

The Significance of Festivals is “In Tune with the World”

—Interpretation from the Perspective of Western Cultural Theory

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Abstract: In the historical background of “festivalization of culture”, to clarify the meaning of festivals is a prerequisite for accomplishing the cultural value of festivals. By interpreting relevant western cultural theories, especially Pieper’s statements, this article argues that “in tune with the world” is the fundamental meaning of festivals. Considered as a result, “in tune with the world” means metaphysical needs are satisfied, and when taken as a prerequisite, “in tune with the world” should rely on totality strength. The enlightenment rationality breaks away from the field of metaphysics due to overemphasis on reflection, which results in the discontinuity of totality strength in the transition from old to new. This is the fundamental reason why some current festivals cannot realize their own values. Therefore, emphasizing a festival’s cultural connotation and exploring the possibility of re-endowing festivals with charm should be the top priority of research on festivals.

Keywords: Significance of festival, in tune with the world, affirmative narrative, totality

In 2014, Australian scholar Andy Bennett creatively used the “festivalization of culture” to explain the development trends of contemporary cultures. Although it is criticized as being exaggerated, it is indisputable that in time series festivals have become an important reliance for the public culture. As he pointed out in his book, since the 1990s, different continents have witnessed a surge in the

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number of festivals. Also, the diversity of festival types and the diversity of festival participants both locally and globally have become an important cultural symbol of this era (Bennett, Taylor, & Woodward, 2014). This is further supported by the fact that since the mid 1980s, Chinese festivals have entered a period of rapid development after a slump over the past century. Two related studies show that by the end of 2009, the total number of celebration activities in China had exceeded 8,000 (Fan, 2012); by 2013, the number of just the emerging celebration activities had increased to more than 7,000, accounting for 70% of the total (Peng, 2013).

However, does the rise of cultural festivals inevitably bring about the renaissance of festivals? According to French festival researcher Mona Ozouf (2012), simply increasing the number of festivals or diversifying the forms of celebration is not enough to meet public expectations, and is even likely to be just the opposite. Depau (2017) was even more pessimistic that he thought this era basically presented its time as a rush return of various celebration activities. In fact, it was also an era without festivals. All in all, in modern society, people are immoderately adding all kinds of external purposes to the festivals, gradually leading them to be empty carriers. Then, what is the significance and value of the festival itself, casting aside these purposes? This is exactly the question that this paper is to answer.

1. The basic way to understand festivals

Festivals are an ancient tradition in all civilizations. Although there are few systematic studies on festival theories, they have not been ignored through the ages. For example, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe elucidated the correlation between acquisition of festival happiness and changes in social and economic structures in his *Italian Journey*. Friedrich Hölderlin emphasized the importance of holiness in his poems about festivals; M.M.Bakhtin and Victor Turner attributed the successful running of celebration activities to symbolic techniques, among other things. One of the basic consensuses is that, the reason why festivals are important is that they are the “free activities” of human beings.

It is undeniable that scholars in the cultural research circles elucidating the significance of festivals with “free activities” are greatly inspired by the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. For instance, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, *Laws* and *Philebus*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, etc., repeatedly talk about such topics. In their opinion, festivals can only have a special significance when they are free activities, as free activities are the main ways human beings gain happiness and “rational happiness.”

First, happiness and survival contradict each other due to lack of leisure. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, vol. 10, states that happiness lies in activities in line with virtue, and the best activity to realize the highest virtue (virtue of the god) is meditation. But meditation produces nothing but what it reflects on. In order to obtain the external things necessary for gaining happiness, such as a healthy body, food and other services, people also need to be engaged in various practical activities (“slave work”). However, since these activities are not desired for their own sake and all for some other purposes, they do not provide the leisure needed for meditation. Even politics and war, the noblest and greatest of all practical activities, don’t provide leisure (Aristotle, 2011). So, happiness and survival are opposed. Second, free activities generate leisure. Confined to the pressures of survival and the greed of human nature, “slave work” has gradually become the daily routine in human societies and has greatly reduced the leisure needed for

