

Folk Revival and Cultural Identity: Reappearance of Traditional Festivals and Ritual in Modern Literature

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Abstract: This article takes modern Chinese literary works as the core research object. By examining the representation of traditional festivals and customary rituals in literary narratives, it becomes clear how modern literary works promote the revival of folklore through folklore writing and strengthen Chinese cultural identity. It analyzes the contemporary value of folklore writing in modern literature. In order to further confirm the eternal value of folklore as the core carrier of Chinese culture, it highlights the important role of modern literature in connecting tradition and modernity and condensing national cultural consensus, and provides a historical mirror and literary support for contemporary folklore protection and cultural identity construction.

Keywords: Folklore revival; Cultural identity; Modern literature; Traditional festivals

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1. Introduction

Folklore is the living carrier of a national cultural gene, carrying the group's common historical memory, values and life wisdom. As the core expression of folk customs, traditional festivals and rituals build cultural connections between individuals and groups, history and the present through behavioral paradigms, symbol systems and emotional expressions passed down from generation to generation. They are an important foundation for the formation and maintenance of Chinese cultural identity. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, due to the impact of Western culture, the transformation of social structure, and the acceleration of the modernization process, traditional folk customs faced an unprecedented survival crisis^[1]. Against this background, modern Chinese literary writers have brought traditional festivals and rituals into their creative vision with strong cultural consciousness, recording, interpreting, and reconstructing them through literary narratives. Using words as a medium, they have awakened the people's collective memory of traditional folk customs. By exploring the core of Chinese culture behind folk customs, they have promoted the revival and transformation of folk customs in modern society, and achieved the strengthening and continuation of Chinese cultural identity.

2. Reappearance of traditional festivals in modern literature

Traditional festivals are the most representative carriers of folk culture. They consist of fixed time nodes, complete ritual processes, and clear cultural implications, forming a cultural memory shared by the group. Modern Chinese literature has evolved from unconscious or small-scale and sporadic simple records in the past to current conscious and planned excavation and protection, and even innovation. In this process, it not only preserved the endangered festival folk customs but also promoted the transformation of folk customs from “marginal” to “central point” through the exploration of cultural value, laying the foundation for the revival of folk customs^[2].

2.1. Spring Festival: Era changes in the symbol of reunion

The Spring Festival, as the most solemn and core traditional festival of the Chinese nation, carries the profound cultural meaning of “saying goodbye to the old and welcoming the new” and “reunion of the whole family”. It has gradually formed folk activities such as pasting Spring Festival couplets, worshiping ancestors, New Year’s Eve dinner, staying up late, and paying New Year greetings, which are a vivid reflection of the cultural roots of the Chinese nation.

In traditional societies, with yearning for a better life and reverence for their ancestors, people carefully prepare and participate in various customary activities solemnly. When posting Spring Festival couplets, choose auspicious words and phrases to express your wishes for the new year; ancestor worship ceremonies are held in ancestral halls or homes, burning incense and bowing to remember the achievements of your ancestors and inherit the family spirit^[3].

However, in the early 20th century, the impact of new culture and Western culture and the dramatic transformation of the domestic social structure, caused significant variations in Spring Festival folk customs. In 1933, “Home” published by Ba Jin described the scene of the Spring Festival in the Gao Mansion - “On the night of New Year’s Eve, the Gao family was decorated with lanterns and the whole family gathered in the hall to worship their ancestors. The table was filled with rich dishes such as chicken, fish, pork, fruits and rice cakes. For the sacrifices, the elders dressed in python robes and coats led the younger ones to kowtow in order, and then the whole family sat together to share the New Year’s Eve dinner. The younger generations paid New Year greetings to the elders and received red envelopes”^[4]. This accurately presents the traditional family Spring Festival style in the 1930s. It can be clearly seen from this description that even in the severe context of cultural shock, traditional folk customs are still tenaciously continued in large families, and behind this continuation is the embodiment of the strong cohesion of family ethics in Chinese culture. In Lao She’s unfinished posthumous work “Under the Red Flag” from 1961 to 1962, he uses delicate and Beijing-flavored brushstrokes to make up for the folk details of the Beijing Spring Festival in this historical span: “Celebrating the Little New Year on the 23rd of the twelfth lunar month is almost a ‘dress rehearsal’ for celebrating the New Year. As soon as it gets dark, firecrackers go off, and every household is busy with the New Year’s Eve dinner. After the 23rd, everyone becomes even busier, and the New Year is here in the blink of an eye. Before New Year’s Eve, every household must put up the Spring Festival couplets and do a general cleaning, which is called ‘cleaning the house’”^[5]. Lao She’s text completely restores the traditional process of the Spring Festival in Beijing, allowing readers to feel the strong atmosphere of the festival. At the same time, analyzing this description in light of the background of the times, we can find that social changes have quietly penetrated into folk customs - the strictness of the patriarchal order of ancestor worship rituals has weakened, and the younger generation no longer fully respects traditional rituals^[6]. This variation in folk customs is not only a change in external form, but also a concrete manifestation of social change at the cultural level^[7].

