A Comparative Study of American and Chinese Holidays

Name: Zhou Ting
E-mail: caintlinloves@163.com
Tel : 13704506294
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Abstract

Holidays are important components of traditional culture, which are unique in different countries. As American and Chinese holidays belong to two cultural systems, there are some disparities where may confuse people of different countries. This paper mainly illustrates the similarities as well as the differences of the holidays of the two countries, which aims to make a comparison on the holidays to help reader understand the holidays deeply.

It will give a general and clear description for readers of those two countries who are interested in foreign holidays. The author further introduces the culture inside the holidays and concludes that it is a good way for developing the Chinese and American holidays in the world. This paper also arouses people’s attention on traditional cultures both in the USA and China and promotes cultural exchange in those two countries.

Key words: holidays; similarity; difference; the USA; China
1. Introduction

Holiday is a kind of cultural phenomenon which is the activity of people and it is an important component of the culture. In this paper, it mainly studies the connotation and meaning of the two countries’ holidays in three ways: comparison, induction and illustration.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate more information about the holidays, which help readers know the historical experience and traditional values that holidays contain. By comparing similarities and differences of the holidays in two countries, readers can recognize these two features objectively and systematically. Furthermore, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of the holidays can help people discuss how to keep holidays become unique in globalization world and develop them to a higher stage. This plays an important role in inheriting the splendid holiday culture. This paper mainly discusses the similarity and difference of American and Chinese holidays. In the similarity aspect, it concludes the purpose of the holidays, such as the best wishes, virtue inheritance, while in the difference part, it discusses the cultural connotation of these two countries, including the background, the content, the values and so on.

The significance of this paper lies that readers can get more knowledge about the connotation and values of the two cultures, which may draw people’s attention on traditional culture. On the other hand, this is a good way to spread different culture to the world as well as that it makes contribution to the culture inheritance.

2. Similarities in American and Chinese holidays
All the holidays have their own meanings, purposes and wishes, which is the center of culture. Therefore, the holidays exist now all have great values. Holidays are the unique things that a nation owns and they are a kind of culture that created and shared by the whole country. This kind of culture reflects the history of a nation. Holidays of the USA and China belong to two cultural styles, which have some similarities to some extent. The following paragraph is going to introduce some similarities between the two countries.

Firstly, holidays represent the pursuit and wishes for the good life. For Chinese people, the traditional holidays mean happiness and pleasure. Spring festival, for example, whose theme is to celebrate the harvest of the whole year and to wish family safe and happy. At this day, family get together and have a feast. After dinner, people set off the firecracker to hope to have booming days next year and express their delights. In the USA, there is also some holidays that share the same purposes as the Chinese holidays. Christmas, similar to Chinese spring festival, is a day that families reunion. People sit under the Christmas tree singing Christmas songs and prey for good days. People celebrate holidays to pursue a better life in which two countries own the same purpose.

Secondly, holidays are the heritage of traditional culture, which leave the idea to respect the old and cherish the young. In Chinese culture, the idea of respecting the old and loving the young can be trace as early as Qin dynasty which has been existing for over thousands of years. Today, Chinese people offer sacrifices to the ancestors in holidays and give children new year money, these all the symbol of traditional culture.
Traditional Chinese holiday--Double Ninth Festival is a distinctive holiday that people respect and cherish the old. The same holiday also exist in the USA, for instance, Father’s Day. Father’s Day is celebrated on the third Sunday in June which is suggested by American woman in order to show regards to fathers. This has the same goal of celebrating holidays.

Thirdly, holidays stand for the crave for the love. Love is the theme in the long history which never disappear and continue to be favored by different kinds of people without noticing their nationalities. This kind of belief reflects on the holidays as well. In China, the Double Seventh Day is such a holiday that comes from a moving love tale. It is said that a fairy named Zhinv who is a woman weaver in heaven fell love with an ordinary man called cow man. They loved each other and had two children. However, Zhinv was caught back to heaven when she was found missing and they were separated by the goddess in heaven. At last after a series of difficult experiences they had only one day to get reunion and this day is on the seventh day in lunar July. This is the one of the origins of double seventh day. Therefore this day is a day for Chinese woman to make a wish for a good marriage and for having a romantic love. Now a popular holiday has been celebrated in China which is rooted the western countries called the Saint valentine’s day. This day is to commemorate a friar named Valentine who help many couples to get together. This holiday is on February 14 which is the best moment for people love each other to express their loves. These holidays both present the crave for love.

3. Differences in American and Chinese holidays
Holidays are a kind of complicated cultural phenomenon, including the national history and many inherited features, beliefs, thinking modes, moral sentiments and aesthetic tastes as well as the values of many national cultural connotation in deeper structure which is the result of the specific society that influence for a long time. This is the most prominent display of a nation’s survival forms. American holidays and Chinese holidays both own profound meanings.

In the first place, the origin and development of each country have great difference as different country shares different national conditions. China, which is an agricultural country whose main traditional holidays are related to seasons, has great farming culture. The values and thinking modes of traditional agriculture society determines the forms of Chinese traditional holidays mostly depends on the agricultural seasons. For example, the spring begins which is one of the twenty-four solar terms that just after the spring festival. On this day, people will predicate whether it is a harvest year or not and farmers begin to do farmings. There are some other holidays that can show the great effect of agriculture customs for traditional holidays. The Double Seventh Day, for instance, is one of the most obvious holidays that could reflect the characteristic of Chinese traditional culture. The content of this holiday is about a husband, a wife and a cow, which is a traditional men plow the fields and women weave cloth period. This holiday can illustrate the closely connection between holiday culture and agriculture social lives. These holidays can be regarded as a way of releasing people themselves from a dull and monotonous farming life. Therefore, holidays are passed on generation by generation. Chinese traditional holidays reflect
production, lives and farmers’ physical need of agricultural society which is the epitome of agricultural civilization.

