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CULTURE DIFFERENCES OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The culture of traditional festivals are different between China and America. This article is designed to discuss the differences in customs, origins and other aspects of traditional festivals with the similar cultural connotation, analyzes the reasons lying behind the differences and reflects the cultural differences between the two nations. The article also analyzes the mutual fusion in traditional holidays between China and America.

Keywords: Traditional festivals, Chinese and American culture, cultural differences, mutual fusion.

JEL Classification: Q3, Q4

1. Introduction

China is a multi-ethnic nation, people in different nationalities or regions celebrate different traditional festivals of their own, while among all the festivals the most typical ones celebrated by Chinese people in common consist of these ones: the Spring Festival, Tomb-Sweeping Day, the Dragon-Boat Festival, the Chinese Valentine's Day, Mid-Autumn Day, and the Double-Ninth Festival, etc.

Different from China, America is a multi-culture nation, people from different countries live together and the cultures brought by them melt into the distinct American culture. The festivals in America can be divided into the legal holidays and traditional ones; besides, some states also celebrate a few festivals of their own. In general, the most popular traditional festivals celebrated by American people include the following ones: New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, All Fools' Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas, etc.

Traditional festivals are the historical products of a nation's development. Whether in China which has a long history of more than five thousand years or in the newborn America, the origination of traditional festivals in the two countries is similar. Most traditional festivals originated from people's expectation for harvest in the agricultural production, the worship towards the gods and the nature, sacrifices to the historical characters etc. After the long-term evolution, traditional festivals have become an indispensable part of the national culture. Through traditional festivals, the distinct cultural characteristics of a people and the national spirits can be observed.

2. Differences between Chinese and American Traditional Festivals

Traditional festivals, as an integral part of the national culture, possess rich cultural connotations. It is no wonder that there are traditional festivals in the two cultures with the similar cultural connotations, such as "The Spring Festival vs. Thanksgiving Day, The Zhongyuan Festival vs. Halloween. However, The Chinese Valentine's Day vs. Valentine's Day". Behind the similar cultural connotations of traditional festivals, origins and customs of these festivals are greatly differentiated, which illustrate the cultural differences of the two nations.

In view of origins, the Spring Festival has close relation to agriculture. Actually, most Chinese traditional festivals are derived from people's conducting the agricultural production. Comparatively speaking, origins of American traditional festivals reflect the influence of religion, mainly Christianity. Thanksgiving Day is related to religion to some extent, although it is originated in the celebration of harvest, the influence of agriculture on this festival has faded away, and it tends to be a festival for family reunion and showing thanks to the God. In fact, among all the American traditional festivals many are originated from Christianity. The biggest festival Christmas is held to observe the birth of Jesus; Easter is to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus; Halloween is also branded by Christianity as a day to memorialize all the saints. Christianity is closely related to American traditional festivals. In contrast to the unique place of Christianity in American

traditional festivals, pantheism has great impact on Chinese traditional festivals. There are many gods in China's legends. The Qixi Festival is rooted in the story of Cowherd and Weaver Girl who was the seventh daughter of the Jade Emperor and Queen Mother in the Heaven. And the Kitchen God Festival is obviously related to the Kitchen God, etc.

In view of customs, etiquette has been greatly emphasized in celebration of Chinese traditional festivals. Take the Spring Festival for example, etiquette can be seen everywhere: the seating arrangement at the family reunion dinner, the elder giving "red envelops" to the younger, the younger giving gifts to their parents, the descendants offering sacrifices to their ancestors, people saying greetings to each other, paying New Year calls to relatives and friends with gifts. Etiquette has been regarded as a criterion to judge an individual's personality to some degree. Besides, most Chinese traditional festivals attach more importance to harmony and happiness among people. While in America celebrations for traditional festivals are more tending to be for fun and recreation. At the same time, the customs of traditional festivals are somewhat religious, for example, the prayer before the Thanksgiving dinner, people going to the church at the Easter morning.

