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《地海传奇》的道义奇幻与奇妙道思

The Taoist Fantasy and the Fantastic Taoism in

The Earthsea Cycle

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摘 要

厄休拉·勒奎恩所著的《地海传奇》被盛誉为最成功的西方奇幻小说之一。它以东方道家思维的独特视角和笔韵勾勒构建出一个东方哲学和西方文学和谐交融的奇幻地海世界。过去针对《地海传奇》所进行的研究角度丰富、内容深刻，主要集中在探讨作品人物的成长历程、语言的力量、女性的角色，并借助超验主义解读文本寓意等。然而，即使勒奎恩多次于访谈和作品中强调道家思想对其自身与文学创作的深刻影响，除却几篇硕士论文外，仍鲜少见有学者借助道家哲思深入解析《地海传奇》的代表元素和主要意象。因此，本论文立足于道家哲思与《道德经》，通过解析小说中真名、魔法、龙等三个重要的意象元素，全面深入挖掘并探究《地海传奇》中蕴藏的深邃玄妙的东方道家思想。本论文第一章分析意象真名与语言创世、道三者间的联系，阐述真名包含的生命与存在本质。第二章阐释意象魔法的隐喻及其蕴含的均衡无为道思，分析作者在其中流露出的和谐辩证思维与对乌托邦的向往。第三章探讨龙的象征、变形与性别隐喻，探讨所展现出的女性力量与阴阳和谐、永恒回归。最后，本文得出如下结论：《地海传奇》是一部充满东方道义哲思的西方奇幻著作。真名是地海世界存在的本质，魔法源自顺应自然生态发展的需求，龙象征女性力量苏醒和生命轮回，地海万物自然无为，却生生不息，在和谐辩证中达到超越。

关键词：厄休拉·勒奎恩 《地海传奇》 魔法 龙 道

Abstract

The Earthsea Cycle by Ursula K. Le Guin, regarded as one of the most successful Western fantasy novels worldwide, constructs for the readers a fantasy Earthsea world where the harmonious combination of Oriental philosophy and Western literature lays the pillar. The pervious academic research dedicated to *The Earthsea Cycle* bases on diversified perspectives and conveys profound messages, such as the growth of the protagonists, the power of language, the role of the female, and the Transcendentalist interpretation of the text. However, despite the fact that numerous interviews and her literary works witness Le Guin's public emphases on Taoism's paramount influence on her personal life and literary career, few scholars take the initiative to explore the Taoist connotations of the typical elements and significant symbols in *The Earthsea Cycle*. Consequently, drawing upon the philosophy of Taoism and *Tao Te Ching*, and resorting to the analysis of the three most significant elements in the book, namely true name, magic and dragon, this thesis conducts a profound and comprehensive exploration of the Taoist wonders in *The Earthsea Cycle*. The first chapter illustrates the connections among true name, language creation view and Tao to reveal how true name reflects the nature of life and existence; the second chapter elaborates on the metaphoric connotation of magic and its reflection on balance and inaction, and analyzes the dialectical harmony and longing for Utopia; the third chapter demonstrates the symbolic meaning, metamorphosis and embedded feminist metaphor of the dragon to explore feminism, the harmony of Yin and Yang, and the eternal return. At last, the thesis concludes that *The Earthsea Cycle* is a literary work of Western fantasy entwined with Oriental Taoist philosophy. True name is the essence of existence in the Earthsea world; magic originates from the need to develop while following the course of nature; dragon symbolizes the awakening power of the female and the eternal return of life. All things in *The Earthsea Cycle* rely on nature and inaction, grows within the circle of life, and eventually accomplishes transcendentalism by harmonious dialectics.

Key Words: Ursula K. Le Guin; *The Earthsea Cycle*; Magic; Dragon; Taoism

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Introduction

The Earthsea Cycle written by Ursula K. Le Guin is two trilogies of fantasy stories illustrated in six different books respectively with drastically different backgrounds, exotic landscapes, and various protagonists. The first three books are generally referred to as the first trilogy, while the later three the second trilogy. With Le Guin's vivid depiction, the Earthsea world in all six books can be tasted and digested while the reader experiences the unique history, ethnicity, custom, language, geographical features, and even functioning laws in a fantasy and magical land.