meditation. Free activities characterized by entertainment, relaxation and aimless play can distract people from their desires for the outside world through a form full of joy, and then, since without any purpose in themselves, they become the main place for leisure generation and meditation. Moreover, free activities are the way to gain “rational happiness.” In Plato’s (2003) opinions, “happiness is not the foremost,” only “rational happiness” resulting from thinking, reasoning and remembering is worth pursuing. This shows that although free activities have the external characteristics of happiness, they are not the key to distinguishing free activities from practical activities. In fact, the special meaning of free activities is still related to meditation. That is, the prerequisite for occurrence of thinking, reasoning and remembering is meditation, and meditation mainly occurs during free activities. Accordingly, free activities are associated with the gaining of rational happiness and endowed with the meaning of happiness. Moreover, given the lack of conditions for meditation to actually take place independently, the ancient Greeks believed that rational happiness could only be gained through free activities.

That said, can we equate festivals with free activities in significance? No. As a general term for certain types of activities, free activities never refer to festivals. There is also a long tradition in the West of defining play as a free activity. For instance, Plato (2003) described festivals and games as “nobler than work” in his *Phaedrus*. In *Laws*, he even mixed them up and went so far as to say that what then will be the right way to live? A man should spend his whole life at play—sacrificing, singing, dancing. “Play” here obviously refers to playing games, but is not the “sacrificing, singing and dancing” as an explanation also the main way to celebrate festivals? The definitions of festival and play were vague to a large extent, or they were complementary and inseparable in a certain sense.

Johan Huizinga, best known for *Homo Ludens*, reached a similar conclusion. In his opinion, festivals and plays not only have the basic properties of free activities, but are also different ways of expressing the same thing. To this end, he also deliberately summed up the consistency of the two, “Both declare a pause in the daily life, and are enveloped in joy, though not necessarily, since festivals can also be serious. Both are bounded by the limit of space and time and combine strict rules with true freedom. Festivals and the plays share common characteristics, both seemingly closely related to dance.”

Huizinga’s (2007) view was questioned by German philosopher Pieper. In his opinion, Huizinga had exaggerated the scope of plays from the very beginning, thus misjudging the essence of plays: Separated from the festival, pure plays cannot be classified as a free activity, because they do not meet the condition of “significance lies in itself.” Specifically, “What makes an action significant is its content and purpose, not the manner in which it is performed” (Pieper, 1991). The key to evaluate the significance of the content and goal of an activity depends on the seriousness of the content and goal. On the other hand, although a play is serious to some extent, the seriousness only refers to the rules and has nothing to do with the content and goal.

As a matter of fact, even Huizinga himself was aware of this. In order to prove the seriousness of plays, he even repeatedly imposed the “solemn atmosphere” of religious festivals on them, but little achievement was made. “What is a play, and what is the seriousness?” The two questions are “playing hide-and-seek” with us and confuse us until the end of the book (Huizinga, 2007, p. 245). So it may be as Pieper said, a play is for the most part just a mode of activity, or a specific way of manifesting festivals, whose attributes are determined by nothing but “form” (Pieper, 1991, p. 10). Moreover, plays are not free activities in the absolute sense, and the

reason why they can also trigger rational happiness is probably that they are closely related to festivals.

However, we still cannot equate festivals to free activities, let alone treat “capable of triggering rational happiness” as the only reference to analyze the significance of festivals, because besides plays, there is another activity that is also in the category of free activity, namely, aesthetic appreciation.

The formal inclusion of aesthetic appreciation in the category of free activities is attributed to the development of Western aesthetics since the end of the 18th century. Kant, Schiller and Hans-Georg Gadamer were the three most prominent contributors. Among them, the first two are to some extent the initiators and forerunners of the theory, yet it was Hans-Georg Gadamer who really helps us distinguish festivals from aesthetic appreciation. Analyzing their relevant theories may be helpful to further understand festivals.

Specifically, it was Kant who introduced for the first time the concept of “play” into the aesthetic field, and thus initiated the discussion on aesthetic appreciation as a free activity. In his *Critique of Judgment*, he pointed out that the difference between art and handicraft lies in the idea that the essence of art is freedom and that of handicraft is being forced. Art and plays are interlinked exactly at the point of freedom (Zhu Guangqian, 2011 p. 416). The immediate follower is Schiller, who took “Spieltrieb” as the symbol of the integrity of human nature and regarded it as the origin of beauty in his *Script of Aesthetic Education* (Schiller, 2003, p. 115). His opinion is also an affirmation for the inherent consistency between plays and aesthetic appreciation.

