

A Study of the Folk Culture in White Deer Plain

Yijing Deng*

School of humanities, Hainan University, Haikou 570100, Hainan Province, China

*Corresponding author: Yijing Deng, dengyijing02@outlook.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: White Deer Plain is a full-length novel written by author Chen Zhongshi over six years, which won the fourth Mao Dun Literature Prize and has been altered into a variety of art forms, including movies, television dramas, and plays. The setting of the novel is the feud between three generations of the White Deer and Deer families on the White Deer Plain in Guanzhong, Shaanxi Province, beginning in the late Qing Dynasty. The novel is rich in content and depicts diverse and intertwined characters. The author realizes the life at that time, with original life and real details, showing a story on the White Deer Plain. The writing of the novel weakens the political utilitarianism and enhances the depiction of local folk culture in Guanzhong, Shaanxi, which improves the artistic value of the novel. This paper will explore the folk culture study related to White Deer Plains from the following three parts, namely, the concept of the life of family marriage and childbearing, the unique dialect culture, and the traditional spiritual beliefs. The related folk culture has been passed down from generation to generation, forming a set of its own patterned way of life with a certain degree of inheritance and stability. These centuries-old traditions make the research and discussion more relevant to the present.

Keywords: White Deer Plain; Folk culture

Online publication: August 23, 2024

1. Concepts of life in family marriages and births in the White Deer Plains

1.1. Family-centered, household-based organizational model

1.1.1. The establishment of villages centered on the family

Traditional China relied on blood ties to establish patriarchal relationships and to maintain a life that was similar from one generation to the next without much change, which depended entirely on the development of a small, self-sufficient peasant economy, meaning that agricultural production limited human creativity and the ability to generate new forms of productivity. Moreover, in such a small-scale geopolitical society built on bloodline, the family is the center of power. The head of the clan becomes the core of the interests of the whole clan, so for the sake of the whole clan's continued reproduction, the importance of the birth of a child is to protect the interests of each person in the clan. In the novel, it can be seen that Heiwa feels that Bai Jiakuan's waist is too straight, which is actually a kind of ideal of Bai Jiakuan as a patriarch. This kind of ideal makes Heiwa, who has a rebellious spirit, feel very uncomfortable. Then, he developed the idea of going against Bai Jiakuan and interrupting Bai Jiakuan's waist. Heiwa, as the son of the eldest worker deer three, in the name of first name Bai

Jiaxuan, fully considered the clan generation and the relationship between the characters, combined with the characteristics of Heiwa himself, before giving him the name of “Zhaokian.” Heiwa left White Deer Village at a young age to work in other villages, which was also a way for the new generation to get rid of the restrictions brought by the traditional clan bloodline.

1.1.2. The family is the unit of production and life

The traditional patriarchal society follows a way of life of “male-dominated.” While the man is working outside the farm, there is a need for a woman at home to give birth to and bring up the children, cook, and weave and gin cotton. Such a production and lifestyle of men and women make a good family model ^[1]. This is the first sentence at the beginning of the novel, “Bai Jiaxuan later cited as proud to have married seven women.” This is the shocking part of the novel. A woman in the White Deer Plains must be able to spin and weave and must be able to make good meals. Bai Jiaxuan kept marrying, but his daughter-in-law kept dying, and his mother, Bai Zhao, still wanted her son to marry a daughter-in-law. This idea has been carried over to the next generation, as Bai Jiaxuan told his sons to marry their daughters-in-law, implicitly telling them that men’s and women’s destiny is to get married, as a married family needs sons to handle a lifetime of major events.