More specifically, when it comes to the plots and developments in *The Earthsea Cycle*, the very first book, *A Wizard of Earthsea* opens the door to fantasy and magic by showing how Ged, a young boy, grows into a mature wizard by embracing his true nature and self. The second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, on the other hand, lays another stone on the construction of Earthsea world by telling a story of light and dark, where the female protagonist Tenar finds the way out of the dark and unspeakable underground sacrificing rites with the influences and assistance of Ged. The third book, *The Farthest Shore*, illustrates the apocalypse mimicking the real world when equilibrium among all things is disturbed and eventually disrupted by a single man's desire, driven by the thirst for wealth and money, which, at the end, is quenched by Arren who receives help from Ged and manages to reset chaos to the original status at the boundary of the alive and the dead, the farthest shore.

Thus, the first trilogy of *The Earthsea Cycle* is completed, while the second takes almost twenty years to get refined. The fourth book, *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* conducts a profound and comprehensive research of gender inequality and feminism by reminiscing on the legendary figure, Therru's awakening power and transformation into a dragon, whose identity surpasses the limits set by the definite interpretations of gender in

the societal context. The fifth book, *Tales from Earthsea: Short Stories* consists of six stories, in which long-expected explanations about the origin of the Earthsea world, the historical account of its geographical features and ethnics, as well as the gradual formation and accumulation of customs and languages in it are presented with vivid details and meticulous depictions. The sixth book titled *The Other Wind* ends the whole series with a story of how men and dragons forsake the misunderstandings, embrace the differences and eventually cooperate with each other to overcome the evil power in the Earthsea world.

In terms of the status of the work in literature, *The Earthsea Cycle* has long been considered as one of the three major Western literary works in the genre of Fantasy, with the other two being *The Lord of The Rings Trilogy*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S Lewis. One after another outlandish imaginary worlds gradually unfold before the readers who are invited to step on a dangerous yet fruitful journey going through the smoldering magma of Mount Doom, observing the emerald eyes of the ageless dragons shining with alert and greed, and even experiencing the heartbreaking sorrowfulness of Harry Potter due to the loss of his beloved ones. However, there is this fascinating one that distinguishes itself from the rest with the philosophical and metaphorical elements, such as hovering dragons, boisterous waves and one single lonely boat drifting alone on the infinite ocean—*The Earthsea Cycle* by Le Guin. *The Earthsea Cycle* does stand out in the forest of Western fantasy literary works.

As for the reasons that differentiate *The Earthsea Cycle* from the other successful works of Fantasy, its depictions of the common Fantasy elements in an uncommon way inspired by Taoism play an indispensable role. In both *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the dichotomy of Good and Evil serves as a prevailing theme throughout the whole story. The clash of the good and the evil, the divergence of the light and the dark make up the backbone of the stories, which witness how the heroes like Frodo and the lion, in the unremitting search for the absolute good, ultimately achieve the

perpetuity and infinitude, as Jesus did. However, in all the stories of *The Earthsea Cycle*, the eastern Taoist thinking sparkles and twinkles. In *The Earthsea Cycle*, Le Guin does not utterly downplay the importance and justification of the dichotomy of Good and Evil. Never has she blindly trailed along the path. In contrast, Le Guin makes full use of the dialectical thinking in Taoism, proves the negative with the assistance of the positive, and holds the firm belief that light and darkness, good and evil, life and death are all mutually interdependent. There is no need or possibility to ever repudiate the existence of evil and death, or to pursue the unadulterated good and uncorrupted immortality. The reason lies in that though named differently, the opposite elements and forces are actually two sides assuring the wholeness and completeness in one thing. Le Guin's own magic guides the Oriental Taoism to function in concord with the Western fantasy narratives. Philosophy and literature collaborate in harmony and spark innovative thoughts in the realm of fantasy. Taoism and Western fantasy literature have both reached a new peak.

As for the previous academic research done in the related fields that might provide necessary materials and insightful thoughts to further analyze this literary work, during the preparation for this thesis, a great number of papers, articles, and books about the related themes are consulted as a solid foundation for the further research. All of the research and results are no doubt inspiring and helpful in that they cover a wide and relatively comprehensive perspectives in relation to Taoism, *The Earthsea Cycle*, mythical thought, language and existence, feminism, all of which play an indispensable role in the completion of this thesis. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, apart from several postgraduate theses, there is no paper dedicated to the specific connection between Taoism and *The Earthsea Cycle* by Le Guin. Three papers construct the pillar for this paper: "How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books" by Laura B Comoletti and Michael Drout; "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Gum's Earthsea Trilogy" by T. A. Shippey; "The Emersonian Choice: Connections between Dragons and Humans

in Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle" by Warren G Rochelle. It is these three papers that help this paper decode the myth surrounding the elements of true name, magic and dragon in *The Earthsea Cycle*.