While in the USA, its traditional holidays are mostly derived from the Christianity, which means it is full of religion tones. After the Christian civilization is accepted by the western countries, nearly all of the big traditional holidays are influenced by it.

The representative holidays in the USA are Easter and Christmas. Easter is a holiday that memorizes the day of Jesus’ s sufferings. This holiday is the most important and meaningful memorial day in Christianity for people think the resurrection of Jesus is more meaningful. Easter eggs symbolize the beginning of new life in spring and it is a celebration for Jesus’ s resurrection. Hence, on this day, Easter eggs can be seen everywhere. Another holiday is Christmas which is the birthday of Jesus and it is very popular in many other countries. On this day people will celebrate in their own way, such as making mass, sending gifts, singing Christmas songs. From the introduction that demonstrate above, it can be seen that the American holidays are a kind of Christian culture.

Next, the content of celebrating traditional holiday that between those two countries is different to some extent. Each holiday has its unique celebrating activities. Chinese holidays are mainly discussed about food and American holidays are celebrated with the theme of entertainment. In China, catering culture is an important component of holiday culture. Any traditional holiday that is celebrated by different food customer. Spring festival, for instance, is the most ceremonious and popular holidays in China. On this day, people eat dumplings that is widely known at home and broad. Chinese
meaning of Dumplings lie in best wishes for the new year. Another famous holiday in China is the Dragon Boat Festival which is to memorize the patriotic poet Qu Yuan. The Dragon Boat Festival is on the May 5th in lunar calendar and on this day people eat Zongzi which is the iconic food for Chinese people. The origin of Zongzi comes from the story of memorizing Qu Yuan. It is said that when Qu Yuan saw his country invaded by hostile country, he was so sad that he decided to survive with his country. Then as his country was totally defeated, he jumped the Miluo river where he last stayed. The local people were moved by his patriotic action, and they threw some rice that was encased in bamboo leaves to draw fish’s attention in order to save Qu Yuan’s remains. There is another reason is that zongzi is the sacrificial offering for god who controls the water and rain. Eggs are also an important food on the Dragon Boat Festival. On the holiday morning, adults usually provide some eggs for children as they think eggs are a food that could keep the children healthy. The most popular drink on this day is the realgar wine that is a kind of wine added by some realgar which is a Chinese medicine. Chinese people used this realgar wine to avoid poisonous insects and animals especially snakes. The last example is the Mid-autumn Festival which is on August 15th in lunar calendar. On this holiday, every family has the habit of eating moon-cakes together. Moon-cakes represent a meaning of reunion which symbolize a whole family get together. The rich food culture is an indispensable component of Chinese traditional holidays which not only meet people’s basic requirements but also render an active atmosphere and lend enchantment to the holidays. The basic reason of this is mainly caused by
idea and value of people. Chinese people pursue a healthy and long life as their goal and they realize this goal by eating different kinds of food. People believe that to have food naturally according to different seasons without changing the environment so that they could be healthy and longevity. Therefore, food can best explain the Chinese traditional holidays.

In America, holidays also have a series of festival food, such as the Easter eggs, thanksgiving turkeys and pumpkins, however, the main theme of holidays is the entertainment. The holiday that could mostly demonstrate and reflect the cultural spirit of American holidays is April Fool’s Day, which can also be called as All Fool’s Day. According to traditional customs, on this day, everybody can tease others and be laughed at as well, even to do a trick is allowed. It is a good way to make people feel relax from such a holiday which can also help people to catch joys in their lives. The spirit of entertainment can be discovered in other holidays. Halloween, for example, is a day that people do some makeups to do things they do not do on usual days, which is a good chance for people to release themselves and enjoy a different life for one day.

It can be concluded that American holidays are a process of releasing emotion. To celebrate a holiday is to provide a chance to reduce their pressure as well as depression. It is said that the theme of American holidays is from the purpose pursuing in their lives is to be healthy and happy which mainly by joining a religion and entertainment activities to make this come true. This is the theme of celebrating holidays which is quite different from that of Chinese holidays.
Finally, the difference lies in values that both countries share. In Chinese holidays, collectivism is the main value that most people admit. For example, almost half of the main traditional holidays all have the meaning of family reunion, like the spring festival, tomb-sweeping day, dragon boat festival, mid-autumn day and so on. These Chinese traditional holidays are giving the hope of getting together which can best explain Chinese collectivism. In the USA, on the other hand, people focus on individualism which stresses on the value, right and freedom of an individual. Valentine’s Day, for instance, is a day for people who fall love with each other. Usually, it is celebrated just between two people and no one else could be present on this day as only two people are enough in love. This is the best way to express people’s emotion to another people which obviously show the individualism.

Therefore, different history, development and values of those two countries caused different culture and holidays. This is a long process for people to explore and understand.

4. Conclusion

By the comparisons mentioned above, it can be concluded that two different holiday culture are caused by the following reasons--natural environment, social conditions and historical development. However, there still are some similarities lie in these holiday cultures. With the world globalization going, more and more cultures mix together. It is a good way for people to understand different culture and explore its deeper values, which can be vital for keeping national features and promoting national culture as well as learning American cultures. This is a chance for people from both
countries to get to know each other which benefits for the communication between the USA and China.
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