However, Pieper has pointed out that simple plays cannot be regarded as free activities. Therefore, it seems to be unacceptable to define aesthetic appreciation as a free activity based only on the consistency between it and plays. In fact, in terms of the free activity attribute of aesthetic appreciation, Kant already made it very clear when he elaborated the four opportunities of aesthetic judgment, “Among all the three pleasure modes (Angenehmen, goodness and beauty), only the pleasure in the appreciation of beauty is a kind of harmless and free pleasure” (Kant, 2007, p. 135). And there is a lot of evidence for that in the Greek treatises. For example, in discussing the gifts of festivals and plays, Plato (2003) talked about ecstasy, “The greatest blessing comes through ecstasy, and ecstasy is indeed a gift from the god.” The ecstasy here mainly involves the divination, the ritual of atonement and disaster relief, the poet (poetry) and love, among which the excellent poet (poetry) is realized through the ecstasy of a Muse. That is undoubtedly in the category of aesthetic appreciation. For another example, Aristotle also discussed music as an activity with purpose in his dialogue about music. The definition of aesthetic appreciation as free activity is not a groundless idea of modern scholars.

Besides, Hans-Georg Gadamer proved the internal connection between aesthetic appreciation and free activities from another perspective when he leveraged festivals to discuss the timeliness of aesthetics. But it is not his most important contribution. His most important contribution is having put forward a possible distinction between festivals and aesthetic appreciation. First of all, festivals are celebrated in the form of a regular return (wiederkehr), which differs from repetition in that they are not only for recollection, but also to evolve. Accordingly, during the festival, man and the festival do not merely co-exist (mitanwesenheit)—co-existing in the same time and space—but also have a relationship of dabeisein (to co-present), “Whoever shares a thing knows exactly what the thing was originally” (Gadamer, 2010, p. 138). In addition, the dabeisein of people and festivals also means that people participate in festivals on the basis of understanding the origin and development of festivals, and ultimately contribute to the evolution of festivals.

By proposing the “dabeisein,” Hans-Georg Gadamer tried to explain that the “dabeisein” relationship

during festivals is also a condition for the development of aesthetic activities. At this point, they are not different. However, speaking of the issue of poetry and aesthetics, he added that if there was one thing that was connected with the experience of celebrating festivals together, it was that one is not allowed to be separated from others. The festival was a community experience, and the community itself manifested in a perfect form. Festivals were always for everyone (Gadamer, 1993, p. 130). That is to emphasize the sharing nature of the festival, and the festival and aesthetic appreciation are thus distinguished by the sharing nature.

Although aesthetic judgment is a universality, singular judgments remain their primary characteristic, namely, there is universal beauty, but no completely consistent beauty. By contrast, festival participants' cognition of festivals is consistent in many aspects. And such consistency is also manifested in the process of participating in the celebration. It is exactly the collective participation that contributes to the evolution of festivals. Further, festivals are not just the wealth of the collective, but also the fruit of the collective creation. So, the resulting happiness is bound to be shared by the collective. Obviously, festivals are more social in significance than aesthetic appreciation, which might be the reason why Bakhtin regarded festivals as "an extremely important primary form of human culture" (Collected works of Bakhtin. 1998).

The only way to distinguish festivals from other human activities is to consider whether they can provide "shared rational happiness." Since "shared rational happiness" both embodies the uniqueness of the festival and is closely related to happiness, it certainly can also be regarded as the significance of festivals. However, it should be noted that the provision of shared rational happiness is only an attribute of the ideal festival, which remains under restrictions in the real world, so that is not the ultimate significance of the festival.

2. Reasons for the formation of festivals: From love to "in tune with the world"

We believe Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture* can best explain the final significance of festivals. Yet, considering his thoughts deviate from this paper, it is necessary to give a further clarification based on the conclusions above.

Pieper mainly answered two questions: How do festivals acquire the intrinsic nature of "significance in itself" and if the proposition is proved to be true, what does it ultimately mean? The questions correspond exactly with the two conditions, "rational happiness" and "sharing."