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and before the reform and opening up, society entered a new stage of development, and the inheritance of Spring Festival folk customs faced a new era. Lu Yao’s description of the Spring Festival in the 1970s in “The Ordinary World” written in 1975 is quite representative: “On the Spring Festival, the cadres of the Shige Festival Commune gathered together to worship each other, and the villagers would also visit each other to congratulate each other. Although there was no luxurious pomp, everyone’s faces were filled with simple smiles, and the food served was simple but full of warmth”^[8]. Analyzing this description shows that the Spring Festival folk customs not only adhere to the core connotation at this stage, but also adjust with the times. The festival warmth conveyed

in the text also makes us feel that people cherish the emotional value of traditional festivals in changing times. Despite the impact of social changes, the core status of the Spring Festival as a national cultural symbol has never changed, and it is still an important link to maintain family emotions and gather social strength.

After the reform and opening up, Chinese society has experienced rapid economic development and increased cultural confidence, and modern literature has taken on a new look in writing about the Spring Festival^[9]. Wang Zengqi wrote “Three Friends in the Winter” written in 1980. The description of the Spring Festival is full of strong life flavor and cultural warmth: “Before the Spring Festival, Deaf Chen was busy writing Spring Festival couplets for each family. His handwriting was good, and everyone in the village was happy to invite him. On New Year’s Eve, three old friends got together, cooked a pot of bacon, boiled a pot of wine, and stayed up until dawn. New Year’s Eve First, everyone greets each other and speaks auspicious words, and the village is full of laughter and laughter”^[10]. From this description, we can see that the Spring Festival at this time not only retains the traditional elements of posting Spring Festival couplets, staying up late, and paying New Year greetings, but also incorporates the equal and close communication methods of modern society. New Year greetings are no longer limited to ritual forms, but have become sincere emotional exchanges between friends. Wang Zengqi emphasized, “The Spring Festival is not an empty festival. Its excitement hides the Chinese people’s reunion complex and their expectations for the coming year. These things cannot be thrown away.”^[11] Although this view is not deliberately for “folk custom revival,” it accurately points out the cultural core of the Spring Festival, provides guidance for contemporary people to re-understand and cherish the folk value of the Spring Festival, and indirectly promotes the revival and inheritance of Spring Festival culture in the contemporary era.

2.2. Qingming: The writing of ancestor worship rituals and the strengthening of root-seeking awareness

Qingming, as a traditional festival of the Chinese nation with both natural and humanistic connotations, has carried the profound cultural meaning of “carefully pursuing the past” and “searching for ancestors” during its long historical evolution. It has gradually formed a customary activity with great emotional warmth centered on ancestor worship, sweeping tombs, and outings^[12].

However, in the early 20th century, with the collision of social and cultural trends of thought, Qingming folk customs not only retained their core connotations, but also showed regional characteristics and the imprint of the times. In “Border Town” published in 1934, Shen Congwen described the unique style of the Qingming Festival in western Hunan in the 1930s with tenderness: “During the Qingming Festival, people in Chadong City visit the graves of their ancestors. They bring wine, meat, and paper money to the graves, clear weeds, place offerings, kowtow to worship, and then the family has a picnic in front of the graves. Cuicui and her grandfather would also go to the back mountain to visit Cuicui’s mother’s grave, and her grandfather would tell Cuicui her mother’s story”^[13]. From this description, it can be clearly seen that the Qingming Festival in western Hunan in the 1930s included both solemn ancestor worship ceremonies and outings and picnics that blended into the atmosphere of life, which vividly demonstrated the local folk customs at that time. More importantly, the plot of the grandfather telling Cuicui his mother’s story closely combines the ancestor worship ceremony with the inheritance of family memories, highlighting the cultural connotation of “root-seeking” during the Qingming Festival.

