

Folklore studies to embrace modernization

By ZHANG JIE

Folklore research has long focused on rural communities, while cities as research objects are more or less ignored. As urbanization and modernization proceed, urban ways of living are becoming increasingly common, leading to the emergence of urban folklore studies.

Scholars suggest that the rise of urban folklore studies not only signifies the turning of research attention from the countryside to cities, but also marked its transition from being traditional to becoming more modernized. Researchers in the field hope the study will enter a new stage of self-renewal.

Wu Bing'an, deputy director of the Committee of the National Intangible Inheritance Protection, said examining folklore inheritance throughout human history, there had been rural and urban folklore communities as well as exchanges between them since the emergence of ancient cities. The repetitive dissemination of folklore between cities and villages enriches, eliminates, infuses and develops Chinese folklore.

As industrialization and urbanization proceed, great changes have taken place in people's lifestyles, leading to a decreased number of conventional customs. Wu Xiaoqun, a professor from the School of Literature at Henan Uni-

versity, said it is against this background that folklore studies in the West began to focus on urban ways of living. In the United States, research on urban folklore had completed its transition in the 1980s, which changed folklore research from a study of the past to a modern discipline. This new research orientation has made related scholars pay more attention to modern society.

Xu Ganli, a professor from the Institute of Folklore at East China Normal University, said traditional folklore studies focus on customs in rural areas, while taking oral accounts from illiterate people or groups that rarely use words to communicate in narrative form. In contrast, urban folklore studies deal with city dwellers who have mastered considerable communication tools and techniques. Xu said that research on urban folklore should no longer focus on cultural relics and remnants of customs, but instead examine inherited customs that have adapted and thrive in modern circumstances, as well as the living cultures of city dwellers.

Pushed by urbanization, research on folklore needs to expand its research borders by studying modern city lifestyles and establishing new research methodologies.

Wu said that the characteristics of Chinese folklore differ from those of

the West in that Chinese folklore has a distinctive infusion of country and city folklore. In terms of space, even in the downtown urban areas and suburbs where the style and features of the city and countryside are interwoven, traditional village customs and city habits are integrated. Wu said that a key task should be investigating how ancient customs evolved in villages adjacent to cities in the urbanization process.

Urban folklore is more diverse, complex, commercial, entertaining, and more subject to new trends than rural customs, Xu said. Previous research on small communities in rural societies required less dependence on theories, while more should be applied to the interpretation of sophisticated cultural phenomena in the city.

Wu said Chinese folklore studies originated in the 1980s, lacking both influence and research results. Also, these research outcomes fall into two categories: Taking urban folklore studies as one type of regional folklore, with rural folklore as the opposite. The other is linking the studies to modern requirements, with traditional folklore as the opposite.

In addition, Xu said the means by which urban customs are passed down differ from those of traditional rural communities. Culture can be transmitted by face-to-face interactions, but it is also possible for it to be communicated through both real-time and non-real time dissemination across time and space. The diversity of dissemination now exceeds any point in history.

The research methodology behind urban folklore should be founded on research practices that emphasize living cultures in urban spaces. In other words, research problems in this area of folklore should be dealt with by emphasizing current social cultural phenomena and people's emotional needs, and utilizing the scientific methods.

Xu added that traditional folklore studies emphasize the temporal perspective while urban folklore studies look at comprehensive cultural phenomena that grow on new soil. Therefore, the spatial dimension is more important. In addition, folklore studies often take non-recorded oral accounts as research objects. Field objects in cities are mostly word sharers, who express themselves via WeChat, Weibo and online fiction. Folklore studies emphasize field research. Investigation fieldwork in urban areas could make up for the lack of descriptions of key details in popular culture as well as the ignorance of sociological research on culture, Xu said.



