

Festival Views Reflected in Longmen Farmer Paintings

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Abstract:

The festival view is the collective cultural identity of the festival content and form reflected in the celebration activities, which specifically reflects the collective subconsciousness of the relationships between humans and nature, humans and society, and cultural identity. Longmen farmer paintings depict and record the rural life of the Longmen area in Guangdong province, China, where under the integration of Guangfu and Hakka cultures, with warm color combinations and exaggerated images. The festival views reflected in the festival-themed Longmen farmer paintings, which are visual treasure-house of folk culture, comprehensively reflect the collective unconscious cultural attitude of the Longmen people. This paper decodes the festival views of Longmen people from the festival-themed works of the representative contemporary Longmen farmer painters applying picture content analysis. As a result, the most prominent characteristics of Longmen people's festival views are as follows, the relationship between humans and nature, which shows the unity of following the natural rhythm and constantly striving; the relationship between humans and society, which shows the unity of personal development and social harmony; cultural identity, it shows the unity of Chinese context and local characteristics.

Keywords:

Longmen, Farmer Painting, Festival View

1. Introduction

“In the history of Chinese art after 1949, farmer painting is a unique kind of painting, which takes village culture as the mother body and folk art as the modeling foundation and is a significant part of the national folk art system. [1]” As the tools of farmer painting are eclectic, it cannot be classified according to tools; with urbanization, a large number of farmers' identities have changed to new citizens, and categorizing the farmer painting according to the creator identity is also invalid; the unchanged thing is the theme of farmer paintings, which are full of realistic rural life and nostalgia. As the identity of folk paintings has not changed up to now, farmer paintings vivid samples of rural cultural studies.

As traditional folk painting, the Longmen farmer painting in Guangdong Province, China, originated in the 1970s. In 1988, Longmen was awarded the title of “Hometown of Modern Chinese Folk Painting” by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of The People’s Republic of China, and in 1998, it was awarded “Hometown of Ethnic Folk Art (Farmer Painting) in Guangdong Province” by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangdong Province [2]. Longmen farmer paintings depict and record the rural life in Longmen, where under the integration of Guangfu and Hakka culture, with warm color combinations and exaggerated images, including labor and life scenes, as well as festivals and folk themes, of which festivals are vital content themes [3], these works are the visual treasure-house of folk culture, and the festival views reflected in the festival-themed Longmen farmer paintings are the collective unconscious cultural attitude of the Longmen people.

The interpretation of the word Jie Qing in the Modern Chinese Dictionary is “festival, celebration day”. The explanation does not provide enough details, but provides a clue, that is, the meaning of Jie Qing is the meaning of “festival + celebration”; The interpretation of the festival is “a day of remembrance and a day of traditional celebration or sacrifice” reflecting two characteristics, namely “remembrance, and culture”; The term celebration is defined as “to carry out some activities for a shared happy event to express joy or commemoration” and the words shared and activity in the interpretation are also characteristics of Jie Qing, “shared” means that Jie Qing is part of collective culture, not anniversaries of individuals, and “activities” are the form carriers of Jie Qing [4]. The interpretation of Jie in the Xinhua Dictionary means node and rhythm and every Jie Qing is a time node for people to plan their production and life for a year [5].

The understanding of the festival is almost identical in both Chinese and English. The Oxford Intermediate Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary interprets a festival as “a day or a time when people celebrate sth. (especially a religious event)” [6]; the Pocket Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary interprets a festival as “a day or a period of celebration. [7]” The key saying of the two interpretations is “a day or a time or a period”, which indicates that a festival is a specific time node; The word “people” points to the characteristic of the festival as collective, rather than individual; “a religious event” shows the cultural nature of the festival. Both dictionaries have two elements in the interpretation of “celebrate”, “a special day/ an important occasion” and “to do sth./ doing something”, which is an event held for a special moment [6,7].

The festival view is the collective cultural identity of the festival content and form reflected in the celebration activities, which specifically reflects the collective subconsciousness of the relationships between humans and nature, humans and society, and cultural identity. The complete festival views are reflected both in the connotation of the festival and in the form of the celebration. The festival-themed Longmen farmer paintings that record folk culture are effective samples for decoding the people’s festival views in the Longmen area.

This paper decodes the festival views of Longmen people from the festival-themed works of the representative contemporary Longmen farmer painters applying picture content analysis.

2. Relationship Between Humans and Nature

On the second day of the second lunar month, the Long heads up, and both scorpions and centipedes show their heads.