1.2. Traditional folk concepts of succession

1.2.1. Women are the tools of the traditional concept of continuity of future generations

In the White Deer Plains, there is a group of women who abide by the traditional rituals, live in a male-dominated society, and become the victims and accomplices of the male-dominated society. In the eyes of many people, these women are subordinate to the patriarchal society, and they are the tools of the traditional concepts and desires for the prosperity of the heirs and the extension of future generations ^[2]. However, in such a relatively closed and small village, a woman is not, in the view of traditional custom, a person of independent thought and significance ^[3]. Maximizing a woman’s value is to produce children for a family. Men in power believe that children need to be married by parents and matchmakers and that love is something that is not needed, and even if it is, it has to be nurtured slowly by the couple after marriage. So, for the sake of the purity of the family line, women need to abide by chastity. “Chastity is bigger than life.” This view of chastity is absolutely harsh. Mr. Leng’s poisoned mute daughter, Tian Xiaoe, in the White Deer Village, was instructed by Bai Xiaoyi’s daughter-in-law, who was childless after marriage, to participate in the “mallet club” to borrow the son of the plot. As long as a woman does not reach menopause, she has to keep having babies, and babies who die soon after birth are buried in dung, which then becomes fertilizer to nourish the land. Hence, Bai Ling’s ability to go out to the city to study and participate in revolutionary activities at a time when her brothers were still at home carrying on the traditional life of their fathers did seem a bit magical under the social conditions of the time.

1.2.2. Males submit to patriarchal authority.

Males, as the dominant players in White Deer society, need to obey the tradition of marrying and having children, which comes from patriarchal power. This kind of brainwashing and oppression is the result of the absolute power of the feudal patriarch in the family. Adult males were brainwashed by the traditional concept of filial piety, believing that accepting the arrangement of the elders to start a family was a necessary step in life. Therefore, even after the death of her six daughters-in-law, Bai Zhaozhi still insisted that her sons find wives, and Bai Jiaxuan chose daughters-in-law for his sons who were satisfactory to the elders of the family.

2. The unique dialect culture in the White Deer Plain

2.1. Characteristics of dialect writing in the White Deer Plain

2.1.1. The use of Guanzhong's ancient dialect words shows the regional style and makes the characters more prominent

Guanzhong region has had a deep culture since ancient times, and the dialect contains ancient words with ancient meanings^[4-5]. The word “gnaw” in “full gnawing” is found in “Zhou Yi” as early as “fulfill the tiger’s tail, don’t gnaw,” which means to bite. The fact that the people of Guanzhi used it instead of the word “eat” indicates that the Qin people’s way of eating reflects the innate boldness and ruggedness of the people of Guanzhi. In particular, contemporary online media have used this character in their videos, which have been strongly disseminated and recognized throughout the country.

2.1.2. The use of Guanzhong's distinctive dialect brings the reader's imagination “Xiuliou” depicts the beauty of Tian Xiao'e's small feet and walking posture^[6]. “Liaozhalie” lets the reader feel the strong feelings of the people on the plains when they praise her. “Gua” shows the stagnant and clumsy attitude of the people on the White Deer Plain when they make stupid mistakes. This kind of vocabulary not only introduces the dialect of Guanzhong but also shows the readers the feelings of Guanzhong people when they express their views on things through words.

2.2. The dialect of the white deer plains embraces local traditions

In the character title, Bai Xiaowen, Bai Xiaowu and Bai Xiaoyi's nicknames “horse colt,” “mule colt,” and “calf,” Lu Zhaoqian's nickname “Heiwa” is very in line with the traditional Guanzhi people traditional “simple name, can raise better” traditional concept^[7]. The younger generation calls their father “Da”, which is a unique local characteristic, instead of “Dad” and “Father,” which are widely used throughout the country. Men refer to their daughters-in-law as “people in the house.” All this is in line with the traditional male superiority and female inferiority as well as the male-dominated way of production and life. In terms of food and drink, because of the fertile land and special natural geographic conditions of the Guanzhong area, wheat has been the staple food of the Guanzhong people, who have flourished on this land for thousands of years, and the “bun” and “noodle” designations further reflect the simple folkways of the Guanzhong area.