Shen Congwen wrote in “Xiangxi Essays” also written in the 1930s: “Visiting graves during the Qingming Festival is not a superstition, but a thought for future generations, so that they know where their roots are and how to remember the kindness of their ancestors”^[14]. This Although this statement was not deliberately written by Shen Congwen for “folk custom inheritance”, it accurately pointed out the cultural value of Qingming at that time, and these written records also objectively provided assistance for the continuation of Qingming ancestor worship folk customs in western Hunan during this period.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and before the reform and opening up, due to the influence of social ideological trends, the inheritance of folk customs of ancestor worship during the Qingming Festival

faced challenges, but folk memory still existed in people's lives and literary writings in a hidden way. In "History of Entrepreneurship" published by Liu Qing in 1959, through the memories of old man Liang San, he mentioned the custom of worshipping ancestors during the Qingming Festival before the founding of the People's Republic of China: "In the past, during the Qingming Festival, we would go to the graves of our parents and put out a few steamed buns. Burn some paper money and talk about things at home. Although I don't go there often, I still remember it in my heart"^[15]. This memory not only reflects the past Qingming folk customs, but also reflects the changes in folk customs around the 1950s. This kind of implicit writing objectively preserves the core emotional core of Qingming folk customs, and lays an important foundation for the subsequent restoration and revival of folk customs^[16].

After the reform and opening up, modern literature has written more abundantly about Qingming. In "The Ordinary World" created by Lu Yao in 1986, he gave a detailed description of the tomb-sweeping scene during the Qingming Festival from the late 1970s to the early 1980s: "On the Qingming Festival, Sun Shaoan took his wife and children to his parents' home. In front of the grave, he first cleared the weeds around the grave, then placed the white flour buns steamed by his wife and a few dishes of side dishes, lit incense candles, and led the children to kowtow in worship. He said to the graves of his parents: "Dad, Mom, the family is getting better and better now"^[17]. Through the above scenes, we can clearly perceive the importance of ancestor worship rituals to the cohesion of family emotions and the inheritance of historical memories. Such literary representations also objectively cause readers to pay attention to the value of Qingming folk customs, and connect Qingming folk customs with the root-seeking consciousness of Chinese culture, making Qingming an important carrier to strengthen cultural identity and inherit the spirit of "filial piety", and provide strong support for the revival and development of Qingming folk customs in contemporary society^[18].

2.3. Dragon Boat Festival: Modern reshaping of cultural spirit

The Dragon Boat Festival, a traditional festival with rich cultural connotations, originally originated from people's worship of natural celestial phenomena and the sacrifice of dragon totems in ancient times^[19]. As time goes by, the Dragon Boat Festival has incorporated multiple connotations such as commemorating Qu Yuan, exorcising evil spirits and praying for blessings, and has become an important festival with both natural and humanistic characteristics. Its core festival folk customs are rich and diverse, such as eating rice dumplings, racing dragon boats, hanging mugwort, etc., which not only continue to respect and be grateful for nature, but also inherit and promote the national spirit^[20]. The connotation of commemorating Qu Yuan makes the Dragon Boat Festival go beyond simple seasonal festivals and folk rituals to become an important carrier of the spiritual character of the Chinese nation.

In the 1930s, Shen Congwen described the Dragon Boat Festival in western Hunan in his book "Border Town" published in 1934: "On Dragon Boat Festival, local women and children all wear new clothes and have the character, "王" drawn on their foreheads with realgar dipped in wine. Any family on this day will be able to eat fish and meat. At around 11 a.m., all the people in Chadong had lunch. After eating, those who lived in the city locked their doors and went out to the river to watch the boating^[21]. Shen Congwen's description of the Dragon Boat Festival in Western Hunan in the 1930s was full of vitality and a warm, collective carnival atmosphere. During the dragon boat race, "the sound of drums is like thunder, coupled with the cheers of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait"^[22], which not only implies the original desire for good weather, but also vaguely echoes the legend of people's search and rescue by boat after Qu Yuan threw himself into the Miluo River. It quietly combines the awe of nature and the memory of the hero, and the scene of people gathering by the river and interacting through the boat race is a vivid display of the cohesion of folk customs and the national spirit. These descriptions by Shen Congwen were not deliberately written for the "Dragon Boat Festival inheritance", but they objectively recorded the vivid form of Dragon Boat Festival folk customs, allowing the Dragon Boat Festival to always retain its spiritual warmth in the inheritance of local society.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, affected by the social environment, the way of celebrating the Dragon Boat Festival changed, and the scale of traditional folk activities was reduced and the form was simplified. Literary works of this period, such as "History of Entrepreneurship" published by Liu Qing in 1959, although they did not directly describe the Dragon

Boat Festival folk customs in detail, they reflected people's persistence in tradition and cherishing the spiritual core from the side: In times of scarcity, people would still find glutinous rice and rice dumpling leaves, make simple rice dumplings, and sit around with their families to share them. The custom of eating rice dumplings seems simple, but it carries a distant echo of Qu Yuan's patriotic spirit ^[23].