On the second day of the second lunar month, the Long heads up, and every household plows the land with cattle.

On the second day of the second lunar month, the Long heads up, and the large and small granaries will be full and overflowing.

On the second day of the second lunar month, the Long heads up, and every household is frying soybeans.

The nursery rhyme is the inspiration for the farmer painter Luo Xuefang's work *Second Day of the Second Lunar Month, the Long Heads Up* (Figure 1), in which the scenes of the Long spitting water, the cattle plowing the land, frying soybeans, and worshipping the land god are all appear on the painting.



Figure 1. *Second Day of the Second Lunar Month, the Long Heads Up*, Luo Xuefang.

The Second Day of the Second Lunar Month festival, also known as the Long Heads Up festival, which is a common theme of Longmen farmer paintings. The Chinese Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi vividly depicted the natural changes during the Long Heads Up festival through the image of rain and new shoots in his poem *The Second Day of the Second Lunar Month*. On the second day of the second lunar month, rainfall increases, and insects wake up from hibernation. Luo Xuefang's Long spitting water scene in her work expresses the simple view of nature and romantic feelings of the Longmen people in celebration and peace, which is not unique to the Longmen people, but deeply rooted in Chinese culture, and many archaeological materials confirm the cultural tradition of Long as water god [8]. The second day of the second lunar month is the beginning of a new year of farming, and people will hold a sacrifice to the land god, hoping for a smooth new year and abundant grains, that is the inspiration of the scene for "cattle plowing the land" and "sacrificing the land god" in Luo Xuefang's work.

Xiao Fang made an in-depth combing of the festival time system characteristics in his research, and he believed that the time consciousness of the ancients showed the characteristic of the unity of nature and humans, that is, the combination of natural time and social time. Natural timing was the first choice of early societies; the rhythm of social life gradually shapes into social time with the establishment of social life order. [9]

Conforming to the second day of the second lunar month, it is what Lao Tzu called the "laws of nature", Longmen people's attention to this day, in essence, is to respect the laws of nature, and let people's behavior and natural laws unity, which is the same as most Han people, Longmen people are also deeply influenced by Taoist thought,

their production and life follow the regular changes of natural solar terms, inheriting solar terms festivals.

Tasting New Festival, Longmen traditional festival with local characteristics, also influenced by the idea of the unity of nature and humans, which is known as the “Sixth Day of the Sixth Lunar Month”, with a history of more than 300 years, and it is mainly popular in Lantian Yao Ethnic Group Township in Longmen area. On the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, when the first batch of grains is ripe, the first harvest results are tasted. The festival is not only popular in Lantian, but also among many ethnic groups in some parts of southern China, and is a festival developed from the laws of agriculture, which contains accurate knowledge of crop growth by farmers.

Longmen farmer painters Huang Weiping and Liu Shaoxia’s work *A Year of Harvest and Happiness* depicts the scene of the Longmen Lantian Tasting New Festival on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, in which the livestock are fat, fruits and vegetables are full, the family is happy, man and woman make the good harvest into food, and the family is tasting the rich fruits of labor.

In the thinking of Longmen people, conforming to nature time and human striving are unified. In Luo Xuefang’s painting, the sacrifice on the altar is fried soybeans, and there are two popular explanations for this custom, the first is that the second day of the second lunar month is the time when insects wake up from hibernation, poisonous insects will hide in the beams, and the frying activity will produce a large amount of oil smoke, which can repel insects; Second, it is related to a folklore, which says that the Long King violated the order of the heavenly court and rained privately, and only the blossoming of golden beans can release the Long King’s imprisonment, fried soybeans are golden beans, and the Long King’s release can ensure a year of smooth weather and rain [10]. Whether it is repelling insects or saving the Long King is the human action to reverse the unfavorable factors, emphasizing the unity of respecting the laws of nature and human striving.

Similarly, the *Monthly Instructions for the Four Peoples* (Eastern Han Dynasty) [11], and *A Compilation of Important Activities During the Four Seasons* (Tang Dynasty) [12], both record the Tasting New Festival and both texts mention winemaking. These are similar to the festival content of the Lantian Taste New Festival, in which the man tastes the newly brewed wine in the painting *A Year of Harvest and Happiness* by Huang Weiping and Liu Shaoxia. During the festival, the people of Longmen make wine, cook Ciba..... It is in the continuous deep processing of agricultural products that Longmen cuisine grows and local cuisine has become an essential part of Chinese food culture. Simple food processing reflects the unique power of Chinese culture and everywhere in China nourished by agricultural civilization, people share the national character of deep cultivation inward, and gradually form the unceasing strength of the Chinese nation for striving.