Firstly, the paper "How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books" by Laura B Comoletti and Michael Drout explores the true names in *The Earthsea Cycle* from a feminist perspective, particularly in accordance with the expression of "mother tongue". Moreover, in the paper, the wizards and witches of the Earthsea world are compared with priests in reality, since all of them draw incredible power from actions carried out by the medium of speeches. The paper has a thorough discussion of the power and role concerning language and names in *The Earthsea Cycle* from a feminist aspect.

Secondly, the paper "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Words: Ursula Le Gum's Earthsea Trilogy" by T. A. Shippey analyzes the rituals required as the prerequisite of the implementation of the Earthsea magic to work miracles and manifest the wonder. In addition, the paper reveals the source of magic and power in the Earthsea world as one that originates from the utilization of languages and flows to the maintenance of peace. It is safe to assume that the function and the ultimate purpose of magic in *The Earthsea Cycle* lie in the protection of laws and rules in this universe, instead of simply defeating the villains in the convention way, which interferes or even completely destroying nature.

Thirdly, the paper "The Emersonian Choice: Connections between Dragons and Humans in Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle" by Warren G Rochelle discloses the intricate connection between human beings and dragons in *The Earthsea Cycle* under the framework of the Emersonian choice. The reason why human beings and dragons are fundamentally different lies in the different choices they made. The path selected by human beings leads them to the unceasing pursuit for the fulfillment of their personal worldly desires. Contrastingly, dragons are determined to live in a way mimicking that of

nature—eternal, infinite, and tranquil. However, regardless of the differences in their choices, the Emersonian choice guides people to do right and be right.

Regarding the philosophies of Taoism in children's literature, the author of "Seeking the Dao in Children's Literature: Reading Western Fantasies from a Daoist Perspective" manages to reread and decode the seemingly simple and superficial children's literature between the lines with Taoist philosophy. This paper actually contributes tremendously to the analysis of some other works, such as *The Little Prince* and *Charlotte's Web*. However, the paper only touches upon the Tao in *The Earthsea Cycle* with some reference to the title of the book and several quotes in the texts. In consequence, the above three papers shed invaluable and thought-provoking light on my analyses and exploration of the three important elements in *The Earthsea Cycle*: true name, magic, and dragons. The three papers not only equip me with more profound comprehensions of the elements, but also inspire this thesis to further associate *The Earthsea Cycle* with the Taoist philosophies.

When it comes to Taoism and its influence on the western scholars including Le Guin, on the one hand, both politically and culturally, Taoism has long been considered as one of the paramount traditional philosophical schools that have laid the pillar for the historical changes, the social developments and even the religious rituals. The core ideas of Taoism are most effectively represented by the following phrases and expressions, namely harmonious dialectics of Yin and Yang, name, nature, inaction, eternal return, and all things leveling as one. On the other hand, Taoism's influence and impact extend beyond the territories within China. A large number of westerners are particularly fascinated by Taoism, in that Tao, as reflected by its mysterious nature, draws people's attention to the equally mysterious land in the East. Such attention leaves a tremendous impact on the westerner scholars of liberal art scholars who accumulate ideas and thoughts from the source of Taoism. For instance, H. D. Thoreau (1817-1862) has been digesting many masterpieces from India and China ever since he was young. His

two-year-long experience as a hermit living in solicitude around Walden Pond witnessed his spiritual journey back to innocence and truth, his exploration of life, and his research on nature, all of which do not fail to reflect the Taoist spirit. Moreover, the contemporary German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is so heavily influenced by Taoism as a thinker and an individual that he takes a step further by translating eight chapters of *Tao Te Ching*, the most representative masterpiece of Taoism, into German, with the Chinese scholar Shiyi Xiao. Furthermore, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) once openly stated that it was reading *Tao Te Ching* that motivated him keep his spirit up (Jin). Actually, a long list of western scholars, artists and thinkers that are once influenced by Taoism in one way or another can be named.

