

Discussion on the Description of Folkways and Customs in Li Rui's Novels

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Abstract: China's ancient civilization tradition is a long river of history, flowing in the blood of the Chinese. The folkways and customs are the historical witnesses and realistic representations of the civilization tradition in the contemporary era. They vividly display the relationship between man and nature, man and society, as the main part of the psychological structure of the national culture. In Li Rui's works, the depiction of folkways and customs is not a dispensable embellishment, but constitutes the basic narrative power of Li Rui's novels and the basic background of the "real situation" of human beings.

1. Introduction

From the investigation of Li Rui's creation, it can be found that his novels do not fully possess the basic aesthetic form of the typical local novel's "Three Paintings and Four Colors". To portray the "real situation" of the Chinese, the description of folkways and customs is not a dispensable decoration. Whether in the "Silver City Series" or the "Luliang Mountain Series", there are a large number of folk descriptions, not only including traditional customs such as merging grave, driving off deceased family members, and funerals, but also some local customs such as praying rain and cattle market. The role of folk descriptions in the novel is also as mentioned above, and it is worth mentioning that the folk descriptions in Silver City even form a "wonder" in contemporary novels: the world of huge cattle and the world of human beings were treated equally, which constitutes the two-line structure narrated in Silver City, while Cloudless entirely describes the customs of praying for rain throughout the north. These folkways and customs constitute the basic narrative power of Li Rui's novels and the basic background of the "real situation" of human beings.

2. Types of folk customs

(1) Drama

The background of Li Rui's works is mostly Luliang Mountain, with primitive and old mountains, blue sky, burning sun and loess. Only with the straight and robust sound can completely express the inner feelings. "The four great Pang-tzus of Shanxi" of Pu Opera, Jin Drama, the Northern Pang-tzu and the Shangdang Pang-tzu, are good at expressing the feelings of passion and indignation, and their singing tunes are known as sonorous, vehement, impassioned and sorrowful, sounding extremely exciting and fully enjoyable.

Li Rui had been in the countryside for six years and was very familiar with the life of the peasants. "In fact, the words are luxurious to the peasants, and the favorite way for peasants is the arts of talking and singing. Singing an opera is a very intuitive and vivid thing, and you can listen directly, look directly, and don't need to read words, since many people are illiterate." [1] One of the most intuitive examples is Captain in the Tree Without Winds, Tianzhu, a natural folk singer of Pang-tzu. When Uncle Guai died, Tianzhu felt guilty and sang: "There was a woman called Meng Jiangnu in the past, and her husband's name was Fan Xiliang. When the couple were performing the wedding ceremony, the first emperor of Qin captured Fan Lang to the frontier, which made Meng Jiangnu have no appetite for food and drinks, being afraid that Fan Lang was desolated." In the heavy physical labor of the peasants, the vigorous, sonorous and miserable opera of Pang-tzu can bring spiritual pleasure and physiological relief to people. During a break in the stone dam,

“Tianzhu suddenly and overwhelmingly sang up, his face turning flushed and full of thick veins on his neck...Xue Meng immediately tore, looking back to Wangyang River. But a piece of soil in the Yanghe River could not be seen, and the little brother of the Camp Five couldn't been seen. I was riding on a horse through the willow wood, catching sight of Xue Gang very angry.”

These two arias are very different in style, reflecting Tianzhu's rich emotions. The former is mild and indirect, with a chilly style. Tianzhu had no direct responsibility for the death of Uncle Guai, and he knew that Uncle Guai was innocent and just a victim of the class struggle. Uncle Guai had no children and lived a busy and miserable life, so it couldn't bear to think about the loneliness after her death.

(2) Praying for rain

The Chinese people believe that the drought is due to the offended Dragon King. In order to obtain the mercy from Dragon King to give rain, a series of different kinds of sacrifices and prayer rituals are held for rain. The custom of praying for rain is very popular in the northern China, especially in Shanxi.

In the “Cloudless”, Wuren Ping had no rain for two years, and it was so dry that the plum tree can't hold the fruit. So then the people in the mountain prayed Dragon King for rain. Praying for rain was held in the temple in the village, with a grand scale, and people from all over the country rolled in. The Taoists were invited to carry out eight notes concert for nine days. The son and the niece of the village head were the golden boy and jade girl to offer up the sacrifice. The novel describes in detail the folk customs of singing an opera, storytelling, offering pigs and sheep in praying for rain. This is similar to the “carnival” on the “square” of Bakhtin—The god of fire instead of the Dragon King was invited, who burned out the original ecological forest on the two slopes of Laolingou. The golden boy and the jade girl were burned to death, and the protagonist, Zhang Zhongyin, was thrown into prison again.