3. Relationship between Humans and Society

The Second Day of the Second Lunar Month festival is jointly inherited by all Chinese ethnic groups, and the Tasting New Festival is popular among many ethnic minorities in southern China, whereas Zuopeng Festival and Fire Dog Dance festival are local festivals with more Longmen characteristics, and the celebrations of these two festivals fully reflect the unity of personal development and social harmony of the Longmen people.

Farmer painter Zhong Yonglian's *Zuopeng Festival* (Figure 2) depicts the grand festival scene, where every courtyard in the village is full of banquets, and each host prepares a sumptuous meal, invites relatives and friends to visit, and organizes opera and lion dance performances. The Zuopeng Festival has a history of 376 years, and since 1647, it has been recorded in many townships in Longmen County [13]. There is no fixed day for the festival, and the villagers choose the day from the second day of the first lunar month to the beginning of the second lunar month, which is the most exciting day during the Chinese New Year, and will hold in Longmen Yonghan, Ma Zhuo, Longhua and other villages in turn.



Figure 2. *Zuopeng Festival, Zhong Yonglian.*

The Zuopeng Festival is an essential cultural form to maintain the harmony of rural social relations, which is inevitable in the historical context of its emergence and gradually internalized into the collectivist values of local people with the inheritance of customs. In the farming era, the practical need to resist enemies and risks together has formed a harmonious and flexible social network in which everyone exerts their own functions and forms a collective strength. Activities such as wedding drinks, funerals, and childbearing drinks are similar in connotation to the Zuopeng Festival [14], and are often collectively referred to as doing good deeds and doing things. The Longmen people's festival view shown by the Zuopeng Festival is more reflected in the establishment of a harmonious relationship between individuals and society.

The Fire Dog Dance, which has a history of more than 300 years, is both a festival and a dance, and it is a rite of passage for women. Farmer painter Huang Weiping's Fire Dog Dance (Figure 3) depicts the celebration scene of the Fire Dog Dance festival, and the inner and outer compositions distinguish the story timeline. In the outer circle, women wash their hair and bodies by the river, after which they can start the fire dog dance performance and meet adult men in the inner circle.



Figure 3. *Fire Dog Dance, Huang Weiping.*

The Fire Dog Dance festival is related to the dog totem worship of the Lantian Yao ethnic group. Lantian Yao Township has lived in harmony with dogs for generations, and it is said that a young master of the Yao ethnic group could not drink breast milk when he was an infant, and his father found a female dog to feed him. To

commemorate the female dogs who help the continuation of the group, the 15th day of the eighth lunar month is designated as a festival to commemorate the dog, and on this day, the village becomes very lively [15]. In June 2006, the Fire Dog Dance festival was awarded the title of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Guangdong Province. Girls must participate in at least two or three fire dog dances to get married, and the fire dog dance ceremony subtly conveys the concept of marriage and family responsibilities to girls, and is also a kind of friendship activity, with sex education and family education functions [16], linking personal development with ethnic continuation, and building a cultural bridge for personal and harmonious social development.

4. Cultural Identity

Guangfu culture, Hakka culture, and Yao culture converge in the Longmen area, where the festivals have both Chinese cultural characteristics and the local celebration forms of Lingnan and Longmen, and the inheritance of festivals has become a crucial means of rallying national strength and inheriting local culture, especially in celebration festivals.

Celebration festivals refer to festivals with the theme of commemoration or reunion, often with the role of uniting families and condensing national beliefs [17,18], typical of which are Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival. These two festivals have a wide influence not only in the Longmen area, but also in the whole of China, and even the entire pan-Chinese cultural circle and all Chinese can reach a high degree of agreement on the theme of reunion. In Longmen, these two festivals are celebrated fully reflect the unity of Chinese culture and local characteristics.

There are many works with the theme of Chinese New Year in Longmen farmer paintings, such as *Long, Lion and Phoenix Dance to Celebrate the Harvest Year* by farmer painter Zeng Yi, the three auspicious beasts of the Long, phoenix, and lion are isomorphic in one picture, and the picture with red as the main color plus yellow-purple embellishments brings the joy of the New Year to the extreme; Wang Hanchi's *Wind and Rain Smooth, Country Prosperous, People Peace* thematically connects the personal expectations of Longmen farmers with the feelings of home and country, and the most impressive thing is the composition of the axis in the picture, which closely follows the theme of country prosperous and people peace.