Since the 1980s, literary writings on the Dragon Boat Festival have focused more on the excavation of cultural connotations and modern transformation, which not only revitalized the Dragon Boat Festival but also allowed the national spirit represented by Qu Yuan to be more clearly demonstrated ^[24]. In "Duck Eggs on the Dragon Boat Festival," published in 1981, Wang Zengqi used the Dragon Boat Festival folk customs in his hometown of Gaoyou as an entry point. From hanging mugwort, tying a hundred ropes to eating duck eggs, he described the details vividly and interestingly: "Tie a hundred ropes. Five-color silk threads are twisted into small ropes and tied around the wrist... to make incense coins. The silk threads are wrapped into small rice dumplings, and the contents are filled. The fragrant noodles are...pasted with five poisons. Red paper is cut into five poisons and pasted on the threshold" ^[25]. Among them, the custom of hanging mugwort inherits the tradition of using natural things to protect life, and implies awe of nature; and the description of "winding silk into small rice dumplings" does not directly mention Qu Yuan, but it continues the commemorative connotation with folk details. Wang Zengqi emphasized, "Eating duck eggs on the Dragon Boat Festival is not just an egg. It is the taste of hometown and the memory of childhood" ^[26]. This kind of writing that associates folk customs with nostalgia and collective memory does not deliberately promote spiritual reshaping, but it objectively makes the Dragon Boat Festival more acceptable to modern society. As an important part of collective memory, Qu Yuan's spirit has also been integrated into the emotional identity of contemporary people.

3. Reconstruction of traditional rituals in modern literature

Traditional festivals are "concentrated displays" of folk culture, while daily traditional rituals are "normalized expressions" of folk culture. Rituals such as ancestor worship, birthdays, and temple fairs carry family ethics, social order, and spiritual beliefs, and are a concrete manifestation of Chinese cultural identity in daily life. The writing of these rituals in modern literature does not simply reproduce the tradition, but preserves its cultural core values and thereby promotes the revival and transformation of folk rituals in modern society ^[27].

3.1. Spiritual reconstruction of ancestor worship rituals

Ancestor worship rituals, as the core rituals that maintain the family's patriarchal order, occupy a pivotal position in traditional families. Through a series of solemn and tedious processes, such as carefully preparing rich offerings, offering offerings in strict order of seniority, all clan members kneeling in order, performing a ceremony of kneeling and worshipping, and blessings from highly respected members of the clan, it strengthens the ethical concept of "respecting ancestors" and is like an invisible link that closely connects individuals and families, present and history.

From the perspective of modern literature, the presentation of ancestor worship rituals has undergone profound changes. In the 1930s, Ba Jin described the ancestor worship ceremony in the Gao Mansion in his novel "Home" published in 1931: "The day before New Year's Eve is the day for ancestor worship prescribed by the Gao family. This afternoon, everyone in the mansion was busy. In the middle of the hall is the shrine of the ancestors of the Gao family, with a dazzling array of offerings on both sides. The elders, dressed in gorgeous python robes and patchwork coats, with solemn expressions, lit incense and knelt down in sequence. The movements were standardized and rigorous; the juniors stood behind in strict seniority order and kowtowed respectfully. Juehui stood in the crowd, watching this ritual that had been repeated for decades, filled with disgust. He secretly thought: "This is all fake, a pretense of feudal ethics!" ^[4] Juehui's resistance represented the strong rejection of the strict hierarchy and cumbersome formalism of feudal ancestor worship rituals by the young generation at that time. However, Ba Jin did not completely deny the significance of ancestor worship itself. When Mrs. Gao passed away, the simplified version of the ancestor worship ceremony hosted by Juexin

was impressive. In this simplified ceremony, there are no longer gorgeous clothes that are worn strictly according to status, the preparation of offerings is no longer luxurious and complicated, and the process of kneeling is no longer limited to the traditional multiple prostrations, but focuses more on the sincere memory of the ancestors^[28]. This “simplification and reconstruction”, like a cultural innovation, strips away the heavy feudal core of ancestor worship rituals, allowing it to retain its pure emotional value, becoming a classic example of modern transformation of traditional rituals in literary creation^[29].

From 1949 to 1979, influenced by social ideological trends and cultural context, folk expressions related to the traditional clan system were mostly suppressed in literary creation, which focused more on reflecting social changes and the construction of a collectivist spirit^[30]. However, the creations of this period did not completely separate the writing of “ancestral memories” and “family emotions”, but implicitly integrated them into the narrative of revolutionary history and collective life, laying the groundwork for the subsequent literary return of ancestor worship rituals after the reform and opening up^[31].