Praying for rain in *The Tree Without Winds* is not only the narrative power source, but also an indispensable central event. This work has created a variety of characters with different personality in a multi-perspective first-person narrative way, such as the first Communist Party member Zhao Wanjin, the village head Zhao Yumai, the enlightener Zhang Zhongyin, Chen Sanye, the false Taoist Gao Weidong, etc., and their oral narratives give us a glimpse into the simple and complex, stagnant and flowing life scenes of the people in Wuren Ping and their deep inner world; In the process of praying for rain, in addition to the description of folklore, it also conveyed the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution; The most important thing is that praying for rain is the cause of the tragedy of the enlightener Zhang Zhongyin. Zhang Zhongyin did not participate in praying for rain, but also he did not oppose praying for rain, because the money donated by the prayers for rain could be used to build a new elementary school. This was the road to recovery after his first failure. The first imprisonment was Zhang Zhongyin's deliberate behavior to “defy the law personally” on the road to enlightenment, to set off a wave of revolution; The second imprisonment caused by praying for rain was the complete disillusionment of his ideals, and praying for rain became a huge psychological trauma to Zhang Zhongyin.

(3) Folkways

There are also some descriptions of similar to genre paintings in Li Rui's novels. In the *Thick Soil*, there is a description of the local “driving away cattle”. Carry Charcoal describes the unique style of LuliangLiulin - “driving away cattle”. “His” sight was stuffed with fat and round the donkeys' asses. The donkeys carrying charcoal was going uphill, while the slope is steep and the road is very narrow, so he could only see these fat and round asses in the eyes. Along the way, the person who led the cattle sang two lyrics: “Talk about Xizhuang, talk about Xizhuang, and there is a good girl in Xizhuang...”. When he came to the front of a stone house, a strong peasant woman's voice suddenly came out. The person who led the cattle and she laughed and at each other. On the way back, the person who led the cattle gave the charcoal in the sweater pocket to his lover. Not knowing how long it took, the person who led the cattle came back, split the remaining piece of coal into two, and put it in the sweater pocket, ready to go back and give it to his wife. On the road, the lyrics were sung again, “Talk about Xizhuang, talk about Xizhuang, and there is a good girl in

Xizhuang...”. In the old society, in addition to “leaving for the west” to make a living outside the country, quite a few Shanxi’s men made a living by driving away cattle. “Driving away cattle” is also called “catching up with the feet”, which is similar to “horse caravan” in Yunnan and Guizhou regions, that is, livestock (mostly referring to donkeys or mules in the north) are used to transport goods for others on a long distance, and those who drive livestock to transport the goods are called cattle drivers. Zhang Tianen, a native of Shaanxi, drove cattle to the three borders when he was a teenager, went down to Liulin, transporting salt and charcoal. The mountains and rivers along the road inspired his creation, and he composed and sang many folk songs, such as: Driving Away Cattle, Kneeling A Land Boat, White Steamed Bun and the Spots Made By Lice, and the Persons Singing Shiquanquan. Among them, Driving Away Cattle is honored as “the first of the folk songs in northern Shaanxi in China”. These folk songs in Li Rui’s works are just like the local operas above, both of which are a kind of tragic expression of life, just as what he said in the Embarrassment of The Gatherer: “The folk songs squeezed out in the life and death of the generations in Loess Plateau are to sigh for comforting life, not to please the public’s ears.” [2]

The folkways and customs are also described in detail in *The Tree Without Winds*. After the death of Uncle Guai, the people in Airen Ping held a funeral for him in accordance with the traditional custom, including making shroud, paper-cutting person and making lamp wicks. “When parents are alive, they should be served according to the etiquette; after the parents die, they should be buried and worshiped according to the etiquette.” [3] One of the details is worthy of attention. Uncle Guai was buried in the fifteen-acre land of his ancestors after his death. “Go to the fifteen-acre land without going down to the ditch, turn to the aged god tree at the entrance of the village, and then go straight to the north, where a loess road lying straight on the soil, is wide and long, like a river lying down.” This is an irrelevant sentence in the novel, but it proves a tradition that lasts for a thousand years. There are two sentences in the explanation of the Neolithic ruins in Banpo Village of Xi’an: “The cemetery is in the north of the village. The heads of the deceased are all towards west.” In the ancient funeral system, this is a custom that has been carried on for thousands of years in northern China. It is no coincidence that tradition and history travel through time and space in this casual moment. A poet told his feelings like these the two sentences “they were like two shots in the ear, and they shook my brain... In the Cultural Revolution, I lived and worked in the small village near Beijing. As one of the six people who carried the coffin at each funeral, I was too familiar with the orientation of the cemetery and the habit of burial: the north of the village and head towards the west – the history is approaching to an unexpected angle, within which I suddenly become visible.” [4]

