

A Comparative Study of Chinese and Japanese Folk Culture

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Abstract. China and Japan are close neighbors who belong to the same East Asian Chinese character culture system, and have many similarities in language and folk culture. This thesis takes folk culture as a research perspective, and compares the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese cultures in terms of food culture and taboo culture respectively. Firstly, the article explains the definition scope and classification criteria of folk culture; secondly, the two points of food culture and taboo culture are selected for comparison from material folklore and spiritual folklore. Food culture focuses on table manners, cooking standards and eating habits, and analyzes the reasons for the formation of food culture from three aspects: economic development, geographical environment and social culture. Finally, the scope of taboo culture is large, so this paper selects two representative differences in numerical taboos and color taboos for discussion, showing the preference of Chinese and Japanese folklore. Finally, a short summary of the significance of folk culture for cross-cultural communication is presented.

1. Introduction

China and Japan have had close cultural ties since ancient times, and both countries belong to the Confucianism cultural circle and the Chinese character culture circle. When President Xi Jinping met with the Japanese delegation to China, he said that the foundation of Sino-Japanese friendship lies in the people, and it is necessary to enhance civil exchanges. When meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, he proposed that the two sides should continue to take advantage of the unique advantages of geographical proximity and humanistic ties to carry out exchanges. Therefore, this paper compares the folk cultures of China and Japan as comparative countries. Additionally, the exchange of folk culture is not only a practical need for national development, but also a basic need for cross-cultural communication, which is conducive to reducing friction and conflict between the two sides of communication. Not only that, culture is the unique spiritual symbol of a country and nation, and the teaching of culture class is essential in Chinese international education. At the same time, folk culture, as the cornerstone of the national cultural system, is good for foreign students to know and understand Chinese culture and heritage more rationally and objectively, and to feel the charm of Chinese traditional culture. For teachers, the teaching of folk culture is conducive to the complete and accurate promotion and dissemination of the excellent Chinese national culture, and truly realizes the practical significance of teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

2. Definition and classification of folk culture

The concept of folk culture in China has appeared as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty, which is described in *The Book of Rites*: "Therefore, the ruler of the people, the chapter of good to show the people's customs"; *the Book of History*: "Chu folk customs, prefer to ride in a short car"; *the Book of Han*: "Changing folkways, transforming folk customs". In 1846, the British scholar Thomas formally introduced the concept of "folk" on the basis of Saxon, and combined "folk" (people, folk) with "lore" (knowledge, learning). Which is not only a summary of folk customs, but also refers to the knowledge of the study of this phenomenon. ^[1]

Folklore has developed rapidly in recent times, and scholars from different countries have different perceptions of folklore. Yanagida Kuni, the founder of Japanese folklore, divided folklore into three major categories: tangible culture, language arts and mindfulness phenomena. In addition, by combining linguistics with the knowledge structure of folklore, "olk culture is used as an entry point to understand and grasp the language of a country." ^[2] Folklorist Zhong Jingwen points out that folklore is the living culture created, enjoyed and inherited by the masses of people, which is a collective, inherited and patterned folk culture, and its promotion and transmission are based on oral transmission, behavioral demonstration and psychological influence. He divides folk culture into four categories: material folklore, social

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folklore, spiritual folklore, and linguistic folklore. Material folklore includes production folklore, food folklore, clothing folklore, housing folklore and architectural folklore, which occupy an important position in the material and spiritual life of each nationality and can satisfy people's physical needs as well as higher-level needs, including security, belonging, self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Spiritual folklore is a kind of folklore about ideology developed from material and institutional culture. It consists of beliefs, taboos and rituals, and is a psychological experience generated by people in the process of understanding and transforming nature and society. Once this experience becomes a collective psychological habit and is passed down from generation to generation in the form of specific behaviors, it becomes one of spiritual folklore. Since folk culture involves a lot of contents, this paper selects two branches of food and taboos for detailed discussion to compare the differences between Chinese and Japanese folk cultures. [3]

3. Chinese and Japanese folk food culture

3.1. Manifestation of food culture differences

3.1.1. Table manners.

Table manners are the essence of food culture, and familiarity with table manners is a necessary quality for a mature cross-cultural communicator. In terms of chopsticks, Japanese chopsticks are much shorter than Chinese chopsticks. Because of the meal sharing system, each person has his or her own dish to eat without helping others. Chopsticks are placed horizontally before eating, and the heads of chopsticks are pointed because Japanese people love to eat fish, so it is easier to separate the fish from the spines by using chopsticks with pointed heads. [5] Also, the owners of chopsticks in Japanese households are fixed and cannot be mixed. Ryozo Sugimoto once mentioned, "The usage of Japanese tableware shows that Japan is a country of individualism." In China, chopsticks are placed vertically and long chopsticks are used to hold dishes between each other, representing hospitality. And in families chopsticks are communal and do not need to be distinguished. [6] When ordering a meal, Japanese people usually finish all the food on the table as a courtesy, which is also the source of Japanese frugality. The Japanese also allow "wolf and tiger" eating [7] to show their enjoyment of food and praise to the chef. The Chinese, on the other hand, do not want their guests to finish their meals, as it is considered rude to run out of food. At the Chinese family dinner table, "Eat without saying anything, sleep without speaking." has been the practice of parents in raising their children.

