

Mysticism from the Perspective of Psychology-A Case Study of Rider-Waite Tarot Deck

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ABSTRACT. *Mysticism has a long history. Since the twentieth century, not only has mysticism been studied from the perspective of philosophical, but it has been integrated with psychology, brain science and even modern physics, so that mysticism is able to have a new vitality and more contemporary characters of the time. Psychologists have studied mysticism from a psychological point of view, and gave the affirmation. As a manifestation of Western mysticism, tarot cards are more closely related to psychology. Modern Tarot scholars believe that, simple as they are, tarot describe a philosophy and mysticism with a profound self-exploration system. This paper mainly discusses the rich spiritual connotation and psychological significance of 22 Major Arcana in tarot and explores those unknown areas through the study and understanding of Tarot cards.*

Keywords: *mysticism, psychology, tarot, Major Arcana*

0. Introduction

Mysticism has a long history. In the East, Laozhuang's Philosophical Idea, Esoteric Buddhism, Tantric Hinduism and the mysterious culture of Zhouyi show the great fascinations to people. In the West, mysticism has a rich variety of manifestations, such as hypnosis, astrology, divination, alchemy and so on which even as part of national culture. In our country, these are known as mysterious cultures while they are called mysticism or occultism in the west[1]. Since the twentieth century, some scholars have begun to integrate mysticism with psychology, brain science and even modern physics, so that mysticism is able to have a new vitality and more contemporary characters of the time[2].

Psychologists studied mysticism from a psychological point of view and gave the confirmation. As W. James demonstrated in his works that mysticism had four characteristics: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity[3]. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, also studied mysticism. He combined mysticism with his psychoanalytic theory and held that mysticism was the retrogression of psychological defense mechanism, that was, the individual returned to the most original state because of sexual depression or sexual frustration in infancy[4]. In addition, C.G.Jung, a representative of the New Psychoanalysis School, made a more thorough study of mysticism. In Jung's theoretical system of analytical psychology, a large number of theoretical bases were derived from mysticism, including collective unconsciousness and archetypes which belonged to the core theories. Jung believed that philosophy and mysticism could make people healthy, and mysticism could be understood, but could not be verified[5]. So mysticism, psychology and other disciplines supplemented and promoted each other.

Mysticism has a variety of manifestations. In addition to the above mentioned philosophy, alchemy, astrology and the Book of Changes, the Tarot Card has been sought after for its ease of interpretation and popular acceptance. Modern Tarot scholars believe that, simple as they are, tarot cards describe a philosophy and mysticism with a profound self-exploration system[6]. There are 78 cards in total, including 22 Major Arcana and 56 Minor Arcana. Many of these 22 Major Arcana showed the image of the medieval society at that time, such as the Hierophant and the Emperor, or some human virtues, such as Strength and Temperance, or even some so-called "heresy" in the Middle Ages, such as the High Priestess. It can be said that the Major Arcana more reflects people's spiritual level[7]. There are many versions of Tarot, among which Rider-Waite tarot deck is most widely circulated. On top of that, many books and documents published specifically to explain it in the market. Therefore, Rider-Waite tarot deck is more representative, so the following discussion is mainly carried out from the perspective of Rider-Waite tarot deck.

In the Tarot cards, the Major Arcana describes the essence of everything with rich spiritual connotations and psychological significance. These Twenty-two cards numbering start from 0 to XXI. As 0, The Fool is the real protagonist of Tarot, and the rest of the Major brands can be regarded as the growth process of the fool which is called the "journey of fools". The fool's "0" is comparable with a newborn baby

who needs follow-up experience to shape, symbolizing unlimited possibilities. The remaining 21 cards can be divided into three groups. According to the meaning, they coincide with Freud's theory of personality structure: I-VII correspond to the id, VIII-XIV correspond to the ego, and XV-XXI correspond to the superego. Here we discuss the psychological significance of these 22 cards at different levels.