The first question, how do festivals acquire the intrinsic nature of "significance in itself?" As discussed above, the key to free activities having their own significance is that they cover the meditation in line with the best virtue, and thus only the pleasure generated during free activities is rational. But it is apparently inappropriate to take "meditation" as the answer, for in the Western thought tradition, "meditation" is almost synonymous with "moderation." In addition, Aristotle pointed out that people do not stop working simply for meditation. To that question, the answer of Pieper is "love," because there is something to love during a festival that makes people willing to moderate and even dedicate.

First, "love" is the purpose of taking part in celebration activities. The biggest difference between festivals and mere meditation is that the former can mobilize people to really act. According to Aquinas (1882, p. 6), "Any person acts for some purpose. The purpose is what he or she desires and loves. So, no matter whoever the initiator is and whatever the action is, he or she is clearly motivated by some kind of love." Second, people take time off from work to participate in festival celebrations. Apparently it is out of love. Moreover, love is

the reason for the joy the festival provides. In Pieper's (1996, p. 24) view, "The reason for joy is always the same: To have or to obtain what one loves, whether they actually have it now, wish to have it in the future, or have it in memories of the past." People are happier during festivals than usual precisely because they are offered something more to love. Because of this the festival has the attribute of being worthy of being loved. The reason why people like something mainly lies in two conditions, namely, their own sense of scarcity and the scarcity of the desire to be satisfied. Festivals are undoubtedly a combination of the two. For one, as an exception during daily work, festivals themselves are scarce; then, "slave work" always brings a sense of scarcity rather than satisfaction, which can only be released to the maximum during festivals. Finally, moderation in the festivals is a manifestation of love. Moderation is the opposite of thrift, the former restraining external desires, the latter the prodigality of the fruits of labor. Even the greatest moderation is not the cessation of desire, but the giving without compensation on such basis, that is, a dedication or sacrifice. The basis for presenting for free is love, because the reason we give somebody something for free is that we hope he is well.

So, the first thing we give him is the kind of love with which we hope he will be well. Therefore, love clearly is in the nature of the first gift, through which all gifts are given away (Aquinas, 2013). During festivals, there are not only mutual blessing, gift giving and wine feasting, but also god worship, ancestor worship and all kinds of waste. For the French thinker Bataille's part, waste is the feedback of human to nature.

Therefore, "love" is undoubtedly the premise upon which a festival triggers rational happiness. Notably however, although love is an innate ability, it often diminishes with accumulated experience. For instance, Taiwan essayist Qin Han (2011, p. 7) once expressed her feelings for "the fading of the New Year custom," "The New Year, always belongs to the children." Therefore, to maintain the ability to love, in different nations and cultural traditions, there are relevant adjustment mechanisms. For example, Aristotle and Western scholasticism advocated the cultivation of love through "silent observation," while traditional Chinese thought emphasizes introspection to achieve the state of "unity of man and nature."

But even if an individual is capable of loving and has what he loves, it is difficult to maximize happiness without sharing it. Just as Cheng Hao (1993, p. 8229), founder of neo-Confucianism in the Northern Song Dynasty, wrote in his poem: "On this lovely sunny spring day with breeze, it is about noon. I'm strolling towards the riverbank across the flowering shrubs and willows. This is a spring outing, but people are unaware of it. They might see me lazy trying to have fun as kids do." On a lovely spring day, wandering and enjoying the beautiful scenery, "I" feel so pleased. But "people" cannot feel my happiness, which spoils "my" good mood. Hence the second question: How can festivals be "shared?"

Although Pieper did not directly put forward a similar concept of the "sharing nature of festivals," before he attributed the inherent nature of the festival that "has significance in itself" to "love," he had already pointed out that the focus of festivals is not how to arrange the celebration activities, but how to find a group of people who can share (Pieper, 1991, p. 13). In fact, the importance of "sharing" to festivals has been affirmed to a large extent—festivals are eventually occasions for the "happiness of all." In addition, he summed up three possible internal structures to ensure the sharing nature of festivals, including the sense of creativity, commemoration and specific significance, and examined their respective relationships with "sharing."