Huixian Excavation Report

Author: Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Sciences
Publisher: Science Press

Establishment of field archaeology paradigm

By SUN QINGWEI

The Huixian Excavation Report was the first field excavation report released after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. It was published in 1956 and edited by the Institute of Archaeology, which was formerly under the Chinese Academy of Science, but has since been incorporated into the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It has been 60 years since the report was published, making this version difficult to locate. This is why the press and the institute decided to reprint this classic work.

In October 1950, the newly founded archaeology institute conducted their first excavation in Huixian County, Henan Province, marking the beginning of archaeological work in the country. This excavation systematically revealed, cleaned and protected archaeological information and unearthed relics in many tombs of the Shang and Han dynasties and the Warring States period, which provided valuable physical evidence for research on different historical periods.

Before the Huixian County site was excavated, only *Chengziya*, edited by Liang Siyong, and Su Bingqi's *Tombs in Eastern Doujitai* could be considered archaeological excavation reports in any real sense. Two factors are decisive to the quality of the excavation report: The qualifications of the excavation team, and the style of the report. Liang created his own style in *Chengziya* but all the essays in that collection were not in a uniform style, because Liang had to include the primary sources provided by various members of excavation teams. It was a chance for Liang to contribute his ideas during this project. Of the members in charge of the project besides Liang and Su three were experienced excavation experts. Xia Nai is one of the founders of Chinese archaeology. Guo Baojun participated in the first excavation of the YinXu tomb in 1928. Su Bingqi worked at the Institute of History at the Peking Research Institute after graduating from Beijing Normal University in 1934, and excavated the Doujitai tomb in Shaanxi Province as part of a project headed by Xu Xusheng. Xia, Guo and Su were the three leading figures in Chinese archaeology at that time.

From the winter of 1950 to the spring of 1952, the excavation team had three large-scale fieldwork projects at five sites in Huixian County. Soon after they finished the excavation, Liang and Xia began to prepare for the editorial work of the *Huixian Excavation Report*. Liang led the writing and decided the style the report was to adopt. A tutorial system was employed to write the report: Liang tutored An Zhimen, Xia instructed Wang Zhongshu, Guo assisted Wang Bohong and Su guided Shi Xingbang.

The publication of the report heralded the practice that the excavation report must be published as soon as the archaeological fieldwork ends. This requirement has been repeatedly emphasized, and become a regulation in subsequent archaeological work. Also, this excavation had profound impact on later archaeology teams. The eight experts tutored 369 students through four sessions of training courses held in Peking University from 1952 to 1955. The Huixian excavation pattern since then has been deeply rooted in Chinese archaeology.



FILE

Temple fairs, usually held during the Spring Festival, is a form of traditional folklore that remains popular today. "Blowing sugar" is a common traditional activity during temple fair celebrations.

<<FROM PAGE 1

Though the Xizhucun Tomb of the Cao-Wei Period was looted, there are still about 500 pieces of ceramic vessels and iron, bronze, lacquer, wooden and jade objects left. The funerary objects exhibit transitional features from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Western Jin Dynasty. The discovery is inspirational to the research on the selection and formation of burial areas during the Cao-Wei Period.

At the meeting, a new section was dedicated to the featured discovery made by Chinese archaeologists overseas. For

2016, the honor went to the Mingtepa walled site in Uzbekistan.

The CASS archaeological team has conducted four excavations of the Mingtepa walled site in Uzbekistan together with archaeologists of the Uzbekistani Academy of Sciences from 2012 to 2015 based on cooperative agreements. The fifth dig in 2016 found the outer walled city of the site for the first time, extending archaeologists' knowledge of the site's spatial layout.

Meanwhile, through the excavation of handicraft workshops in the southern wall of the inner city, they made

clear the architectural characteristics and cultural connotations of the workshops. The new discoveries made in spring 2016 show that the Mingtepa walled site is not only the largest site in Fergana Basin around the Christian era, but also the largest ancient walled site in Uzbekistan. The archaeological breakthrough has changed the way international archaeologists view the status of the site in Fergana Basin and the ancient Silk Road in Central Asia.

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