3.1.2. Cooking standards.

In Chinese food culture, the standard of cuisine is to pursue the full range of Aroma, color and taste, and it is believed that food needs to be cooked carefully to truly

realize its value, so more than 20 different cooking methods such as "frying, pan-frying, deep-frying and steaming" have been produced. People in different regions have also developed local food characteristics in different environments, resulting in the eight major cuisines in China. In *the Analects of Confucius*, the saying "The more delicate the grain is, the better, and the thinner the fish is cut, the better." is a high summary of our food culture. It means to describe a very careful diet. In Japanese food concept, cooking will destroy the original nutritional value and flavor of food, so there are five ways of Japanese cuisine: raw, boiled, grilled, fried, and steamed. Among them, the most widely used method is "boiling", which forms one of the characteristics of Japanese food: lightness. [4] In order to pursue the original taste of food, Japanese people also use limited seasonings, mostly soy sauce, and according to the geographic location of Japan, it extends in an arc from the northeast to the southwest, forming two major culinary systems, Kanto cuisine and Kansai cuisine, both of which prefer soy sauce as the main ingredient.

3.1.3. Eating habits.

The Chinese have long been influenced by the five elements of yin and yang and Traditional Chinese Medicine, and believe that the five internal organs and six internal organs of the human body are interconnected. [8] Therefore, our body need to be supplemented with warm food, i.e., "eating the five grains does not make you sick". The staple food in the traditional Chinese diet is rice and wheat, and the side dishes are mainly vegetables and meat. Through production, the staple food also consists of steamed buns and noodles. Japan likes raw food and cold food, and its diet structure and content is mainly fast. The main food is mainly rice, such as sushi and rice balls, and the side dishes are mainly vegetables and fish, with less meat. The most famous sashimi in Japanese cuisine highlights the raw and cold nature of the Japanese diet, and its most common ingredient is tuna. [9]

3.2. Reasons for the difference in food culture

3.2.1. Economic development.

Food culture can, to some extent, reflect the level of development of a country's productivity, with a material basis for the existence of food culture. Beijing Ape Man began to fire roasting stone baking in history, as the source of Chinese cooked food culture; the cavemen caught fish and shrimp; the Hemudu People planted grains; the Han Dynasty introduced cooking methods; the Tang, Song and Ming and Qing dynasties food culture flourished. Chinese food culture has lasted for more than 1.7 million years and continued to mature with the development of the ancient economy. Japan was less civilized in the primitive society period, and was in the tribal stage in the 3rd century A.D. In the 7th century A.D., Chinese food culture was introduced by Japanese envoys and foreign students, and its food culture began to develop gradually. In addition, the Japanese Emperor Tenmu issued a "meat ban" in 676

A.D. ^[10], so the range of ingredients was somewhat restricted.

3.2.2. Geographical environment.

Folklore has strong selectivity and adaptability to the natural geographic environment. There are differences in geography and environment, and naturally there are differences in food and folklore. China's vast territory and diverse climate are suitable for the growth of different plants and animals, making the variety of source ingredients diverse. Chinese people take advantage of the excellent conditions, "rely on mountains to eat mountains, rely on water to eat water", according to local conditions, there are different types of local cuisine, for example: Sichuan cui-sine, Cantonese cuisine, Huaiyang cuisine, etc.. Japan is an island country, consisting of more than 4,000 islands, so it has abundant fishery resources and relies on water to eat, and its diet is rich in seafood. The scarcity of resources has led to a strong sense of crisis and the formation of a custom that favors lightness and freshness.

3.2.3. Social culture.

Social culture is also an important reason for the difference in diet. In traditional Chinese culture, emphasis is placed on the five elements of yin and yang, the doctrine of Chinese medicine and health, and attention is paid to the "harmony" in cooking. During the Spring and Autumn Period, Yan Ying took cooking as an example: "Harmony is like making a meat soup, cooking fish and meat with water, fire, vinegar, sauce, salt and plum, and cooking them over a wood fire. The cook mixes the flavors so that the various flavors are just right; if the flavors are not enough, the seasonings are added, and if the flavors are too heavy, the seasonings are reduced. The gentleman eats this kind of meat soup, used to calm his mind" Because of the diversity of the social environment, the Chinese food culture is determined by "harmony". Whether stir-fried, fried, steamed, or boiled, the ultimate goal is to bring out the best in Aroma, color and taste. To the Heian Period in Japan, Japanese food culture was gradually formed on the basis of Chinese food civilization. After the Meiji Restoration, Western culture was introduced to Japan, which improved the overall quality of Japanese food culture, combining the beauty of both Eastern and Western cultures. Later on, the Japanese revered the habit of frugality and rarely expanded on food culture. Therefore the development of the cuisine was limited.

