

Comparative Study of Cultural Values in Chinese and Western Traditional Festivals: A Case Study of *The New Year's Sacrifice* and *A Christmas Carol*

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Abstract: Traditional festivals serve as essential carriers of culture, embodying the values and life philosophies of specific peoples. This paper examines Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice* and Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* from the perspective of festive narratives. Utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, it explores the differing perspectives on life, death, and religion reflected in Chinese and Western traditional festivals. The paper argues that Chinese festivals emphasize familial ethics, collectivism, and acceptance of fate, while Western festivals prioritize individual introspection, spiritual redemption, and transcendental faith. Through textual analysis and cultural interpretation, it reveals the deep cultural structures underlying these contrasting views on life and death and discusses their implications for contemporary cultural exchange.

Keywords: Spring Festival, Christmas, Views on Life and Death, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions.

1. Introduction

Festivals are not merely a collection of social rituals, but rather a concentrated embodiment of a nation's spirit and cultural values. Over the course of their long histories, Chinese and Western cultures have developed markedly different ways of expressing festivals, reflecting distinct attitudes toward life and unique forms of religious cognition. Represented respectively by the Spring Festival and Christmas, traditional festivals in China and the West are both iconic celebrations of human culture, yet the imagery of life and death and the cultural beliefs they contain stand in sharp contrast.

Zheng[7] examines *The New Year's Sacrifice* through the historical evolution of ritual and the debate over the "existence of the soul," arguing that ancestor worship and sacrificial rites not only preserve moral and genealogical continuity but also incorporate individuals into the social order through mechanisms of reward and punishment—thus endowing festival ceremonies with normative and regulatory functions. Kuang[2], from an identity perspective, analyzes the plight of Xianglin Sao as a "misborn" figure, whose exclusion from New Year's sacrificial rites exposes the central role of festival participation in social acceptance and the legitimization of identity. Together, these studies offer complementary insights: Zheng provides macro-level historical and ideological context, while Kuang offers micro-level evidence of exclusion in festival practice. By contrast, Liu[4] applies Northrop Frye's Biblical archetype criticism to *A Christmas Carol*, tracing Scrooge's transformation from miser to benefactor, and distilling three thematic archetypes—redemption, rebirth, and charity. Liu further links these archetypes to the Victorian era's imbalance between material progress and moral civility, highlighting the festival's role in fostering repentance, benevolence, and social cohesion. This Western festival narrative, with its emphasis on moral reform through love and generosity, stands in sharp contrast to the Chinese traditional festival's focus on maintaining lineage hierarchy and ritual authority, thus

offering a solid textual and theoretical foundation for cross-cultural comparison of festival values.

Lu Xun's novel *The New Year's Sacrifice*[5] and Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*[1] construct, respectively, narratives of tragedy and redemption within a festive atmosphere, revealing each culture's profound understandings of death, religion, and social ethics. Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, this paper takes these two works as examples and, from the perspectives of values and cultural psychology, analyzes the differences in life-and-death views and religious concepts between Chinese and Western festival cultures. It further explores the significance of this comparison for contemporary cross-cultural understanding and communication.

The six measuring values of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory are summarized as follows[3].

Power distance: Refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept the unequal distribution of power in social or organizational contexts.

Uncertainty avoidance: Involves the tendency of a society to avoid and control uncertainty through formal channels when facing uncertain events and unconventional environments.

Individualism and collectivism: Measures whether a society primarily focuses on individual interests or collective interests.

Masculinity and femininity: Focuses on the societal emphasis on masculine qualities (such as competitiveness and assertiveness) versus feminine qualities (such as modesty and caring for others), as well as the definition of gender roles.

Long-term and short-term orientation: Reflects the degree to which members of a culture accept delaying the satisfaction of their material, emotional, and social needs.

Indulgence and restraint: Indicates the extent to which a society permits the fulfillment of basic human needs and hedonistic desires.

2. A Comparative Study of Cultural Cores

2.1. Festivals and Views of Life in Chinese Traditional Culture

Traditional Chinese festivals, as vital components of Chinese culture, are deeply influenced by Confucianism, exhibiting distinct characteristics of ritual norms and clan consciousness. The concept of "ritual propriety" (li) within festival culture serves not only as the fundamental protocol for ceremonies but also embodies core notions of familial ethics, hierarchical order, and moral instruction. Rituals such as ancestor worship and family reunions during major festivals like the Spring Festival and Qingming Festival demonstrate profound reverence for ancestors and the paramount importance placed on bloodline continuity.