First, festivals that are simply created through creativity do not possess the sharing nature of a festival because they cannot provide a practical experience that can be shared by the celebration participants. Such

festivals are commonplace in the context of contemporary cultural economies and the cultural industry. In fact, such festivals were common as far back as the French Revolution. As noted in the book, opening those dusty paper boxes containing festival files, one would be impressed by the colorful and rich contents: The youth day, victory day, elderly's day, agricultural day, couple's day, republic day, the people's sovereignty day... just endless! Festivals are celebrated everywhere. Even the smallest towns have several festivals a year, or even a few in a month. Flags fluttering, drums beating, carpenters and painters gather, songs chanted repeatedly, and programs carefully arranged (Ozouf, 2012, p. 26)... These festivals have exhausted the imagination of their designers and organizers, but instead of surviving, they have become synonymous with boredom. But it is not the case that the activity where thousands of "trees of liberty" were planted was not grand enough, or that Francois Joseph Gossec's creation was to blame. It is that the creative ideas can only be an external form, not substantive contents of celebration. While these festivals may seem like a lot of fun, the participants often miss the point.

Next, although the memorial days provide practical experiences to be shared, they cannot be celebrated as a festival if the objects commemorated are no longer historical realities that are still in operation. There is no denying that many religious memorial days, such as Easter, Christmas and Halloween, have been great festivals for a long time. But in a modern world of globalization, consumerism and secularization, the significance of those festivals has largely faded away. The reason behind this is that the things of the past have been disconnected from the developing history of the present, and people are no longer proud of the past and have difficulty feeling inspiration from it. Goethe (1995, p. 164), with his keen eyes, noticed it two years before the French Revolution, "It has been bustling these days, but I cannot feel heartfelt happiness. In fact, it is clear and sunny, and the weather is lovely. But I'm still unhappy, but not because of the weather." Even on the eve of social change, festivals organized by the old powers (church) seemed "folly" to Goethe.

Third, certain events such as a birth, marriage or returning home, are not only regarded as the prototype of festivals, but also ensure the validity of the experience, provided that their significance is not negated by the participants. Sartre (2012, p. 691) in *Being and Nothingness* pointed out that all the questions and reflections on existence will lead people to nothingness, which is undoubtedly a negative form of significance. And what reflection grasps at any time is the specific behavior itself, a series of special and day-specific desires. So in Sartre's view, all certain events are absurd in themselves, and of course not worth celebrating. The "nihilism" advocated by Sartre has profound influence on the contemporary so-called post-modern way of thinking, and it is hard not to admit the fact that many people have a negative attitude towards the significance of certain events.

Although these three shared structures have, to a large extent, created a joyful atmosphere for festivals, it does not mean that they can exist as a reason for the festive joy. The reason why festivals bring people rational happiness is that people get what they love from them. Therefore, what really enable festivals are not the various external things, but the people who participate in festivals. They must create an absolute condition for their "love."

Then, how can we ensure that the internal significance structure of the festival is not negated? For this question, Pieper drew on Nietzsche's point of view and pointed out that, everything is related to the entirety of existence, so not denying the existence basis of anything means we must agree with everything. Apart from an individual's agreement with himself and the world, such an agreement needs to be the widespread collective

identity in festivals. That is “in tune with the world.”

The proposition of “in tune with the world” is the answer to two important questions about festivals. First, “in tune with the world” is the ultimate answer to why the festival is so, which is cause-oriented. It should be noted that although this is a summary of the “cause,” the importance of “in tune with the world” to festivals is far greater than the “cause” itself. Strictly speaking, it is not appropriate to regard “in tune with the world” as the sole prerequisite for a festival. In fact, it is much more than that. It is the essence of a festival activity. The very essence of a festival activity is nothing but the “in tune” (Pieper, 1991, pp. 30-31). Second, “in tune with the world” is the final answer to “what is the meaning of a festival for one’s own,” a generalization that is results-oriented. In short, although a true festival can only be so on the basis of the participants “in tune with the world,” it lets participants feel the joy of “in tune with the world”—not only “I,” but also the whole external world where “I” am is meaningful. Furthermore, the joy of “in tune with the world” is a calm and profound satisfaction. As described by Rousseau (2007, p. 314) in *Les Confessions*:

I’m always fascinated with new things, and accept everything with childlike joy, or even angelic joy, for this carefree enjoyment is indeed a little like the tranquil happiness in heaven. Lunch on the grass, evening drinks under the gazebo, picking melons and fruit, harvesting grapes, and peeling ramie with the servants in the lamplight, all are true celebration activities for us.