Similar to the large number of western scholars, Le Guin herself has lived a life heavily or even decisively influenced by and characterized with Taoist ideas and philosophies, both in the daily trivialities and the literary spectrum. In the interview by Producer Dmae Roberts for the second time, Le Guin said, “Taoism and Anarchism fit together in some very interesting ways and I've been a Taoist ever since I learned what it was” (Roberts). In the interview with Brenda Peterson, Le Guin did not hesitate to show her deep interest in Taoism by remarking that “This is something women need, I think, and long for, often without knowing it. That’s undoubtedly one reason why all my life I’ve found the Tao de Ching so refreshing and empowering” (Peterson). Such open and direct statements of her interest in and love of Taoism and all that it stands for demonstrate how Taoism plays an indispensable role in shaping Le Guin as a writer and an individual.

Beside her own statements in the interviews, Le Guin’s family and childhood also insert paramount significance in adding Taoist elements to her future works including *The Earthsea Cycle*. Studies in anthropology, a family tradition Le Guin inherits from her parents, have decisively affected the writing career of her in various aspects such as enriching her writing with rich details of various ethnic customs, guiding her with both

western and eastern philosophies, and inspiring her life long interest in Chinese Taoist philosophy that led her to spend decades dedicatedly specializing in the thoughts of Laotse. She constructs the blueprint of the world in *The Earthsea Cycle* in accordance with the core concepts emphasized by Taoist philosophy. Throughout the fiction, her deep understanding of Taoist philosophy, her philosophical exploration of self and the value of life, and her global view of the relationship between men and nature are well displayed in the work.

The first chapter elaborates on the nature of life in Taoism indicated by the employment of true name in *The Earthsea Cycle*. In terms of its framework, this thesis first draws upon the element, true name in *The Earthsea Cycle*, and the Taoist concept of the connection between name and creation to analyze how true name lays the unyielding foundation in both of them. Moreover, in reference to Heidegger's theory of language, the first chapter in this thesis applies language as the essential thinking element, and bases on the relationship between creation view and language in order to discuss the element, true name, in the Earthsea world in the Taoist contextual situation. Furthermore, the first chapter resorts to the original essence, nature and status of language to reconsider the relationship. Thus, the first chapter in the thesis draws a conclusion on how the depictions of true name in *The Earthsea Cycle* reflect its reference to Taoism.

The second chapter in this thesis starts its analysis and exploration from the standing point of nature, the Taoist concept of core value serving as the basic expounding point, in order to illustrate the essence of magic, which is fundamentally in accordance with the Taoist notion of the integral mechanism of check and balance. In addition, the second chapter demonstrates how Le Guin offers the readers a glimpse at her anticipation for ecological wisdom and her aspiration for a Utopian society. More importantly, this paper resorts to the Taoist reasoning method of harmonious dialectics with the purpose of reflecting on all things from a relative, objective and transcendental perspective.

The third chapter of this thesis establishes the mythical thought in Taoism as the starting point and basis for further analysis in order to conduct an effective and efficient discussion of the symbolic and metaphoric role played by dragons and their metamorphosis in *The Earthsea Cycle*. Moreover, with the life view under the framework of eternal return as the mythical thought and through detailed plot analyses of the books, the third chapter elaborates on the gender awakening and gender empowerment, particularly from the perspective of the female that suffer from an inferior domestic and social status both in the Earthsea and the real world. Then, the third chapter takes a step further by illustrating the relationship between human beings, dragon and the divine, to eventually surpass the limits set by the gender and reveal the nature of the Emersonian choice made by human beings.

To sum up, this thesis, after the three-chapter analyses of the three paramount elements in *The Earthsea Cycle*, comes to the conclusion that *The Earthsea Cycle* constructs the Earthsea world characterized with true name, magic and dragon by the employment of a harmonious combination between the western fantasy literary writing and the oriental Taoist philosophical thinking. True name directly illustrates the nature of individual life, whose representation sets as the starting point of a journey inwardly to explore one's true self. Magic directly demonstrates the nature in the mechanism of check and balance, whose power, through the engagement of equal roles played by the opposite ends, maintains the function of the whole universe in equilibrium and harmony. Dragon metaphorically symbolizes the transformation of the characters and the true meaning of life and death, which, in turn, draw people's attention to the existence in nature in a transcendental manner. All things in *The Earthsea Cycle* rely on nature and inaction, grows within the circle of life, and eventually accomplishes transcendentalism by harmonious dialectics. The Taoist Fantasy and the Fantastic Taoism in *The Earthsea Cycle* entwine with each other, achieve and even transcend harmony.

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