After the reform and opening up, literature on ancestor worship rituals paid more attention to its transformation in modern society and its close integration with cultural identity. In “The Ordinary World” published by Lu Yao in 1986, he used the rural areas of northern Shaanxi in the early days of reform and opening up as the background, and through the ancestor worship scene of Sun Yuhou’s family, he showed the simplification of the ancestor worship ceremony and the persistence of its connotation: “On New Year’s Eve, Sun Yuhou called the whole family together, placed a few simple dishes and a bottle of ordinary wine on the simple Kang table, and then kowtowed three times to the portraits of his parents on the wall with deep affection. Said: ‘Your grandparents’ life is not easy, you must remember them, live a good life, and don’t embarrass your ancestors’”^[32]. The ancestor worship here does not have the complicated procedures, luxurious offerings, and strict class distinctions in traditional ceremonies, and is simpler in form. However, the emotion of remembering the ancestors and the appeal of inheriting the family tradition have not disappeared. On the contrary, the simplification of the external form highlights the essential spiritual connotation of the ancestor worship ceremony to remember the ancestors and unite the family. This simple and sincere presentation allows us to see that ancestor worship rituals can break away from feudal shackles, carry cultural values in a way that is more suitable for modern life^[33], continue to play the role of uniting families and strengthening root identity in modern rural areas, and become the spiritual link to inherit family culture.

3.2. Birthday ceremony: Strengthening the pure core of filial piety

The birthday ceremony is an important ceremony to celebrate the continuation of life and demonstrate family filial piety. Its core customs include holding banquets to celebrate birthdays, giving birthday gifts, and juniors paying homage to birthdays, etc. It carries the filial piety concept of “respecting the elderly and respecting the elderly.” At the same time, in the long history of the past, it was also mixed with the superstitious color of “seeking immortals and worshiping Buddha to achieve immortality”^[34]. Modern literature’s writing on birthday rituals further strengthens the essence of emotional care and filial piety practice, removes some outdated superstitious elements in birthday rituals, and retains its purer spiritual core that embodies filial piety. This allows the core theory of Chinese culture to “respect the elderly and respect the elderly” to continue to be passed down in modern society and consolidate the ethical foundation of cultural identity.

In the 1930s, Ba Jin wrote about the scene of Gao Shuying paying birthday wishes to her mother in “Spring”: “On her mother’s birthday, Shuying got up early in the morning, embroidered a handkerchief with the word, “longevity” for her mother, and helped her servants prepare a birthday banquet. When paying her birthday, she held her mother’s hand and said: ‘Mom, I just hope you are in good health and happy every day.’ The mother looked at her daughter, her eyes were red”^[35]. In the article’s description of the birthday scene, Ba Jin downplayed the birthday ceremony and focused the overall core focus on Shuying’s emotional expression of her mother. This modern literary work proves to a certain extent that the core significance of the birthday ceremony at that time was more about “emotional connection” rather than “complex forms.” This simplification and emotional focus on the birthday ceremony gives the ceremony more filial piety concepts,

such as “respecting the elderly and respecting the elderly”, making the birthday ceremony more spiritual and culturally inherited ^[36].

In “Four Generations Under One Roof” ^[37], Lao She described the birthday ceremony for Old Man Qi’s seventieth birthday in the 1940s: “On Old Man Qi’s seventieth birthday, the Qi family was extremely busy. Huh. Ruixuan, Ruifeng, and Ruiquan kowtowed to the old man to celebrate his birthday. The grandsons and wives served birthday peaches and noodles made by themselves. The neighbors also sent congratulatory gifts. The yard was filled with tables and chairs, and it was a lively scene. The old man sat at the top, looking at the hall full of descendants, smiling from ear to ear: “All my life, I have hoped that my family will be safe and harmonious” ^[37]. Although the birthday scene in Lao Shewen’s writing has elements of traditional customs such as longevity peaches and birthday wishes, it has abandoned the superstitious aspects of praying to gods and Buddhas, and focuses more on the expression of filial piety of the younger generation to the elders and the atmosphere of family reunion. Lao She also emphasized in the article: “Birthdays are not a pomp for outsiders to see, but are family members’ filial piety and a symbol of family harmony” ^[37]. This kind of writing returns birthday ceremonies to the essence of “filial piety”, which is not only conducive to promoting people’s recognition of the value of traditional birthday culture, but also is more conducive to its related inheritance and promotion.