Of course, “in tune with the world” is a conceptual expression of festival cultural values, while festivals themselves are activities in various forms. Therefore, it remains necessary to verify this theory based on other people’s theories and practical historical experience.

3. Forms of an affirmative narrative

Max Weber said that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). In fact, affirming the world is also in the category of “significance,” that is, only when the phenomenal world, as the object of cognition, is projected into the field of ideas, can it be connected with human consciousness and become an appeal. Therefore, the key to affirming the world is not to admit the existence of objective things, but to deal with the relationships between the phenomenal world and the world of meaning. Although the cognitive power of humans is reflected in common sense and science, the link between the two worlds, we cannot deny that no matter how hard man tries to understand the “reality” of this world, he cannot get rid of the “hidden and irreplaceable intoxications” of human nature, such as love, imagination and the shaping of people by existing culture (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 132). To this end, civilized humans have also invented a series of transcendent narratives and defined them as the total reality to answer the metaphysical questions and other unsolved mysteries in the phenomenal world. However, since these narratives cannot be verified in the real world, they form a binary opposition with verifiable parts in the world of meaning.

Of course, the duality of the world of meaning does not mean that the world can never be affirmed. In order to meet their own metaphysical needs, humans have also invented a series of affirmative narratives that can temporarily relieve the duality conflict of the world of meaning, and present the totality of the world to people through specific art forms and more general festivals. However, before that, people would first resort to some imaginary images to more intuitively represent the duality of the world of meaning.

In different cultural systems, the imaginary images vary and are often completely different. Even within

the same culture, these images are not unique and can even be described as “colorful and diverse.” The point, of course, is not which images to use, but how to present the duality of the world through them. Dionysus and his opposite are among the most commonly used images in the Western cultural tradition. In Germany the relevant research has been going on for a long time—from Winkelman, Harman and Herder to the German Romanticists, and to Schelling, Nietzsche, Johann Jakob Bachofen, et al. In Baumer’s view, these efforts have almost developed a discipline called “Study of Dionysus” (Baumer, 2007, p. 5). The most representative of which is Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche was not the first philosopher to discover the “Dionysus Phenomenon,” Dionysus in ancient Greek mythology is one of the most central images in this thought process. In addition, as Sun Zhouxing (2016, pp. 64-65) said, “We have to admit that Dionysus was not known as a ‘famous god of Europe’ or even a ‘famous god of the world’ today until Nietzsche’s work.”

By contrasting Dionysus with Apollo, Nietzsche discovered the first and only form of affirming a world that ever existed, which is the ancient Greek tragedy. Specifically, in his earlier work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche used Apollo and Dionysus as the basis for a distinction among art forms. Among them, as the god of light, Apollo endows everything with a “beautiful appearance” or “beautiful illusion,” which corresponds to the plastic art focusing on “appearance/illusion.” Dionysus is always in a state of intoxication, a state of madness intermingled with pain and ecstasy, and thus corresponds to the art form of music. By contrast, individuals can achieve self-affirmation through the appearance/illusion provided by Apollo, while Dionysus gets people to reflect on such affirmation through intoxication. From an epistemological perspective, if the former points to a constructed/exaggerated and seemingly exact grand narrative, the latter directs a natural impulse to get rid of the illusion and return to the truth (the matrix of existence). In a word, both as artistic principles and cognitive principles, the two are naturally irreconcilable. But Schelling saw the combination of those two forces in the highest achievement of art. Nietzsche even pointed out bluntly that such kind of art is exactly the ancient Greek tragedies.

When Archilochus, the first Greek lyric poet, expressed his wild love for the daughter of Lucambus, he also showed contempt. It was not with his own passion that he “danced” before us with acolasia and intoxication: We see Dionysus and the priestess; we see boozy enthusiasts Archilochus drunk into the dreamland. Just as described by Euripides in the *Die Bakchen*, that at high noon, he sleeps on the Alpine pasture. Now, Apollo is coming towards him, touching him with a cassia twig. Thus, the sleeping poet, enchanted by Dionysus’ music magic, seems to be bursting with visual sparkles. That’s lyric poetry, whose peak of development is the work “Tragedy and Drama: Ode to Dionysus (Nietzsche, 2016, p. 36).

