

The Inheritance and Change Paths of Folk Beliefs in the Transformation of Modern Society

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Abstract: In the period of modern social transformation, with the sweeping wave of globalization and the accelerated progress of industrialization and urbanization, the collision between tradition and modernity is becoming more intense. As a cultural phenomenon deeply rooted in the daily life of the people, folk beliefs are undergoing a profound reshaping of their survival foundation and development forms. This transformation not only brings about drastic changes in social structure and the pluralistic differentiation of values, but also poses severe challenges to the inheritance fields and communication methods of folk beliefs. Based on this background, this paper first reviews the multiple functions of folk beliefs in traditional society, such as spiritual comfort, social integration, and ethical norms. Using this as a reference, it deeply analyzes the specific impacts, including the disintegration of spatial carriers caused by changes in social structure and the weakening of belief identity due to the diversification of values. On this basis, it systematically sorts out the inheritance manifestations of folk beliefs in the contemporary era, including the adherence to ritual connotations and the simplification of forms, the protective utilization of material places, and the re-cohesion of group consciousness. Finally, from the three dimensions of policy support, form innovation, and organizational construction, it explores the inheritance and change paths of folk beliefs to adapt to modern society, providing useful reference for the modern transformation of traditional culture.

Keywords: Social Transformation; Folk Beliefs; Inheritance Mechanism; Change Paths; Cultural Adaptation.

1. Introduction

The transformation of modern society is reconstructing China's cultural ecology with unprecedented intensity. The spatial transformation from rural China to urban China, the rule replacement from a society based on etiquette and customs to a society based on laws and regulations, and the conceptual evolution from collectivism to individual consciousness have changed the production and living methods of the people, and have had an all-round impact on folk beliefs deeply rooted in the soil of traditional society. As a diffused cultural phenomenon, folk beliefs not only contain the awe of all things in nature and the remembrance of ancestors and sages, but also condense the value consensus and emotional memories of specific communities, and are an important code to understand the cultural genes of Chinese society. Exploring the inheritance mechanism and change logic of folk beliefs in social transformation can not only grasp their own development trends, but also reveal the survival wisdom of traditional culture in the wave of modernity[1-2]. Based on this, through the comparison of history and reality, the analysis of functions and impacts, and the exploration of practices and paths, this paper hopes to provide theoretical thinking for the modern inheritance of folk beliefs and practical reference for activating traditional resources in the construction of a strong cultural country.

2. The Functions of Folk Beliefs in Traditional Society

Traditional agricultural society was based on farming production. The reliance of individuals on natural forces and the close-knit community life laid a broad foundation for the survival of folk beliefs, as shown in Table 1. In the spiritual world, folk beliefs created a complete view of the universe and life, becoming a cognitive tool for the people to

understand the world. Facing inexplicable natural phenomena, the people transformed the uncontrollable natural forces into communicable deities through belief practices, thus obtaining a sense of psychological control.

Table 1. The Functions of Folk Beliefs in Traditional Society

Functional level	Specific contents:	The impact on social operation
Spiritual level	Provide a cognitive framework to alleviate anxiety about the unknown world.	Stabilize public psychology, provide spiritual support, and reduce social psychological unrest.
Social level	Strengthen group identity to maintain community cohesion.	Enhance centripetal force, reduce internal conflicts, and maintain grassroots stability.
Ethical level	Shape behavioral norms to complement social governance.	Reduce governance costs, decrease deviant behaviors, and maintain ethical order.
Cultural level	Carry cultural memory to inherit traditional culture.	Promote cultural dissemination, maintain diversity, and enhance cultural identity.
Economic level	Drive related commercial activities for sacrificial ceremonies and promote commodity exchange.	Activate regional economy, increase employment, and supplement agricultural economy.

Regarding life events such as birth, aging, illness, and death, ancestor worship and the concept of ghosts brought spiritual comfort beyond death, reducing the fear of individuals when facing unknown phenomena. From the perspective of social

structure, folk beliefs were the latent bonds that maintained community order. The local deities jointly worshipped in villages and the regular ancestor - worship activities of clans, through collective participation, strengthened the boundary division of the "we" group. The common taboos and ritual requirements in sacrificial activities united scattered individuals into a community with a sense of belonging. In terms of ethical order, folk beliefs regulated the people's code of conduct relying on the idea of divine judgment and the concept of karma. Corresponding sayings and folk stories transformed abstract moral principles into intuitive divine supervision, making virtues such as filial piety, respect for the elderly, honesty, and trustworthiness self - conscious actions without external coercion, and serving as an important supplement to traditional social governance.

