important sources of water for the people. There is a common proverb: A well thousands of miles away will never spit back reflects people's love for well water and environmental awareness, [5] and also involves social ethics issues. There is a record in Zuo Zhuan: The Seventeenth Year of Xiang Gong: Sun Kuai of Wei was hunting in Cao Tunnel. He let his horse drink water on Chongqiu and broke the water bottle. The people of
Chongqiu closed their doors and scolded him. The locals did not dare to accuse him face to face, so they cursed him behind closed doors. Warring States Strategy • Chu Yi records: There was a man who thought his dog was good at guarding the door and doted on it. His dog once peed into the well. His neighbor saw it and wanted to come into the house and tell him. The dog was dirty. Wells, their owners will also attract hatred and scolding, which shows that caring for well water and environmental awareness are part of social ethics.

There is a story in Zibuyu: Xi Guan, who was twelve years old, had a naughty nature and peed in the well... God said that he polluted the well where people drink water, and his crime is to poison people. His life should be taken. He died in the evening. (god of wells) Well water occupies a certain important position in people's daily life. The naughty children who polluted the well water were punished and died, which directly shows the importance of environmental awareness. In the form of fables, it conveys the public moral concept of caring for the well in social morality. There is another story: There was a guard who liked riding horses and archery. One day he went out hunting and chased rabbits on horseback in Dongzhimen. There was an old man squatting by the well to draw water. The guard's horse did not stop and pushed the old man down the well. Go, the guard was very scared and hurried home. After that, Every time I passed Dongzhimen, I would take a detour to avoid the well. (Ghost pretends to be someone else's name and asks for sacrifices) This guard knew that riding his horse by the well and causing others to fall into the water was a wrong act and he was blackmailed by the ghost. It can be seen that for wells where water is drawn, one must not only protect the water from pollution, but also regulate one's behavior when activities near the well, which reflects that safety issues around the well are also worthy of attention. Well-loving ethics not only means caring for the well and protecting water quality, but also enhancing safety awareness at the well and regulating one's behavior at the well. These stories all revolve around wells, expressing the social moral philosophy of loving wells. From this, the allegorical well imagery derives the symbolic meaning of the bond that is documented in literature.

Well, originally a well for drawing water. The well in Zibuyu uses the illusion of space to become a container that carries all things, and uses its dual stillness to become a permanent reference item. It uses allegorical imagery to become a link that carries morality to convey society and the public morality of love. These philosophical explanations and interpretations expand the content of the well imagery and illuminate the rich connotations of the well imagery.

2. The cultural connotation of the well imagery in Zibuyu

As one of the important water sources for ancient people, wells play an important role in people's minds. The imagery of wells in Zibuyu enriches the image and connotation of wells, and also inherits and records history and culture.

2.1 Daoist culture - the well contains the Dao

In Lao Tzu's thought, he believes that Dao was born before the heaven and earth, and that all things in the world are based on Dao as the root of creation and change. Chapter 42 of the Daodejing mentions that Dao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, and two gives rise to three. Three generates all things, that is, Dao generates all things. Laozi also proposed that the best is like water. Water is good for all things without fighting. It stays in a place that everyone dislikes, so it is close to the truth. Dao is the root of all things materially, and ethically belongs to the highest good, that is, the most beautiful and noble quality. Water in nature is ever-changing and ubiquitous.
Laozi regards water as the figure and image of Dao in nature, that is, water is the substitute of Dao in the real world. The Daoist classic *Taixishengshui* mentioned that Tai Yi comes out of water and Tai Yi is hidden in water, that is, Tai Yi is born with water, and water is the life of all things. At the same time, Guan Zhong also expressed a similar sentiment in *Guanzi: Shuide*. From this point of view, it is believed that water is talented and therefore the origin of all things and the clan of all living beings. It can be seen that water can be the Dao and generate all things.