Yet in the long course of history, tragedy as an affirmative form was just a flash in the pan. In the age of Socrates, the appearance was defined as the object (appearance, idea) of reason, and at the same time, such reason became virtue and was equated with happiness. So, by the end of ancient Greece, the great Dionysia festival in praise of Dionysus was banned; The ancient Greeks and Romans then turned their eyes on his opposite—Apollo. Heidegger (2014, p. 207) called that process “falling off (dropping),” “It falls from itself into itself and into a rootless state and nothingness in the non-authentic daily life.” This is also in line with Nietzsche’s later views. In general, the balanced and harmonious duality in the world of meaning was broken — the illusion has replaced the reality, which, though visualized and clear, can hardly be deeply affirmed again.

Notably, although Apollo and Dionysus, as principles of art, are no longer superior to each other after the

death of tragedy, in Nietzsche's opinion, both of them are still indispensable as the principle of affirmation. Among them, Dionysus, indulged in wine, sex and women, embodies the affirmation of one's own body (life). However, Socrates unilaterally defined Apollo as the object of reason, resulting in not only the negation of Dionysus, but also the negation of the value of life. Therefore, as the affirmation of life, Dionysus must oppose Socrates. At the same time, the image of Dionysus has naturally transitioned from an aesthetic principle to a life-affirming principle, which is also an important turning point of Nietzsche's thought after *The Birth of Tragedy*.

However, if the goal is to affirm life, merely opposing Socrates is not enough. It can be seen from the last two works of Nietzsche in his thinking career—*Ode to Dionysus* and *Look, This Man*—that he had turned against Jesus Christ. For what Jesus Christ preached was a more complete principle of negation than Socrates: He built "This Shore" to be a place of atonement, thus denying not only all aesthetic values, but also the value of life. From this point of view, if Dionysus wants to reject "the man being crucified," he must firmly stand on the opposite of denying life, that is, to develop himself into a supreme principle of affirming life.

What, then, is the supreme principle of affirming life? According to Nietzsche, the first is "destruction," and then "rebirth," only in this way can one obtain happiness, and then the value of life can be truly affirmed. Simply replacing one life principle with another is not enough to change the existing dualistic structure of the world of meaning, which could lead to nothing but another kind of imbalance between both dualistic sides. Therefore, the most radical way is to destroy the pattern of the old world (meaning), and then greet the birth of a new world in the ruins. On the contrary, Dionysus, the god of Olympus who was killed and destroyed by Hera in the legend and was reincarnated via his soul cast in the body of Semele, fully conforms to Nietzsche's affirmative logic of "annihilation and rebirth," so Dionysus can also be regarded as the supreme affirmative principle.

In the history from Socrates to Jesus Christ, the principle of the negation of life has been dominant in the Western world of meaning. To break away from the "negative mire," we must go through the process from "destruction" to "rebirth." In discussing this issue, Nietzsche even leveraged a more vivid metaphor, the famous "three metamorphoses of spirit": Nietzsche (2019, p. 24) talked about the "three metamorphoses of spirit" in the opening section of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: First, the camel, an enduring spirit in nihilism; Second, the lion, the powerful will raising questions and expressing "I will and I want" and full of destructive spirit; Third, the child, a new beginning, a play, a self-running wheel, an original movement and a sacred affirmation. "Camel," "lion" and "child" respectively correspond to the three stages that must be experienced to affirm the world—waiting, destruction and rebirth. In particular, the highest affirmative formula in Nietzsche's thought is not the powerful "lion" but the "child," an "eternal return to the same" origin.

Looking back at the historical process of the modern West, we have to exclaim over Nietzsche's great insight: From the enlightenment to the contemporary era, it is undoubtedly a process of transition from "lion" to "child." Of course, we don't know if it is the case ultimately. The only thing that can be confirmed is that the affirmative logic of "annihilation and rebirth" does not exist only in the imagination of the historical process. In fact, it has already been profoundly embodied in the festivals known to modern people.