1. Id: from the Magician, I to the Chariot, VII

According to Freud, id symbolizes the most primitive power and follows the pleasure principle. Cards from the Magician to the Chariot exactly represent the most primitive power of human beings.

The Magician, I and The High Priestess, II are complementary concepts. The magician's right finger points to the sky and his left to the ground which symbolizes bringing God's will to the world. The red robe reflects his enthusiasm and creativity which is the initial positive force, that is, to actively strive for everything needed without restraint. The High Priestess sits quietly in the middle with a blue cape, calm and serene. There is even no slightest wind in her eyes, as if everything is under her control and the outside world could not disturb her exploration of her inner and subconscious. As Jung said about archetypes, the Magicians and the High Priestess represent the dual antithesis of everything: outward energy and inward exploration.

The Empress, III and the Emperor, IV are also relative concepts. Here Jung's archetypes is applicable, too. The Empress represents the gentleness and maternity in the female archetype, while the Emperor represents the sternness and authority in the male prototype. Just as the process of personality growth, it is inevitably influenced by the original family, among which father and mother play the most important roles. Mother's nurturing and blessing of children tends her to be regarded as the body of love and kindness while father has authority, teaches us social rules and demands obedience. The Hierophant, V is not an unfamiliar image in Western society. Pope represents theocracy. He serves the ruling of feudalism and even predominates over the royal. Besides, he undertakes the responsibility of educating and enlightening people's wisdom. With the growth of age, we can not get enough knowledge relying solely on parental education. We need more spiritual growth. So the trinity of empress, emperor and Pope makes up the most important part of our

personality growth.

The Lovers, VI also represents a new stage of our psychological development. When we grow up slowly in the education of family and school and get preliminary self-improvement, we begin to explore happiness outward. Freud believes that during the genital stage (after the age of 12), we derive pleasure from building intimate relationships with the other half, and learn to take responsibility. While intimately uniting with others, we may see the greater and deeper significance of life. Jung also believes that in our archetypes, there is another embodied imagination of our own gender, namely, Anima and Animus, which are the female images of men and the male images of women respectively. What's more, when we are looking for a partner to build intimate relationships, we are actually looking for our Anima or Animus.

The chariot, VII represents our will power. When we have gone through the first few stages of growth, we have become a soldier with firm beliefs and won some small victories. But life can't come this far to be stopped. We still have to face all kinds of challenges. As we grow older, we gradually find that we can't cope with the outside world with our real look, so there is what Jung calls "persona". When we face different challenges, we will choose different "armor" to disguise ourselves, but it is kind and harmless.

2. Ego: from Strength, VIII to Temperance, XIV

After our life develops to a certain stage when we have a lover and some accomplishments, then what happens next? Often we begin to think about some problems and try to understand the meaning of life. But all these questions remain still at the level of ego.

Strength, VIII, from which we can see a gentle woman bows her head to stroke the lion, trying to gently close the lion's mouth. The lion under her hand is as wild as that of a tame cat. This woman who influenced the lion with her tenderness and love is different from the ordinary trainer. And the strategy of overcoming the strong by applying soft methods is illustrated thoroughly by her. We can understand the lion as the instinctive desires of the id, if blindly depressed, the end will definitely turn out to be just the opposite of the wish. However, the use of stroking can get twice

the result with half the effort.

The Hermit, IX, this image has a very special position in medieval Europe. They stay away from the world in order to seek truth and bring light to mankind. In Jung's patients' descriptions of dreams, similar images emerged: an old man led them on a spiritual journey. In psychoanalytic theory, dreams are subconscious expressions, and the image of the old man in dreams coincides with the hermit. There is a hexagram in the lamp of the hermit in the card, which symbolizes the light of unconsciousness. It is only his own success to make small achievements from the magician to the chariot, but it is not the ultimate victory. Only by bringing help to others, can he reach the meaning of life and living.