Water well is the original meaning of a well, and water is the root of the well. The imagery of a well in *Zibuyu* encompasses everything in its space, including the underworld, heaven, ghosts, corpses and other absurd things. These objects in the well are not only the imagination and evil thoughts of the ancients, but also the representation of the Dao of all things born in water. There is also the use of well as a talisman to be integrated into the god subduing' ceremony (*Subduing the Temple*) \[^{3}]^{^{1483}}\. It is precisely because there is a way in the well that something can be created out of nothing. Water benefits all things without fighting. It stays in places that no one likes and is more than the Dao. The water in the well that naturally evolves all things is also one of the symbols of Dao, thus making the space of the well expand infinitely.

### 2.2 Folk culture - well worship

As a long-standing sacrificial custom in ancient China, the earliest records of the Five Sacrifice can be found in the *Book of Rites: Sacrifice*. Siming, Zhongliu, Men, Xing, Li \[^{10}\]. However, in *Baihuotong* written by Ban Gu of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the sacrificial behavior was changed to Sacrifice well. Gao You's note in Lu's Spring and Autumn Annals states: A well can be built to provide water to people, and the king will be born in winter, so he is worshiped. The purpose of sacrifices in ancient China is for the well-being of the people, and the replacement of well sacrifices with line sacrifices reflects the importance of wells in the ancients. It occupies a more important position in daily life and can better improve the lives of the ancients. Well worship is the ancient people's hope that the participation of wells in future life can achieve the ideal of a better life. The rituals for worshiping wells have also gradually become richer. The most common one is that people pay homage to the well god. There are also more rituals such as sacrificing wells, sealing wells and other forms of worship every year. The worship of the well god as an object gradually derived from the worship of the well god as a person, and images of gods and men such as the well god boy, the flute-playing woman, the well doctor and so on were born. There are wonderful descriptions in the Song Dynasty's *Chunzhu Jiwen* and the Southern Song Dynasty's Responsibility for the Well Articles. The essence of the well gods, whether physical or human, is for people to seek blessings and seek a better life in the future.

The folk custom of worshiping wells has a long history. The ancients gradually realized the importance of wells due to their need for water in daily life. In their yearning for a better future, they imagined that a well god would provide them with water guarantee for daily life, thus defying wells and became a folk belief. The lofty image of the well god was recognized and respected by the ancients, so much so that the well was abandoned and not filled. Du Mu's *Wen on Seizing and Abandoning Wells* mentioned: Wells were often abandoned but not blocked, and there was no basis for them in ancient times. Nowadays, there are wells in the state government offices, but they are not blocked. There is a well in the hall where I live, but it is not blocked even if it is no longer used. Some people protect it with a box, or cover it with horizontal wood and earth. Over time, the wood rots, and people fall in and die. However, the people of the world never block it. I don't know what allusion the well cannot be blocked? \[^{11}\] The reason why wells are left unfilled is not due to any
allusion, but rather developed from the folk culture of worshiping wells. Therefore, thousands of wells can exist in the world forever, so that in the long river of time, they gain the static characteristic relative to time, and became a permanent reference item in the ancient people's concepts.

2.3 Water culture - water protection awareness

Water gives rise to all things. Water has nurtured the growth and reproduction of human beings, but it can also bring disasters to human beings. Since ancient times, our ancestors have lived near water sources. Water is an indispensable resource in the lives of ancient people. The productivity of primitive societies was low, they had no understanding of the natural laws of water, and they were helpless in the face of the vagaries of water, which led to the emergence of primitive water worship. The oracle bone inscriptions, China's earliest writings, record the inscriptions of the Yin people worshiping the river god. Since the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the emperor has sacrificed to the world's famous mountains and rivers, which was later listed as one of the Eight Policies in ancient times. From top to bottom, each ethnic group and each region has its own river god that it worships, such as He Bo, the water god of the Yellow River, and Mrs. Xiang, the water god of the Xiang River. The essence of the ancient people's worship of water was the need for water that can benefit all things rather than water that brings disaster. It is generally agreed that water conservancy is the foundation of agriculture and the life of crops.