The Spring Festival, for instance, while superficially marking the renewal of the year, is fundamentally an expression of ethical narrative. Practices such as the reunion feast, the strictly observed hierarchy in New Year greetings, and ancestral sacrifices and blessings enact core Confucian tenets of "filial piety" (xiao) and the "homology of family and state" (jiā guó tóng gòu). Festivals thus function not merely as aspects of lifestyle but as arenas for the performance and reinforcement of ethical order. Within this cultural framework, an individual's social value is often contingent upon their position within the familial and societal structure, rather than individual will.

Ancestor worship, as the foundational religious form in Chinese culture, profoundly shapes the Chinese understanding of life and death. Death is perceived not as an endpoint but as a "return" of the individual into the ancestral chain, hence emphasizing reverence and sacrificial rites for the deceased. As stated in *Liji·Jiyi*: "Attending carefully to the funeral rites of parents, and following them when gone with sacrificial ceremonies: in this way the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence" ("Shen zhong zhui yuan, min de gui hou")[6]. This underscores the role of ritual sacrifice in sustaining moral and genealogical continuity. This belief system reinforces acceptance of "ancestral decree" and fate, also forming the cultural root of tragic destinies depicted in much literature.

Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice* vividly illustrates this logic. Xianglin Sao, a woman stigmatized as "impure" due to multiple bereavements, is excluded from the Spring Festival – a symbol of reunion and harmony. This epitomizes the ritual system's disciplinary exclusion of the "abnormal" individual, highlighting the festival's functional role as an instrument of social control and norm enforcement.

Consequently, within traditional Chinese festivals, life and death transcend natural phenomena to become ethical and social events. Festival rituals act as key mechanisms for maintaining patriarchal order, strengthening clan identity, and disciplining individual behavior. This value orientation provides a distinct cultural reference for Sino-Western festival comparisons and offers a profound cultural backdrop for literary narratives exploring death and social oppression.

2.2. Western Traditional Festival Culture and the Religious Spirit

In the Western cultural framework, Christmas is not merely a religious festival commemorating the birth of Jesus; it also embodies profound cultural concepts such as original sin,

spiritual redemption, and the awakening of love. Its significance extends beyond festive joy, serving as a symbol of moral awakening and spiritual rebirth. Charles Dickens's classic *A Christmas Carol* vividly conveys this spiritual essence through the protagonist Scrooge's "journey of the soul."

Within Christian tradition, the birth of Christ represents God's descent to redeem humanity from sin. In the novella, this theological core is presented allegorically: Scrooge, estranged from humanity by coldness and selfishness, is visited by three Christmas spirits-embodiment of the "Past," "Present," and "Future." Through a process of reflective retrospection, he reevaluates his life and ultimately achieves redemption. This transformation underscores the primacy of personal salvation rather than reliance on family or collective ethics, forming a sharp contrast with the ancestral and communal orientation in Chinese Spring Festival culture.

The narrative also reflects the individualistic orientation of Western culture. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the United Kingdom is a highly individualistic society that values personal choice and self-fulfillment. Scrooge's moral transformation is initiated through inner awakening rather than social or familial compulsion. His assumption of social responsibility and expression of human warmth are voluntary outcomes of self-reflection, fundamentally differing from the traditional Chinese emphasis on "following ancestral precepts and moral codes" during the Spring Festival.

Moreover, the religious spirit of Christmas emphasizes compassion for the weak, philanthropy, and care for others-embodied in the novella through depictions of impoverished children, the homeless, and the working class. Scrooge's rebirth leads him to actively engage in social care, illustrating the festival's function as a moral renewal and a catalyst for social transformation.

The temporal setting of Christmas also carries symbolic significance. Occurring at year's end, it marks the "death of the old self" and the "birth of the new self," aligning with the Christian spiritual logic of "repentance-renewal-rebirth." This stands in contrast to the cyclical time perception of the Chinese Spring Festival. Interpreted through Hofstede's framework, the Christmas narrative reveals low power distance, individualism, short-term orientation, and low uncertainty avoidance: personal redemption reflects individualism; the non-linear temporal structure of the ghostly visions signals low uncertainty avoidance; the egalitarian shift in Scrooge's relationship with his clerk embodies low power distance; and the "Spirit of Christmas Present" scenes of merriment highlight the short-term orientation of Western culture.