3. The Impact of Modern Social Transformation on Folk Beliefs

3.1. The Impact of Changes in Social Structure

Against the backdrop of the transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial society and from rural civilization to urban civilization, the rapid changes in social structure are deeply reshaping the survival situation of folk beliefs. The urbanization process is the core driving force of this transformation. Hundreds of millions of workers have flooded into cities from rural areas, and the traditional rural community has thus disintegrated. The spatial carriers that once carried folk beliefs, such as ancestral halls and temple fair squares, have gradually fallen into disrepair due to the loss of stable community support. The elderly left behind have become the main participants in sacrificial activities[3-4]. The absence of young and middle - aged people has led to an inter - generational fault in the inheritance of beliefs. Many clan sacrificial ceremonies that have been passed down for hundreds of years have quietly disappeared due to a lack of organization. The residential pattern of apartment buildings has severed the traditional geographical connection, and the fine - grained division of labor has weakened the blood ties. The collective participation mechanism on which folk beliefs rely has been severely weakened. More importantly, the standardized governance measures implemented by the modern administrative system in grassroots society have labeled some belief customs with primitive worship as "feudal superstition." Due to policy control, they have gradually withdrawn from public life, further squeezing the living space of folk beliefs.

3.2. The Impact of the Diversification of Values

With the deep penetration of the wave of modernity into traditional society, the reconstruction of the diversification of values is shaking the cognitive pattern of folk beliefs at the spiritual level. The modern education system builds a knowledge framework centered on scientific rationality, and the mass media constantly spreads the concept of positivism. As a result, people's explanations of natural phenomena and life events increasingly tend to rely on scientific laws rather than supernatural forces. The mysterious components such as "animism" in folk beliefs have been repeatedly questioned. The rapid development of the market economy has given rise to the trend of pragmatism. Many people's attitudes towards folk beliefs have shown a utilitarian turn. When participating in sacrificial activities, they focus more on practical returns such as "getting a son if praying for a son" and "getting wealth

if praying for wealth," rather than having a spiritual identification with the beliefs themselves. The cultural integration triggered by globalization has provided people with more diverse spiritual choices. Institutionalized religions such as Christianity and Buddhism attract believers through standardized development. Emerging cultural phenomena such as horoscope divination and psychological healing have also diverted part of the spiritual market, making folk beliefs gradually marginalized in the contemporary spiritual landscape.

4. The Inheritance Manifestations and Ways of Folk Beliefs

4.1. Inheriting Ritual Connotations

With the gradually accelerating pace of modern life and the increasingly fragmented individual time, the rituals of folk beliefs can no longer easily maintain the complex and lengthy form in traditional society. However, rituals are the carriers of the externalization of belief connotations, and their core spirit is consciously protected by the people in inter - generational transmission. For example, the Kitchen God worship custom in northern China used to require more than twenty kinds of offerings and strictly follow the gender restriction of "men do not worship the moon, women do not worship the Kitchen God." Nowadays, most families simplify it to placing kitchen candy and making a short prayer, but still retain the core expectation of "respecting the Kitchen God and hoping for peace." The "Xieyang Festival" along the coast of Zhejiang has changed from the fishermen's collective three - day port closure and sacrificing livestock to worship the Sea God in the past to the current one - hour - long ceremony of presenting flower baskets and reading sacrificial texts. Even though the time length has been shortened, the gratitude for the ocean's blessings and the expectation of safe voyages have never changed[5-6]. The inheritance logic of "simplifying the form while sticking to the core" enables folk beliefs to adapt to the modern time system while maintaining the coherence of cultural meaning.

4.2. Preserving Material Places

At present, with the disappearance of a large number of traditional villages and the renovation of old urban areas, the material carriers of folk beliefs are facing the dilemma of the disintegration of physical space. Protectively preserving places such as temples and ancestral halls is the basic work of belief inheritance. The clan communities in Chaoshan, Guangdong, use crowdfunding to renovate the century - old ancestral halls in an "old - as - before" manner, retaining the carved beam frames and ancestral tablets, and adding moisture - proof and fire - prevention facilities to make the ancestral halls meet the requirements of cultural relic protection, and still continue the tradition of spring and autumn ancestor - worship. The Benzhu Temple in Dali, Yunnan, has been incorporated into the intangible cultural heritage protection park during the tourism development activities. The temple retains the statues and sacrificial utensils, and outside the temple, exhibition boards are displayed to introduce the Benzhu legends and folk stories, making the religious space also a platform for local cultural education, as shown in Figure 1. These practices show that the active protection of material places can maintain the physical support of beliefs and endow them with the public cultural characteristics suitable for modern society.