After the reform and opening up, writings about birthday rituals in literary works focused more on the modern expression of filial piety, promoting the integration of birthday folk customs and contemporary life concepts, replacing them with simple celebration methods that are more in line with the rhythm of modern life. The core connotation of “filial piety” has shifted from “formal grandness” to “emotional sincerity.” Wang Zengqi wrote tenderly about the birthday scenes of ordinary people in “Flowers for Dinner,” written between 1981 and 1983: “Wang Danren celebrated his old mother’s 60th birthday. There was no big banquet. He just invited a few relatives and friends, cooked some of his mother’s favorite dishes, and chatted with her about home life. He said: ‘My mother has been frugal all her life and doesn’t like liveliness. The whole family is together. She is happiest when she starts having a meal’” ^[38]. In this description, the personal trait of “mother is frugal and does not like liveliness” is the direct reason for the simplification of the birthday ceremony. The essence of Wang Danren’s choice is to respect the true wishes of the elders and avoid making extravagant ceremonies a spiritual burden for the elderly. This is a vivid manifestation of the shift of “filial piety” from “formal catering” to “emotional care.”

3.3. Temple fair ceremony: Traditional beliefs expand into a multicultural stage

Temple fair, as a folk ritual that integrates religious sacrifice, business exchanges, entertainment and leisure, has a unique status and rich functions in traditional society. Folk activities include worshiping gods, temple fairs, folk performances, etc. It is not only the sustenance of people’s spiritual beliefs, but also an important carrier of community interaction. However, it is also inevitably mixed with some outdated superstitious concepts ^[39].

The writing of temple fair rituals in modern literature provides an important perspective for us to observe their transformation from religious gatherings to community cultural activities. In the 1920s, Lu Xun described the ritual scene of a rural temple fair from a child’s perspective in his short story “She Opera” ^[40] published in 1922. Although the article does not describe the religious sacrificial process of the temple fair in detail, through the depiction of multiple daily scenes, it inadvertently downplays its religious color and highlights the value of community entertainment and cohesion: children work together to dig for earthworms, fish for shrimps, and herd cattle. The shrimps they catch “are mine to eat as usual,” spontaneously forming a tacit understanding of division of labor and sharing ^[40]; The villagers spontaneously set up a stage and invited theater troupes around the “social opera”, and the whole village, young and old, actively participated in watching, forming a collective consensus that did not require coercion ^[40]; as a guest, “I” wanted to watch the opera but encountered shipping difficulties, Shuangxi and Afa took the initiative to pick up and drop off by boat, showing the warmth of the community by caring for each other regardless of distance ^[40]. Together, these scenes outline the social core of the rural temple fair. From the perspective of literary interpretation, Lu Xun’s writing was not deliberately written to “strip off the religious shell of temple fairs” or “promote its modern transformation”, but the details of collective participation,

tolerance, mutual assistance and collaboration and sharing in his writings allow us to deeply perceive the essence of “community entertainment” and “emotional connection” of temple fairs. The sacred value and intuitive understanding of its significance for the cohesion of rural communities - this folk value extracted from the description of the work lays the emotional and cognitive foundation for our understanding of the modern transformation of temple fair rituals, and also confirms the important role of the reproduction of festival rituals in literary works in interpreting the changes in folk customs.

In the 1930s, Shen Congwen’s “Short Notes on Western Hunan: Sailors on the Boat on the Chen River,” published in 1936, showed the commercial and cultural functions of the temple fair: “The temple fair along the Chen River is held every spring. On that day, the villagers along the bank will happily row their boats over, and the boats will be filled with fresh vegetables grown at home. Fruits and exquisite handicrafts were set up on the shore and sold enthusiastically. Opera troupes were singing in the temple, and the sound of gongs, drums and cheers was intertwined, making it very lively. The sailors would also take the opportunity to go ashore, pick out what they needed at the market, and then watch a wonderful show and chat with the fellow villagers”^[41]. The information conveyed by these scenes allows us to perceive the importance of temple fairs in regional economic exchanges and maintenance of community relations - it has not only become an important symbol of regional culture, but also invisibly assumed the role of a platform for regional cultural exchanges and inheritance^[42]. This interpretation of the function of the temple fair is not an inference of Shen Congwen’s subjective intention when creating his creation, but the cultural value extracted from the objectively presented folk scenes.

From 1949 to 1979, due to the influence of social and cultural orientation and the context of the times, direct writing of traditional folk rituals, such as temple fairs, was relatively rare in literary creation. During this period, traditional folklore was often associated with “feudal superstition”, and literary creation focused more on revolutionary historical narratives, collective production and life, and socialist spiritual construction^[43]. However, some works will still implicitly incorporate the “community gathering” and “cultural sharing” characteristics similar to temple fairs when describing rural collective activities, retaining potential clues for the literary return and value reconstruction of temple fair folk customs after the reform and opening up.