3. Representation of Values in Festival Narratives

3.1. Tragic Festival Representations in The New Year's Sacrifice

Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice*, set against the backdrop of the Spring Festival-China's most significant traditional holiday-presents a powerful contrast between the communal joy of the festival and the isolated suffering of Xianglin Sao, an outcast excluded from the festive celebration. This stark juxtaposition exposes the structural social exclusion embedded in festival culture and reflects deep cultural value differences.

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory,

Chinese culture strongly emphasizes collectivism, where festivals serve not only as celebrations but as cultural rituals that maintain group identity and social order. Individuals are expected to conform to group norms, and those who violate traditional ethics, such as Xianglin Sao who remarries after widowhood, are marginalized as “impure.” The Spring Festival, ideally a time for warmth and reunion, paradoxically becomes a moment for her moral condemnation. This phenomenon reflects collectivism’s role in reinforcing social norms and highlights the lack of true inclusiveness in a society with high power distance.

In *The New Year’s Sacrifice*, the Spring Festival, traditionally a symbol of reunion and harmony, instead witnesses the tragic fate of Xianglin Sao. The vivid depiction of her sitting silently by the kitchen door “like a piece of wood” reveals how she is stripped of her human dignity and excluded even from public space. This exclusion signifies a comprehensive denial of her right to exist with dignity.

China’s collectivist culture prioritizes group cohesion over individual feelings. Xianglin Sao’s remarriage causes her to lose her status as a “virtuous widow,” branding her a moral blemish that disrupts social order. During the festival, she is excluded from the family dinner and scorned by servants, children, and elders alike, turning the holiday into a site of collective moral punishment.

More importantly, this exclusion reveals the systemic oppression of lower-status individuals under a high power distance culture. As described in the text, she is terrorized by the temple monks and forced to donate a threshold plank to avoid becoming a beast after death. This “religious economy” symbolizes absolute control by social authorities—elders, clergy, and Confucian ethics—over individuals. In such a culture, social norms and religious discourse intertwine, extending even to control over perceptions of one’s fate after death.

Moreover, China’s high uncertainty avoidance encourages conformity to norms in exchange for psychological security. Although Xianglin Sao doubts the fairness of her fate, she ultimately submits, repeatedly confessing and praying for her soul’s salvation. This reflects a fatalistic tendency deeply rooted in Confucian ethics. Her death is not merely physical but represents social death—a verdict imposed by cultural values.

From the festive surface to her cold exclusion, Lu Xun does more than depict a tragic woman’s fate; he reveals how individuals are consumed by moral discourse under the intersecting cultural mechanisms of collectivism, high power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. This constitutes the “cultural violence” hidden within China’s traditional festivals.

Furthermore, the Spring Festival in *The New Year’s Sacrifice* is not merely a folk holiday but a potent symbol embodying collective memory and cultural power structures. For Xianglin Sao, it marks the turning point in her life, sealing her slide from social marginalization to death. Her fate is not a product of free choice but the inescapable vortex shaped by traditional ethics and social structures, embodying a fatalistic worldview pervasive in Chinese culture.

In traditional Chinese society, the Spring Festival is a highly ritualized occasion for family reunion, ancestor worship, and social renewal. However, to Xianglin Sao, it is not warm or festive. She must “wait for the year’s end” to beg for food rather than reunite with family. She appears “like a ghost” at the kitchen door before the New Year’s Eve dinner but is cruelly rejected as “bringing bad luck.” The festival thus

becomes a bitter irony—a moment symbolizing social exclusion rather than blessing.

Through Hofstede’s lens, China’s strong collectivism means group consensus and social norms outweigh individual emotions and interests. The festival’s “harmony” and “reunion” depend on excluding “others.” Labeled “unchaste,” bereaved, and “hard-fated,” Xianglin Sao is expelled from the communal festive narrative, her destiny rendered inevitable. This reflects a fatalistic life view deeply embedded in Chinese culture.

The Spring Festival also symbolizes “temporal renewal”—the end of the old year and the start of the new. Yet, Xianglin Sao “end” occurs just before the festival, and even after death, she is denied entry into the kitchen, demonstrating the festival’s cultural power over life and death. This strict demand for “cleanliness” and “harmony” aligns with China’s high uncertainty avoidance, where people seek safety through ritual purity and exclusion of “bad luck.” Xianglin Sao becomes the sacrificial victim of this cultural mechanism.

In summary, the Spring Festival in *The New Year’s Sacrifice* is not a moment of joy and reunion but a symbol of social death. Xianglin Sao’s tragic end stems not only from personal misfortune but also from the cultural system built on collectivism, high power distance, and fatalism. Lu Xun’s ironic narrative critiques not only individual tragedy but also the coldness and exclusion lurking beneath traditional festival culture, exposing how individual rights are further compressed within festival ethics in such a cultural context.