The invention of the well was a major innovation by the ancients in using water conservancy projects to conquer water. *The Complete Book of Agricultural Affairs* mentioned: The merits of wells are great... Yao people dug wells and drank from them. When the soup was dry, Yi Yin taught the people to dig wells in the fields to irrigate the fields.\(^{[12]}\) The great merits of wells are due to the fact that they conquered water for mankind. This enabled ancient people to use water more conveniently and effectively. Well water has become one of the sources of life that nourishes human beings, occupying a place in the daily life of ancient people. Well water can benefit all things. The changes in the relationship between man and water made the ancients realize the importance of protecting well water very early. For example, in the *Responsibility for the Well* in the Southern Song Dynasty, it is created that the well prodigy endured the humiliation and endured the heavy burden to save the exhausted well.\(^{[13]}\) The *Heard new rumors from the lake and the sea and continued writing Yijianzhi* written by an unknown person in the Yuan Dynasty records that because the well was protected by Wu Zhan, the Well Goddess cooked rice and vegetables and made soup like a mortal woman.\(^{[14]}\) Protecting water from depletion, and more importantly, protecting water from pollution, are all manifestations of the ancient people's awareness of protecting water. The well god Tongzi in *Zibuyu* even raised the act of contaminating well water with children's urine to the highest level of punishment, saying that his crime was the same as poison and took his life. The starting point of these stories is the importance of well water, praising human behavior in protecting wells and criticizng the behavior of polluting wells. As the saying goes, if the skin does not exist, the hair will not be attached. The allegorical well imagery in *Zibuyu* is based on the awareness of water protection in water culture, and illustrates the philosophy that protecting a well is not only for protecting water, but also for protecting people. concept.
Conclusion

Well has rich connotations in Chinese literature and has different symbolic connotations in different literary works. For example, it has the meaning of homesickness, bloody wild history and other symbols. As one of the three major collections of classical Chinese fantasy novels in the Qing Dynasty, Zibuuyu expands the image connotation and cultural connotation of the well through Yuan Mei's artistic creation. With its double stillness, the well becomes a permanent reference object on the ground. In the gestation of folk culture and mysterious culture, the fable-like story form has become a link to convey the morality of caring for wells in social morality. The illusory space is written with absurdity and becomes a container for all things, while also alluding to ancient well-building technology. The imagery of the well in Zibuuyu reflects China's rich culture and philosophy with its unique symbolism and cultural connotation. It is also a supplement to the imagery of wells in novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

A well is a water conservancy project created by human beings' subjective initiative. It is the crystallization of the wisdom of the ancients and brings water of life into thousands of households. Wells are valued for the water they contain, and rich cultural implications can be read from them. However, with the development of the times and the gradual improvement of productivity levels, wells are no longer just water wells. Mines and oil wells have come one after another. The smooth flow of tap water has squeezed the living space of water wells. With the changes of the times, the folk custom of worshiping wells gradually disappeared, and the function and value of wells gradually disappeared in the minds of the world.

As the saying goes, never forget the man who dug the well. We have running water in our lives, but we should not forget the wells that have nourished the ancients for thousands of years. From the analysis of the well imagery in Zibuuyu, we can see that the well imagery is derived from the well. It exudes a strong cultural atmosphere. Daoist thought has profound connotations, and the pure appearance of the ancient wells visible in our lives is the continuation of Daoist thought. The interpretation that water is equal to Dao provides us with a more intuitive example of understanding Daoist thought, and also gives a deeper value to the existing ancient wells.

Wells stand on the surface of the earth for the purpose of supplying water. They were worshiped and offered sacrifices by the ancients and have survived forever. They reflect the ancients' yearning for a better life, which is also the goal that the Communist Party of China strives for today. Watching the well, you can better understand that the struggle of the Communist Party of China is for the expectations of the people for thousands of years. With the development of the times, water utilization efficiency has gradually increased, and water pollution has gradually received attention. General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed that clear waters and green mountains are valuable assets, which is the best affirmation of the concept of water protection. The allegorical well imagery in Zibuuyu shows that the ancients have already shown no tolerance for water pollution. The increase in the availability of water resources does not mean that we can use water as we wish. Establishing a correct awareness of water protection is Our shared responsibilities and obligations. The allegorical well imagery reveals the contradiction between man and water and promotes the concept of water protection, which is still worthy of recognition and exploration today. The well imagery in Zibuuyu is not only the manifestation of the ancient people's concept of wells, but also the cultural integration of wells and water, which makes the well imagery have more significant cultural significance.
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