After the reform and opening up, the writing of temple fairs in literary works focused more on the in-depth exploration of cultural connotations and the ingenious transformation of the modern spirit. In his short story “Da Nao Chronicles” published in 1981, Wang Zengqi gave a detailed description of the temple fair scene in Da Nao area: “The temple fair in Da Nao is held around the Qingming Festival, mainly to worship the land god and bless the harvest in the coming year. But more people come to the market, watch the theater, and meet friends. At the temple fair, there are sugar paintings for sale, and the masters use skilled skills to spread syrup on the stone slabs. Various lifelike patterns were outlined; there were dough-making figures, each with bright colors and different shapes, full of artistic charm; there were also troupes singing Huai Opera, and the wonderful performances of the actors won bursts of applause from the audience. The audience was packed with people, and everyone was immersed in the atmosphere of joy. Merchants also took the opportunity to do business, and the cheers kept coming and going, making it very lively”^[44]. The description of the article not only retains the traditional elements of “sacrifice and praying for blessings” of temple fairs, but also highlights the functions of business, entertainment, and community activities in temple fair ritual activities. He emphasized in the article: “Temple fairs are not just about worshipping gods, they are our culture here and a thought for everyone to get together”^[45]. This kind of description that combines temple fair customs with other local social and cultural activities is not only conducive to the inheritance and revival of folk culture in contemporary society, but also plays an important role in strengthening the identity and development of local culture, and has become an important carrier of strengthening regional cultural identity.

4. The path and mechanism through which modern literature promotes the revival of folk customs and cultural identity

4.1. Realistic records: Retaining folk customs and laying the foundation for revival

The “realistic recording” of traditional festivals and rituals in modern literature is the first step to promote the revival of

folk customs. In the context of the impact of Western culture and social transformation, many traditional folk customs have gradually become blurred and are even on the verge of being lost. However, concrete narrative records in modern literary works have included the Spring Festival couplets and Dragon Boat Festival rice dumplings. The fillings, as large as the process of worshipping ancestors, the scale of temple fairs, etc., are systematically recorded, completely preserving the material carrier, behavioral processes, and atmospheric scenes of folk customs, providing a reference “text model” for the revival of folk customs in later generations^[46].

Lu Xun’s “Blessings” detailed the “sending stoves and firecrackers” and “blessings and sacrifices” during the Spring Festival in Lu Town; Lao She’s “Under the Red Flag” described the process of “cleaning the house” and “posting Spring Festival couplets” during the Spring Festival in Beijing; Wang Zengqi’s “Duck Eggs at the Dragon Boat Festival” contains trivial descriptions of “tying a hundred ropes” and “picking duck eggs” during the Gaoyou Dragon Boat Festival. The traditional culture of regional folk customs and the unique form of cultural presentation are fixed in the lines of the article in a realistic style. This kind of “realistic record” provides a material and behavioral basis for the revival of folk customs, allowing the folk customs that are about to disappear to be “reborn.”

4.2. Excavation of core values: Elaborating cultural connotations and consolidating national cultural identity

Realistic records are an important carrier for preserving folk customs, and value mining is the spiritual core that gives folk customs inheritance value. While recording folklore forms, modern literary writers pay more attention to deeply digging and exploring the spiritual core of Chinese culture behind folklore. For example, the most symbolic cultural spirit of the Spring Festival among traditional festivals is “reunion and harmony”; the connotation and modern significance of Qingming is “careful pursuit of the past” and reverence for nature and life; birthdays are “respect for the elderly”, etc. Through the excavation and elaboration of these core values, literary creators have elevated folk customs from simple “life customs” to “cultural symbols”, allowing the public to develop a spiritual identity with Chinese culture based on understanding the meaning of folk customs^[47].

In “Border Town,” Shen Congwen explored the collective spirit of “unity and bravery” through the description of the Dragon Boat Festival Dragon Boat Race; in “Home”, Ba Jin described a simplified version of the ancestor worship ceremony, which highlighted the root consciousness of ancestor worship consciousness in “remembering ancestors.” These written descriptions go beyond the superficial form of folk customs and go deep into the cultural essence of traditional festivals and rituals. They not only allow readers to have a more comprehensive understanding of what folk customs are, but also allow them to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of what folk customs mean. Reunion during the Spring Festival is to maintain family affection, and ancestor worship during the Qingming Festival is to remember the historical roots. These values constitute the core connotation of Chinese culture. When the public understands and recognizes these cultural values, folk customs will no longer be dispensable “old habits”, but cultural heritage worth protecting. In the process, the sense of identity of Chinese culture will also be consolidated at the spiritual level.