3.2. Festival Representations in A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* narrates a story of spiritual awakening and moral rebirth occurring during Christmas. The protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, initially a miserly and cold-hearted capitalist, is indifferent to the poor and emotionally detached. His famous exclamation “Bah! Humbug!” epitomizes his selfishness and emotional isolation. However, the visitation of three Christmas spirits—representing the Past, Present, and Future—forces him into a time-travel-like introspection. Confronted with visions of his lonely and regretful death, Scrooge undergoes a profound transformation, awakening compassion and generosity. Upon Christmas morning, he joyfully proclaims, “I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me,” symbolizing his soul’s rebirth and commitment to change.

This narrative embodies the Christian symbolism of Christmas as a celebration of hope, love, and redemption, rooted in the birth of Jesus Christ as the savior delivering humanity from sin. Scrooge’s moral regeneration reflects this religious spirit, portraying the festival as a time for personal reflection and renewal.

From Hofstede’s cultural dimensions perspective, Western societies—especially Britain—exhibit high individualism, emphasizing personal choice, autonomy, and responsibility. Scrooge’s redemption arises not from external coercion but self-realization, highlighting the Western cultural ideal of individual agency over one’s fate. Moreover, Western culture’s low uncertainty avoidance fosters acceptance and even celebration of change. Scrooge’s willingness to embrace transformation and his exuberant declaration, “I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy,” illustrate this cultural openness to new possibilities.

The novel also reflects low power distance through the evolved relationship between Scrooge and his clerk, Bob Cratchit. From a harsh employer to a caring benefactor concerned for the Cratchit family and the ailing Tiny Tim, Scrooge transcends class boundaries. This egalitarian ethos echoes Christian values of universal equality before God and demonstrates the festival's role in reshaping social relations and moral order.

Dickens's work thus serves not only as a festive tale but as a literary symbol of "soul plasticity" and "individual rebirth" within Western cultural tradition. Christmas is portrayed not merely as a joyful reunion but as a pivotal moment for self-reflection and moral regeneration—a concept contrasting sharply with the Chinese New Year's collective emphasis on social harmony, familial order, and cyclical destiny.

Within *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens constructs a rich Christian religious imagery system centered on salvation and repentance. The ghost of Marley, Scrooge's former partner, appears "bound in chains he forged in life," warning of the consequences of personal choice: "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will." This underscores Christian beliefs in free will, moral accountability, and the possibility of redemption.

Christmas symbolizes light overcoming darkness and salvation through Christ's birth. Scrooge's spiritual journey, guided by the three spirits, mirrors a purgatorial trial culminating in his moral rebirth. His ecstatic affirmation, "I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been," marks his soul's transformation and grace regained.

Hofstede's concept of low long-term orientation in Western culture aligns with Scrooge's instantaneous redemption, emphasizing immediate change and results, unlike the Chinese emphasis on cyclical fate and karmic continuity exemplified by Xianglin Sao's tragic cycle in *The New Year's Sacrifice*.

The spirits also exemplify low uncertainty avoidance; despite supernatural encounters, Scrooge embraces the unknown, reflecting Western faith's openness to spiritual experiences and inner transformation.

In summary, *A Christmas Carol* offers more than a heartwarming story; it is a spiritual narrative about redemption, repentance, and hope, reinforcing the Western cultural tradition that views festivals as moments of soul awakening. This contrasts with the Chinese New Year's focus on familial reunion, ancestor veneration, and acceptance of destiny, underscoring profound cultural differences between individual-centered spiritual renewal and collective harmony and fatalism.

4. Cultural Comparison of Views on Life and Death and Religious Concepts

4.1. Differences in Chinese and Western Cognition of Life and Death

The concept of life and death, as a core cultural element, reflects a nation's understanding of the meaning of life, the afterlife, and human value. In *The New Year's Sacrifice* and *A Christmas Carol*, although both address death within the context of a festival, their cultural backgrounds and ideological foundations reveal distinct East-West differences, particularly regarding individual value, the construction of death's meaning, and interpretations of fate.

In *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Lu Xun portrays a fatalistic view of life and death deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Xianglin Sao's death appears as an inevitable outcome of societal and ritualistic oppression, leaving her powerless to change her fate. Her repeated lament, "I was truly foolish," exposes a passive, submissive, and silenced life. The contrast between the New Year's symbolic reunion and renewal and her spiritual collapse before death underscores the marginalization and repression of individual life within traditional Chinese society.