All the differences analyzed above between Chinese and American traditional festivals are formed under the particular historical background and specific cultural features. The following part is devoted to the underlying factors that have caused such differences.

3. Main Factors of Differences between Chinese and American Traditional Festivals

3.1 Influential Factors of Chinese traditional festivals

China is a country that bears wisdom of generations and a national history of centuries; therefore, it is inevitable for traditional festivals to go through dramatic changes for "it is a general law in human history that the various civilizations polarized, synchronized, and affected each other". In history, such factors as religion, literature and arts, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism from the foreign land and politics and others have exerted a significant and positive influence on the culture loaded by Chinese traditional festivals. Agricultural civilization and Confucianism are the primary ones among all the factors that have contributed to distinct characteristics of Chinese traditional festivals.

The agricultural civilization is the foundation of most Chinese traditional festivals. The time system of Chinese traditional festivals is born from the system of "solar

terms” because “solar terms” provide the prerequisite for deciding the time for festivals. Most festivals are celebrated around or on some solar term.

Confucianism, with focuses on human morality and right actions, is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucianism is a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that has had tremendous influence on the culture and history of China.

3.2 Major Factors influencing American traditional festivals

Different from China, America is a highly industrialized country. With the fast pace of the industrialization in America, agricultural characteristics in the traditional festivals gradually disappear. The Thanksgiving as the festival most closely related to the agricultural production is no longer a festival to celebrate the harvest but a festival for the reunion of the family members and showing their thanks to the God. Furthermore, with the several immigration waves bringing abundant labor force for the industrialization in America, many foreign festivals have also been embedded in the system of traditional festivals in America.

Religion is vital to the American people’s life. The belief in Christianity is the source of formation of most American traditional festivals. Christmas is celebrated in the memory of Jesus’ birth; Easter is celebrated in the memory of his resurrection. Other festivals have also been branded by Christianity, such as the Valentine’s Day and the Halloween. The Valentine’s Day is said to commemorate the saint Valentine, and Halloween, originally as a day to memorialize the dead, has become a day in the memory of all the saints. Based on the analysis above, it is obvious that Christianity has deeply taken root in American culture, and exerted great impact on American traditional festivals.

4. Mutual Fusion Between Chinese and American Traditional Festivals

The differences between the Chinese and Western traditional festivals make the world beautiful and interesting, rich and colorful. However, every thing has two sides, when we affirm the differences, paying attention to the similarities is helpful to understand things comprehensively, then deal with problems dialectically.

Today, by the global economic integration and China’s market economy, people liberated their thought, provided conditions for western culture merge into our society, at that time, learning the West seems to be a trend, such as learning English, learning Western technology, learning Western lifestyles and so on. In

recent years, the Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day and the Fool's Day have become the new generation, especially the fashion of the "after", they are interested in the freedom, everywhere, unrestrained, personal atmosphere, sometimes are full of swing, and never tired. This acceptance of the western culture and traditional festivals reflect the fusion of the Eastern and Western cultures. Now the current situation continues to evolve, this is a active acceptance.

The European acceptances to our traditional festivals mainly are in the Chinese communities. Though the Chinese bring dancing dragon, dancing lion in our new year and stepping ships to the Europe, but they have not created a great impact.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the Chinese traditional festivals reflect the characteristics of agricultural civilization. Expectation for harvest is the origination of most traditional festivals. In the process of the development of traditional festivals, they have been mainly influenced by Confucianism and embodied the essence of Confucianism into the customs and celebrations of themselves.

In contrast, the fast development of industrialization in America has crowded out the influence of agriculture in traditional festivals. At the same time, American traditional festivals are closely related to religion. The culture embodied in American traditional festivals reflects the important role of religion, mainly Christianity, in the society.

In cross-cultural communication, effective communication relies on mutual understanding, the avoidance of misinterpretation, and positive cultural awareness of individual interlocutors. However, limitations exist in that due to the author's limited range of knowledge, the covered cultural phenomena are not various enough and thus the depth of our analysis is in need of further development.

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