3. Traditional spirituality in the White Deer Plains

3.1. Deification of Mr. Zhu, who represents the image of a traditional Confucian gentleman

In traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism puts forward the requirement that a gentleman should improve his self-cultivation, “cultivate himself and his family, to rule the country and pacify the world,” and pay attention to the affairs of the world^[8]. In White Deer Plains, Mr. Zhu, Bai Jiaxuan's brother-in-law, formerly known as Zhu Chenxi, is the wisest person in the book, a gentleman educated in traditional Confucianism. He was smart and intelligent in Confucianism from childhood. He later worked as a gentleman in the White Deer Academy, where he was able to give some advice to his wife and brother when necessary and was able to care for the people, persuade the Qing soldiers to keep one side of the people safe and take the lead in providing relief in times of famine. His life has a legendary color, the development of vision with keen insight, can know in advance the development of things towards his tomb masonry engraved with “tossed to the end of the day” is his decades ago on the future direction of society's foreknowledge. His character being a “prophet” is the point that the author wants to portray deliberately. His advocacy for the revision of county records is also a manifestation of

the traditional Confucian sentiment of “coming out of the world.” Therefore, the advantage of deifying Mr. Zhu is to let the people in the White Deer Plain have spiritual support and, in addition, to let readers who stand in God’s perspective have spiritual support for the development of the storyline so that readers can have a “peace of mind” at the same time ^[9].

3.2. Worship and fear of “spirits”

The root of the worship and fear of the White Deer Plains people for “spirits” comes from the folk customs passed down from generation to generation. The backwardness of science and technology, the insufficiency of cognitive tools, and the ability to recognize, so to all kinds of slightly incomprehensible things will be added to the “spirit” fantasy so that in the backward traditional villages can be explained by all the seemingly “spiritual” things ^[9]. From the origin and legend of “White Deer” in “White Deer Plains,” traditional villagers regard it as a symbol of good fortune, and it is the legendary White Deer that blesses the land with good weather and heirs ^[10]. Thus, the auspicious function symbolized by the white deer is considered by the villagers as the source of all good things. Later, the villagers agreed that the plague was attracted by Tian Xiaoe, so some people kept offering incense to the broken kiln courtyard where Tian Xiaoe had lived before, hoping that she would take away the plague; three old men believed that the deer was possessed by Tian Xiaoe’s ghost; Bai Jiaxuan built a tower and pressed Tian Xiaoe under the tower so that she wouldn’t “plague people again.” These are all manifestations of the villagers’ worship and fear of the mysterious power of “spirits.”

4. Conclusion

The White Deer Plain takes readers to the cultural and historical destiny of the Chinese nation with the power of a novel. The national changes, national emotions, and national culture have a powerful force, allowing people to see where they come from and where they want to go, carrying the traditional perspective of the Chinese nation’s traditional view of life, family, and society, and the spiritual impetus to move forward in the contemporary era.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhao JM, 2023, A Study of Folk Culture Writing in Chen Zhongshi’s Novel White Deer Plains, thesis, Huazhong Normal University.
- [2] Zhao WK, 2022, An Analysis of the Imagery of “White Deer” in White Deer Plain under the Perspective of Collective Unconscious. *Chinese Character Culture*, 2022(07):113–114.
- [3] Huang DN, 2016, Social History, Cultural Tradition, and Women’s Fate: The Three Dimensions of Tragic Consciousness in White Deer Plains. *Journal of Guizhou Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 2016(03): 107–113.
- [4] Liu Y, 2016, A Study of Guanzhong Dialect Words in White Deer Plains, thesis, Shaanxi Normal University.
- [5] Wang LJ, 2023, Analyzing the Guanzhong Dialect in White Deer Plain. *Ginseng Flower*, 2023(03): 130–132.
- [6] Yang SJ, 2018, Study on the Dialect and Social Folk Culture of White Deer Plains. *Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Education*, 34(09):18–19.

- [7] Yang G, 2017, Analyzing the Dialect and Colloquial Culture of Guanzhong Plain in White Deer Plain. *Young Literati*, 2017(09): 38.
- [8] Du YG, 2016, Trial Exploration of White Deer Plain and Guanzhong Folk Culture. *Chinese Culture Forum*, 2016(10): 85–91
- [9] Wang HY, 2021, Research on the Folk Culture Position of White Deer Plains, thesis, Zhejiang Normal University.
- [10] Ge MY, 2013, Analyzing the Folk Culture Position in the Works of Lu Yao and Chen Zhongshi. *Creation and Review*, 2013(10): 56–59.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.