4.3. Reconstruction of modernity: Adapting to the needs of the times and continuing the vitality of identity

If traditional folk customs are to be continuously passed down in modern society, they must complete the “modern transformation,” and modern literature is the “guide” and “explorer” in this transformation. By “removing the bad and extracting the essence” from traditional folk customs, literary writers have extracted out-of-date cultural components and integrated their essence into modern concepts of equality, freedom, and simplicity, thereby constructing a “new folk custom” that retains the spiritual core of traditional culture and can adapt to the development needs of the current era, allowing folk customs to gain sustained vitality and allowing Chinese cultural identity to continue in the modern context.

Lu Yao’s description in “The Ordinary World” simplifies the tedious process of traditional ancestor worship and retains the core connotation of folk customs of “reminiscing about family traditions”; Wang Zengqi’s “Flowers for Dinner”

replaces the grand pomp of birthdays with “domestic companionship”, concretely interpreting modern filial piety. These “modern reconstructions” have allowed these folk activities to remove the outdated and dross elements and become cultural practices that conform to the concepts of modern society. This kind of reconstruction allows folk customs to truly “come alive” in modern society, and also allows the sense of Chinese cultural identity to always maintain fresh vitality that develops in step with the times.

5. The contemporary value of modern literature and folklore writing

5.1. The value of “text database” for folklore protection

Modern literature’s realistic records of folklore details have become an important “text database” for the protection of contemporary folklore. Many folk customs that are on the verge of being lost, such as the “stove sacrifice” process during the Spring Festival in Beijing in the 20th century and the custom of “catching ducks” during the Dragon Boat Festival in western Hunan, have been preserved through literary records. When contemporary folklorists carry out field surveys and folklore restoration, they often use these literary texts as references to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of folklore restoration. For example, when Jiangsu Gaoyou created the “Dragon Boat Festival Cultural Festival”, it used the description of folk details in Wang Zengqi’s “Duck Eggs on the Dragon Boat Festival” as a basis to restore traditional rituals such as tying a hundred ropes, making incense coins, and sticking five poisons, giving the cultural festival a more historical feel.

5.2. The value of “emotional ties” in cultural identity construction

In the context of globalization, the cohesion of cultural identity is facing unprecedented challenges, and the value of Chinese culture conveyed by folklore writing in modern literature has become a spiritual hub for strengthening the cultural identity of contemporary people. Modern literary works’ tender descriptions of reunions during the Spring Festival and tracing roots during the Qingming Festival can bridge the boundaries between eras and regions, and arouse the emotional resonance and cultural belonging of contemporary readers. No matter where you are, reading the Beijing New Year’s Eve Dinner in Lao She’s novels and the Qingming Tomb Sweeping in Lu Yao’s novels can make people in foreign lands feel a sense of cultural belonging to the Chinese nation.

5.3. The value of “practical model” for the modern transformation of folk customs

The “modern reconstruction” of folk custom by modern literature provides a “practical model” that can be used for reference for the innovative development of contemporary folk custom. Literary writers’ reconstruction concept of “removing the bad and extracting the essence” retains the core value of folk custom and integrates the concept of the development of the times into it, which has direct guiding significance for the transformation of contemporary folk culture^[48]. For example, in birthday ceremonies, “accompaniment-style filial piety” replaces “ostentation-style birthday celebrations”. This transformation of ritual folk customs is consistent with the concept of written descriptions of birthday ceremonies written by Ba Jin and Wang Zengqi; even new folk customs such as “online ancestor worship” and “online reunion parties” that have emerged in recent years are essentially modern transformations of the core values of traditional folk customs, and are in line with the reconstruction logic of modern literature.

6. Conclusion

The writing of traditional festivals and rituals in modern Chinese literature is a “cultural protection and construction” project that spans a hundred years. Against the historical background of social transformation and cultural impact, writers have a strong cultural consciousness, preserve folk forms through realistic records, interpret cultural core through value

mining, and imbue the times with vitality through modern reconstruction. They have constructed a folklore revival path of “scene recording-value mining-modern reconstruction” and a cultural identity mechanism of “memory awakening-emotional resonance-value recognition.” This process not only allows the “rebirth” of traditional folk customs that are on the verge of disappearing, but also allows the core values of Chinese culture to be deeply rooted in people’s hearts through the carrier of folk customs, achieving the strengthening and continuation of cultural identity.

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