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, China exemplifies high power distance and collectivism, where individual life and death are subsumed under familial, social, and moral orders. Xianglin Sao's inability to remarry, the death of her child, and her exclusion from ancestral rites illustrate how individual dignity and life meaning conform to collective ethics and ritual norms.

In contrast, Western culture tends to regard death as an opportunity for spiritual transformation. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge, initially miserly and cold, attains repentance and redemption through his Christmas spirit journey, achieving spiritual rebirth. Marley's admonition—"Mankind was my business"—awakens Scrooge to the true meaning of life as rooted in human kindness rather than wealth. This narrative reflects Western culture's low power distance and individualism, emphasizing each person's freedom to repent and reshape their destiny, with individual value placed above traditional rules and social expectations.

Furthermore, Western culture embraces a more positive conception of the afterlife. Scrooge's vision of his desolate death and others' rejection exemplifies the Western notion of "death as judgment," differing from China's emphasis on "pre-death determining posthumous honor." Western cultures prioritize active agency within one's finite life.

Regarding uncertainty avoidance, China's medium-to-high level leads to taboos surrounding death and reliance on religious rituals to comfort the living and the dead. In contrast, Western countries' lower uncertainty avoidance facilitates acceptance of death as a natural part of life, allowing narratives like *A Christmas Carol* to use "visits from spirits" as central plot devices promoting growth rather than repression.

In summary, the East-West divide in life-and-death perceptions centers on China's focus on collective and ritualistic regulation of individual life versus the West's emphasis on personal soul freedom, choice, and salvation. The tragic death in *The New Year's Sacrifice* and the redemptive death in *A Christmas Carol* vividly illustrate these profound cultural value contrasts.

4.2. Religious Ideas and Festival Expressions

Traditional festivals in both Chinese and Western cultures not only carry social and ritual functions but also deeply embody their respective religious spirits and belief logics. *The New Year's Sacrifice* and *A Christmas Carol*, set against the Chinese Spring Festival and Western Christmas respectively, reflect through literature the influence of religious concepts on social psychology and individual fate, revealing fundamental differences in religious permeation behind East-West festival cultures.

In *The New Year's Sacrifice*, although organized religion is not overtly present, Confucian "ritual ethics" functions as a form of secular religion within traditional Chinese culture. Xianglin Sao is deemed "impure" for remarrying and

forbidden to approach the ancestral altar during the New Year, ultimately expelled as a bad omen. These seemingly folkloric acts embody a deep-rooted “moral purity” and “fatalism,” closely tied to Confucian veneration of chastity and filial piety.

Traditional Chinese society’s ancestral worship and ritual practices, while lacking systematic theology, form collective reverence toward “Mandate of Heaven” and ancestral spirits, exerting quasi-religious social control. The Spring Festival, as a temporal marker of renewal, centers on reverence for ancestors and hopes for the coming year. Xianglin Sao’s impurity disrupts this sacred order, leading to her exclusion from ritual participation. This religious-like moral judgment, though not stemming from formal religion, is deeply embedded in Confucian rites, folklore, and patriarchal structures, representing a “cultural religion” manifested in festival life.

Conversely, *A Christmas Carol* presents a more explicit and systematic religious meaning. Christmas commemorates Christ’s birth, and the novel’s emphasis on “repentance,” “atonement,” and “rebirth” directly reflects core Christian values. Scrooge’s supernatural transformation through visits from the ghosts of past, present, and future enacts a religious ritual of “soul renewal.” His gradual awareness of sin and coldness, culminating in redemption through repentance, typifies the Christian “faith–sin–forgiveness” model.

Religion in Western festival culture manifests not only in doctrine and ritual participation but penetrates deeply into value systems. *A Christmas Carol* uses religious imagery and symbolism to frame the festival as an opportunity for moral reconstruction and spiritual renewal. This “spiritual function” makes the holiday not only a time of celebration but also a moment for ethical reflection and soul purification.

In contrast, the cultural religion portrayed in *The New Year’s Sacrifice* prioritizes social order and ethical norms, lacking the West’s dialogic mechanism between the individual and the divine. Chinese traditional festivals emphasize functional and ceremonial aspects of religion—such as ancestor worship, exorcism, and blessing rites—serving secular social stability and continuity. Western festivals, particularly those rooted in Christianity, highlight direct communication with God, repentance, and grace, displaying more pronounced transcendental and individualistic tendencies.