3.3. Taboo Culture

3.3.1. Definition of taboo.

Taboo, known as "tabu" in the fields of ethnography, folklore and anthropology. The specific meaning of "tabu" is the prohibition and restraint of thought and action in order to prevent the incurring of blame and calamity through thought and action. The scholar Wan Jianzhong,

in his book *Taboos and Chinese Culture*, once mentioned that there are three interconnected key points in the understanding of the basic characteristics of taboos, namely, that they belong to negative behavioral norms, that is, they are irresistible to the punishment of national beliefs and taboos at the psycho-social level ^[11]. This paper focuses on the differences between Chinese and Japanese folk cultures with a focus on numerical taboos and color taboos.

3.3.2. Number taboos.

In China, "four" is an inauspicious number because of its harmonic sound of "death"; "seven" is also disfavored because of its harmonic sound of "qi". "Six" and "eight" are both very popular because "six" is a sign of success and "eight" is a sign of wealth. On special days, the Chinese usually choose even numbers to avoid suffering from widowhood. The cultural connotation of "two" is richer, and is regarded by Han Chinese as the meaning of pairs, while Manchu and Korean people taboo the funeral on even days to avoid bad things in pairs; Guangzhou people taboo "three", because its harmonic sound is "scattered", the locals will replace three points with two sixty points.

In Japan, the appearance of "four" and "nine", will make the public very sensitive because of the resonance of "death" and "suffering". Therefore, there is no number four, nine, fourteen, twenty four in Japanese hospitals. And there is no number four in parking lots and hotels, but there is a number nine room in prisons, not a number four room, in order to punish prisoners for their pain but not for their death. When giving gifts, Japanese people prefer odd numbers, especially "three" and "seven". The legend of the seven gods of good fortune has been passed down in Japanese folklore, and its origins come from various religious sects, including Shintoism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The number "three" is both an auspicious Christian number and a number considered by Pythagoras to have reached a new unity beyond one and two. In *the Japanese Chronicle of Ancient Matters and the Japanese Book of Records*, it is written that the three generations of Amaterasu Omikami's royal grandson came to Japan with three divine weapons, the most frequent of which is number "three".

3.3.3. Color taboos.

Chinese people like red, red symbolizes joy, good luck, folk marriages revered red, the bride wears red wedding clothes. Red can drive away evil spirits and attract good fortune, and in the year of birth, wear more red clothes to avoid disaster. Red symbolizes the development of smooth, "red people" "red list" "red luck" and so on all indicate positive development. Chinese people do not like white, white represents the color of evil funeral, after the death of a loved one to do "White Ceremony" for it, wearing mourning. White symbolizes failure and shallow knowledge. There are white flags for losing wars, "white papers" in exams, and white faces in operas. Nowadays, due to the influence of Western culture, white elements are

becoming popular in China.

The Japanese like white, which is light and elegant, symbolizing purity. White appears most frequently in Masamune Atsuo's *Manyeki*. The aesthetic sense of ancient Japan centered on snow, moon and flowers. In the traditional Japanese wedding ceremony, the bride must wear a white dress and the guests must wear a white tie. White is a symbol of good luck, and it is written in *The Chronicle of Japanese Books* that Emperor Takatoku and Emperor Gwangin renamed their years "Hakusei" and "Hakugame".^[12] In Japanese, the word "bare or loyal" is generally used to represent the color red, which represents a mysterious color and has more of a negative meaning. In traditional Japanese songs and dances, white represents decency, red represents villainy, and the opposite is true for Chinese face painting. In summary, China reveres the color red, which symbolizes positive meaning. White represents a more negative meaning. The Japanese attach more importance to white, symbolizing purity and innocence, while red mainly represents mystical ritual colors and festivity, but to a lesser extent than in China.

4. Conclusions

Folk culture is an important part of a country's culture, and different countries have formed their own unique folk culture. The accelerating process of globalization requires us to be aware of the cultural similarities and differences of other countries, to respect the differences and understand their folk culture in the process of foreign communication. This paper selects two East Asian countries, China and Japan, and explores them mainly in terms of food and taboos. Through the comparison, we have a clear understanding of the basic characteristics of the folk cultures of the two countries, which provides some reference for people's daily interactions in cross-cultural communication situations. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese teachers can better grasp the strength of cultural export, respect the differences and avoid cultural conflicts.

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