The Wheel of Fortune, X comes from a medieval admonition that pride is regarded as the greatest sin of the church. As the 11th card in Major Arcana numbered 10, it is also the midpoint of all cards, just like all one's lifetime: when life passes by with time, some things will be seen by us. At this time, we will face to make choices. It is also because of the ups and downs that we have experienced that we can look at ourselves more objectively.

Justice, XI shows our understanding of insight. The woman in the card is Themis, the Titan goddess of ancient Greece. She points to the earth with a balance in her left hand and to the sky with a sword in her right hand, representing the fairness and justice of society. When we have experienced the age of ignorance which is simple black and white, we will gradually find that sometimes there is not only one criterion for judging things, but to understand from several perspectives. Large and small events in our lives make us what we are now. And the interweaving of various reasons and environments contributes to the formation and development of our personality. Understanding does not make us feel that we have great control over everything, but allows us to accept our limitations.

The Hanged Man, XII also contains the philosophy of life: when you see that your life will have a great turning point, you can accept it calmly even in great adversity. Death, XIII expresses the most rustic view: Death is the grand leveller. However, death is not the end. As many philosophies say, the death of the body does not mean one's closure. Psychologically speaking, the deeper meaning of death is to abandon our old persona. That being said, the old behavior pattern is as deep-rooted as a stubborn disease, and there will be pains to touch it. Therefore, the only way to

get rebirth is to make a thoroughly change. Temperance, XIV represents self-control. After the rebirth of the God of death, how can the reconstructed behavior model develop and avoid extremes? Temperance is a useful method.

3. Superego: from the Devil, XV to the World, XXI

When we have experienced the stage of ego, our life will not only pursue success, but also pursue higher self-realization. In fact, there are relatively few people who can reach the stage of ego, but there are still people who are always looking for something higher. That is to pursue the growth of the spiritual world and follow the perfection principle with superego first.

The Devil, XV represents desire and restraint. On the surface, it is because of the degeneration owing to the fall of reality. In fact, it is a suppressed subconscious which is not accepted by the secular world. This is the time for us to face the dark side of personality. When we choose to face the suppressed problems, it shows that we have got enormous energy. As for the Tower, XVI, the following destruction of the tower means that the dark parts are engulfed. High towers are sparkling with fire, and transformation is bound to be accompanied by pain. Our self-exploration can not only stay on the level of consciousness, or it will always be just beating around the bush. Only by breaking through the barrier of consciousness, can we have a deeper understanding.

The star, XVII represents the tranquility after the storm. The female in the card is naked and blend perfectly with nature, just as pure as a newborn baby without any selfish desire. The tank in her hand is slowly pouring water into the lake, symbolizing the connection between consciousness and subconscious which is filled with hope. The appearance of The Moon, XVIII is telling people about entering a new cycle. Scorpion crawls out of the water representing the subconscious and towards the moon. We strike a balance between good and evil, life and death, light and darkness. Even the most positive people have a negative subconscious. The Sun, XIX reflects an active state. In the sunshine, the meaning of life is more obvious, and the internal and external levels are well combined.

Judgment, XX, in which the angel sounds the trumpet and release the fear. This is a call from the heart which can break the isolation between experience and the

outside world. The last one is the World, XXI. Heaven and earth mixed as a unified over and over again. A naked women dancing in a wreath of olive branches symbolizing completeness and victory. This card contains a great philosophy: everything in the universe is moving, no one is the absolute center, but they are working in step. Everything can start and end here. The World, XXI is the beginning of the end.

This is the psychological significance of the Major Arcana in Tarot. Regrettably, although the public interest in the Tarot is growing, it is regarded solely as a divination tool. And little attention has been paid to the artistic history, psychology and philosophical significance of the Tarot cards in academic circles. Tarot represents a valuable journey which tells us how a person's life will be spent. You can choose to drive your development, or you can choose to explore the real self. Of course, you can also seek spiritual growth. There is no wrong or right and option is available to you. Taro tells us to experience and explore the uncharted territory, even if the journey is full of thorns. As Jung said, "Only the soul can understand the soul".

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