Chinese New Year themed Longmen farmer paintings often show scenes of family reunions making Ciba together; the most common celebrations are traditional performances such as lion dances, Long dances, and the Spring Cattle Dance. At the end of the year's agricultural work, the Chinese New Year arrives, people and land rest together, families are reunited, and people worship their ancestors with food and wine. When the northeasterners outside Shanhaiguan are cooking Jiaozi, the northwesterners outside Jiayuguan are eating Jiaotuan, the people of the capital have just returned from the temple fair in the Temple of Earth, and the Tangyuan of the Jiangnan family has been on the table, the Longmen family is reunited to make Ciba, perform lion dances, Long dances, and dance the Spring Cattle Dance to spend the Chinese New Year.

The most characteristic of Longmen in Chinese New Year celebrations is the century-old Spring Cattle Dance. Every Chinese New Year or when farming begins, Longmen farmers will praise the spirit of cattle cultivation through songs and dances, praying for a good harvest in the coming new year. Two dancers dance the Spring Cattle Dance, one charge for the cattle head, the other for the cattle body and tail. The

vivid spring cattle head is made of wood and bamboo, twice the size of the real cattle; The cattle body is made of cloth, covering the dancers, so that the dance moves freely and flexibly.

Longmen County is located in the middle of Guangdong Province, China, and is backed by the Zengjiang River. The Han people account for more than 70% of the total population and 20% of the Hakka people, mainly living in Pingling, Longjiang and other areas, and another 10% of the population is a minority group, among which the most famous Lantian Yao ethnic group, showing the characteristic of large mixed living, small settlements, the culture is dominated by Lingnan culture, but the Longmen New Year Hakka culture is obviously imprinted, many of which are ancient customs of the Central Plains, with Confucianism as the core [19]. No matter how far apart, people will set off firecrackers and dance during the Chinese New Year, the moment makes all Chinese descendants empathize because they have similar customs and a common home, Chinese New Year is so playing the role of Chinese cultural condensation nucleus, the Mid-Autumn Festival is more straightforward and poetic in the inheritance of reunion.

Farmer painter Chen Quanshu's *Full Moon* uses scattered perspective to overlook Huizhou's West Lake during the Mid-Autumn Festival from the bright moon, in which various auspicious beast lanterns are placed on the shore of the lake, shuttling between buildings; the blooming fireworks echo the lotus lanterns and the crowd. Moon viewing is a typical symbol rooted in Chinese culture, under the pen of farmer painters, and in the hearts of the Longmen people. Another of Chen Quanshu's work, *Under the Moon in the Mid-Autumn Festival* (Figure 4), also shows people viewing the moon, and when the time comes to night, the scene pulls back to Longmen, when the lights are exceptionally bright, and the brightest is the moon in the sky, and the two works fill the picture with the happiness of contemporary Longmen people.



Figure 4. *Under the Moon in the Mid-Autumn Festival*, Chen Quanshu.

Different from Chen Quanshu's large-scene paintings, Luo Xuefang's *Full Flower and Moon* depicts a harmonious family sitting in the middle of a blue and white porcelain pattern. In farmer paintings, the artist's expression of the Mid-Autumn Festival can be both a harmonious society and a happy family. The bright moon in the Mid-Autumn Festival is a symbol of reunion, a kind of Chinese romance, in which the Longmen family, the Longmen society, and the Chinese land continue to use reunion to condense the power of unity.

5. Conclusions

Longmen farmer paintings unique to the history of Chinese art after 1949 as folk paintings, with warm colors and exaggerated images to record and praise the real rural life, is the visual culture treasure-house of Longmen folklore, the farmer painters use brushes to relay from generation to generation to depict the life attitude of Longmen people, among which the depiction of festival celebrations epitomizes the collective unconsciousness of Longmen people for the relationships between humans and nature, humans and social and cultural identity. The most prominent characteristics of Longmen people's festival views decoded from the festival-themed works of the representative contemporary Longmen farmer painters are as follows, the relationship between humans and nature, which shows the unity of following the natural rhythm and human striving; the relationship between humans and society, which shows the unity of personal development and social harmony; cultural identity, which shows the unity of Chinese context and local characteristics. Such festival views reflect the vitality of harmony in diverse Chinese cultures and provide an experienced sample for the construction of prosperous new rural culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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