Figure 1. Benzhu Temple in Dali, Yunnan

4.3. Cohesing Group Consciousness

The large - scale migration of the population between urban and rural areas and regions has gradually loosened the traditional geographical and blood - related communities. Folk beliefs, with their cultural adhesive properties, have become a key bridge for reconstructing group connections. In cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, merchants from Putian, Fujian, spontaneously unite to form the Mazu Cultural Exchange Association. Every year on the 23rd day of the third lunar month, they hold a celebration ceremony for the birthday of Mazu. Members, regardless of their native places and occupations, participate in parades and worship as "Mazu believers," forming a cross - industry business mutual - assistance network. The "Dabogong Temple" built by the overseas Minnan community is not only a place for sacrificing the Earth God, but also a community center where overseas Chinese handle conflicts and convey hometown news. The donation lists and activity records in the temple have become the archives that maintain the emotional connection between overseas Chinese and their ancestral hometowns [7-8]. Through the group integration of beliefs, it provides spiritual belonging and social support for the scattered people. The Inheritance and Change Paths of Folk Beliefs in the Transformation of Modern Society

5. Exploration of the Inheritance and Change Paths of Folk Beliefs

5.1. Introducing Targeted Support Policies

Folk beliefs are in a zone where policy regulations are vaguely defined. In some areas, due to the lack of clear guidance, there are extreme phenomena of either insufficient protection or over - intervention. This policy instability has led to a large number of culturally valuable belief activities facing the crisis of inheritance disruption. Government departments should change their cognitive approach to folk beliefs and include them in the scope of protection as part of traditional culture. Drawing on the existing experience of intangible cultural heritage protection, a special team composed of folklore scholars, archaeological experts, and grassroots cultural workers should be established to conduct a systematic census of folk belief projects in the region. Details such as ritual procedures, information about inheritors, and relevant physical carriers should be recorded, and a classified protection roster should be created. Differentiated protection plans should be implemented for projects at different levels. Rescue support should be provided for endangered projects, and for projects with good survival conditions, key assistance should be given to their dynamic inheritance. In the policy area, the legal boundaries of folk belief activities should be clarified. Legislative interpretations should be used to distinguish between feudal superstition and normal belief activities, providing clear institutional basis for

the registration and management of places such as temples and ancestral halls. Special cultural funds should be set up. Financial subsidies should be used to support the organization of traditional temple fairs, sacrificial ceremonies, etc., corresponding funds should be provided for the training of inheritors, and tax - reduction or exemption preferential policies should be given for the renovation of belief places, creating a comprehensive policy support system [9].

5.2. Innovating the Forms of Folk Belief Activities

In modern society, folk beliefs face the dilemma of losing their audience due to the change in the pace of life and communication. Innovation should be carried out based on the actual situation. Take Mazu culture as an example. Fujian, the birthplace of Mazu culture, vigorously integrates modern technology and the cultural and creative industry to promote the "breaking - the - circle" development of Mazu culture. The "Mo Mo Da" Q - version Mazu creative doll launched on

Meizhou Island breaks the solemnity of the traditional Mazu image with its cute appearance, making it more in line with the aesthetic preferences of young people nowadays, as shown in Figure 2. The safety pendants combined with wood - carving techniques integrate traditional craftsmanship with belief elements and have become popular cultural and creative items. Designer Huang Shenghong incorporated the theme of "Mazu's Inspection Tour" into the design of cloth bags. The fashionable appearance combined with unique cultural connotations has attracted the attention of a large number of young people in Taiwan [10]. The TV drama "Mazu" starring cross - strait movie stars spreads Mazu culture through the popular film and television form, breaking the barriers of cultural communication and achieving high ratings. Through these innovative forms, Mazu culture has successfully attracted the young group, reflecting the feasibility of the innovative development of folk beliefs and providing valuable reference for the inheritance and development of other folk beliefs.



Figure 2. Q - version Mazu

6. Conclusion

The transformation of modern society gives folk beliefs a new survival proposition. From a multi - functional carrier in traditional society to a cultural symbol in the contemporary era, although the form of folk beliefs has been adjusted, the cultural memories and community emotions it carries have remained unchanged. Under the impact of changes in social structure and value pluralism, it achieves self - renewal through ritual simplification, space reconstruction, and function expansion, demonstrating strong adaptability. Policy guidance provides it with institutional guarantees, form innovation expands the dimension of communication, and social organizations strengthen internal governance. These three paths jointly form a support system for the modern transformation of folk beliefs. The inheritance and change of folk beliefs are essentially a vivid practice of traditional

culture responding to the challenges of modernity. Cherishing this cultural heritage and promoting its positive interaction with modern society can not only safeguard the spiritual home of the people, but also inject lasting impetus into the development of cultural diversity and the harmony and stability of society.

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