3. Connotations of folk customs

Li Rui himself had experienced this kind of shock. When going to live and work in Luliang Mountain, “especially some farm implements that were named by farmers in dialects, those words that I always thought did not exist in the dictionary, and the so-called dialects that I regarded as the country’s stubborn and closed language preference, unexpectedly coincided with the history before two or three thousand years ago, exactly the same as the ancient pronunciation and characters.... The appellation of ‘grinding’ is only popular after the Han Dynasty. In the long history before that, it had always been called ‘stone milling’, and the dialect of Dijiahe actually has spanned more than 2,500 years of history and continued to the “Spring and Autumn Period”. At that moment, I was really shocked and stupefied.” [5] All of this directly turned into Li Rui’s novel materials in the future, which triggered a shock to the knowledge and history.

This kind of burial custom has transcended the limitation of the region and is an ancient custom passed down to now by the Chinese nation. The author tries to raise the life of the people in Luliang Mountain to the height of the whole nation’s living conditions through this description. This is the theme throughout his whole novel—describing the true living conditions of Chinese people that is the conscious choice in their creation. This millennium invariant custom is a concrete portrayal of the long-lasting and stagnant life of the people in Luliang Mountain. Obviously, the inclusion of this custom is greater than that of the folkways and customs in the regional style.

In other novels, these specifically regional custom descriptions can also be seen. In the *Peaceful Scenery*, Xiaomin liked the Beiyi Village where mom's grandmother lived, and every time he saw Beiyi Village, it reminded him of the deep wrinkles on the face of his mom's grandmother, as well as her age that nobody could guess. "On the dry and comfortable loess mountain, the sunken part is also a dry and comfortable loess ditch. Along the sides of the ditch, there are lots of dense and uneven caves and courtyards. The front face of the caves are made of locally-harvested reddish-brown stones, and the eaves of the veranda and the bases are made of bricks and wooden columns. They are all typical local styles, that is, golden eaves, bright pillar and high-rise platforms. The houses of the well-behaved people also have a courtyard gate with a gatehouse where there is an animal ridge on the tile roof. The doors have delicate brick carvings, engraved with auspicious patterns, such as KylinSongzi, and Felicity and Longevity. Because of the age, the tile roofs of the corridors and the gatehouses have become thick black, and the brick patterns are all mottled and spalled due to wind erosion. The winding roads go up and down, narrow and wide, crossed and bifurcated in the streets, braided into a dense and messy net, and the red-brown stones were laid on the road. When you walk close, you will see that these red-stone roads have long been worn and rugged. Thus, this broken, uneven but dense net connects the scattered caves, courtyards, tile roofs and steps with each other with a vague memory. The village temple and the stage are placed on the most prominent and most important platform in the village. Through the echoes and resonances on both sides of the loess ditch, the drums and arias on the stage can be spread throughout every corner of the village. In the distance, there is a tall and ancient sophora japonica tree near the well at the bottom of the ditch, like a road monument of time. On the border of the cave and the courtyard, the green trees have flourished quietly for thousands of years. The whole village is silent, while the desolate and old air are soundlessly filled out from the dignified silence. If it is not because of the wisps of smoke rising up, if it is not the occasional dog barking, you must be mistaken to think that you have seen a building model that someone deliberately made and is forgotten in the wasteland of the loess world." [6]

This is a "topographic reference map" of a typical rural village in North China, which shows the overall structural layout of the village. It has basic elements of a village, such as roads, caves, yards, village temples, stage and the big tree at the entrance of the village. At the same time, there are depictions of details, such as the location of caves and courtyards and the architectural style, and even the static sketches of the desolate and old atmosphere in the countryside. The long life and history seem to be fixed here. Beiyi Village is a miniature landscape of the permanent and stable living conditions for thousands of years in China's rural society. Is the deep wrinkles on mom's grandmother's face not a symbol of the long history and collective memory of this nation? Looking at this "topographic reference map", we feel the solidification of time and history. This solidification is not a metaphor for the cyclical growth history of Chinese farmers?

The existing research shows that "Chinese has settled in the countryside in the 2000s before the epoch, and this kind of community has not changed much until modern times. We know that agricultural life is static and it is rarely changed. Such an environment is the easiest to cultivate people's eternal consciousness. In addition, since the Qin and Han dynasties, agricultural technology has hardly improved, making the traditional Chinese community form lack of motivation to change, so everything makes people feel calm and long-standing." [7] Li Rui said that the *Peaceful Scenery* is "a dialogue with the ancestors", and the description of folkways and the depiction of the peasants' current situation form a way of dialogue between reality and history.

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