Thus, differences in religious permeation in East-West festivals extend beyond form to fundamental distinctions in value orientations and cultural logic. *The New Year’s Sacrifice* reflects social religion’s disciplining of individual fate, whereas *A Christmas Carol* reveals how faith guides individuals toward self-redemption and moral rebirth. This divergence defines the spiritual divide of East-West festival cultures, providing distinct intellectual depth and cultural tension within their literary portrayals.

5. Contemporary Significance and Cultural Reflections

In modern society, festivals increasingly function as consumer-driven cultural spaces, with their original religious and ethical cores gradually marginalized. Yet, traditional festivals’ cultural symbols related to life, death, family, and faith continue to subtly influence individual behavior and social identity.

In contemporary China, although the Spring Festival remains a major traditional holiday, its patriarchal structures

and ritualistic constraints have loosened considerably. The exclusion of Xianglin Sao from festival rituals in *The New Year’s Sacrifice* reflects the rigid moral purity and exclusivity of the Confucian era’s festivals, whereas today’s Spring Festival emphasizes family reunion and emotional comfort, with diminished ethical judgment. Meanwhile, the festival has evolved into a nationwide leisure event combining tourism, shopping, entertainment, and socializing. Its ritual significance has been simplified, emotional aspects amplified, and symbolic religious functions increasingly marginalized. This modern transformation allows the festival to adapt socially but risks diluting its deeper cultural values.

Similarly, Christmas in the West has undergone a cultural shift. In *A Christmas Carol*, Christmas is not only the commemoration of Christ’s birth but also a moment of moral awakening and spiritual redemption for Scrooge. However, in the contemporary context, Christmas has largely detached from its religious roots, becoming a commercial, consumer-driven, and family-centered celebration. Emphasis on decorations, gift exchanges, and sales often overshadows its religious symbolism and spiritual reflection. This consumerist turn, while increasing social participation, simultaneously weakens the festival’s spiritual core and cultural depth.

Globalization has also led to cultural intersections between East and West festivals. Increasingly, young Chinese engage in Western holidays like Christmas and Valentine’s Day, while Christmas has become a key period for Chinese cinema and e-commerce. Conversely, elements of the Spring Festival—such as parades and dragon dances—have gained recognition in some Western societies as part of multicultural integration. This demonstrates festivals’ roles as carriers of cross-cultural communication beyond mere ethnic expression. However, such fusion often remains superficial, lacking deep understanding of the underlying cultural values and meanings.

Revisiting festival narratives in literature helps restore cultural depth and spiritual value. The differing East-West views on life and death provide a profound basis for cultural complementarity. Chinese traditional death concepts emphasize harmony between individuals, family, and nature, valuing ritual and moral significance. Western perspectives, closely tied to religious faith, focus on soul redemption and individual introspection. *The New Year’s Sacrifice* uses the Spring Festival to reveal traditional society’s neglect of female fate, while *A Christmas Carol* employs Christmas to guide spiritual awakening through confronting death.

These differences reflect distinct cultural understandings of life’s meaning and social ethics. In a globalized context, appreciating each other’s cultural logic on life and death can deepen civilization dialogue. For example, Eastern culture might draw inspiration from Western “death education” to enhance individual spiritual salvation, while the West might learn from Eastern “life-death unity” to foster more holistic human care. Such mutual value exchange can promote cross-cultural dissemination and reconfiguration of festival cultures worldwide, offering contemporary individuals broader perspectives on life and meaning.

6. Conclusion

This comparative analysis of *The New Year’s Sacrifice* and *A Christmas Carol* reveals how traditional festivals serve as profound cultural lenses reflecting divergent Eastern and Western worldviews on life, death, and individual identity. Rooted in collectivist and high power distance Confucian ethics, the Chinese Spring Festival emphasizes social order,

ritual purity, and familial continuity, often marginalizing individuals who deviate from normative roles, as exemplified by Xianglin Sao's tragic fate. In contrast, the Western Christmas, embedded in Christian individualism and low power distance culture, foregrounds personal moral awakening, spiritual redemption.

While modernization and globalization have reshaped the ritual and social functions of these festivals-often diluting their religious and ethical cores-their enduring symbolic power continues to shape social identities and intercultural dialogues. Understanding these festivals' embedded cultural logic, especially regarding life, death, and morality, not only enriches literary interpretation but also fosters cross-cultural empathy and mutual learning in an increasingly interconnected world. Future scholarship and cultural exchange may further explore how these foundational differences can inform global perspectives on human dignity, spiritual renewal, and communal belonging in contemporary society.

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