Among them, the carnival in medieval Europe is undoubtedly one of the festivals that can best embody Nietzsche's affirmative logic. However, it should be noted that the greatness of carnival is closely related to its special historical background, which cannot serve as a model for all festivals. Just as Wittgenstein (2014,

p. 110) put it, “We associate the concept of festival with entertainment. Yet, in another era, it was linked to fear and worry. What we call ‘fun’ and ‘humor’ certainly did not exist in other times. They are constantly changing.” Therefore, the purpose of studying carnival here is not to analyze the ideal festival form or its composition, but to answer the question of how festivals make “in tune with the world” possible.

In fact, Bakhtin, famous for his research on carnivals, has given an answer to this question, which is “symbolism.” It is by means of symbolism that carnivals manage to construct an “affirmative” utopia for people living in the “dark Middle Ages.”

The symbolic celebration ensures the order and basic safety of the festival and a series of celebrations can be approved by the authorities. Carnival is undoubtedly deviant. For instance, in Rabelais’ novels, carnival images such as “bloody battle,” “cutting,” “burning,” “death,” “killing,” “beating,” “curse” and “abuse” were almost everywhere during the festivals. But the celebrations were often orderly and even permitted by the church and authorities. Therefore, in order to maximize the festive air, all the activities must be as lively and interesting as possible. That requires not only a strict normative framework to ensure the smooth development of activities, but also many professional actors to rehearse in advance to ensure the results. For example, the “resident bailiffs” in the “country of litigation” mainly make a living by being beaten during festivals.

Second, through symbolic means, besides resisting orders of the real world, people could even destroy them in various ways. “The Clown King” in a classic carnival program for example, the clown was disguised as the king and beaten and humiliated to make money. In the end, his mask of king would be torn off. In such a process, participants actually realized the aim of insulting the real king, who exists in the imagination but was extremely certain, through symbolic means—the king was a clown, and the moment the mask was torn off, he was “de-coronated,” and the people won the final victory. As Bakhtin said, in Rabelais’ novels, the nature of the rant is never purely personal. It is all-encompassing and always aiming at the highest point (*Collected works of Bakhtin*, 1998, p. 239).

Third, through symbolism, the “eternal cycle” of life is revealed, and “in tune with the world” is thus possible. In Nietzsche’s view, the eternal cycle is the highest affirmative formula. And all the “flesh reaping” images collected by Bakhtin are manifestation of the “eternal cycle” philosophy. For example, after “being beaten,” blood will become wine and death, namely, the new life. In addition, “swallowing” and “procreation” are also important “eternal samsara” images. On Id al-Adjha, for example, Jijia the Beauty, a pregnant woman, was mistaken for giving birth as she had rectocele after eating too many cow intestines. Then the epidermis of the placenta was split due to misdiagnosis by the midwife, eventually causing the baby to emerge from her left ear. In this series of grotesque images, the destruction of the placenta is linked to the birth of a child; the intestine that comes out, the cow belly that is eaten, is connected with the belly of Jijia the Beauty that give birth to the child. All this, in turn, relates to the cycle of life. “Through the belly of Jijia the Beauty to swallow and breed, we see not only the belly of the earth that swallows and gives birth to all things, but also the body of the people that are forever reborn” (*Collected works of Bakhtin*, 1998, p. 256).

Carnival, with its profound symbolism, seems to repeat the ancient Greek tragedies in medieval Europe. They are so similar, “It is not for getting rid of the fear and pity, or purifying itself in a dangerous excitement after emotional outbursts (that is the way Aristotle understood it), but to go beyond fear and mercy, becoming the eternal generation of pleasure itself—the pleasure which contains in itself the pleasure of destruction.”

(Nietzsche, 2013, p. 100). In addition, Pieper's "In Tune with the World" theory was preliminarily verified: The greatest significance of festivals is to affirm the world, and only by affirming the world can we have great and happy festivals.

4. Clarifying the culture of festivals via "in tune with the world"

Taking "in tune with the world" as the fundamental significance of the origin of festivals is the last and most radical clarification of Western scholars based on their own cultural traditions. Although there are needs for intermediary discussions on celebration activities from the foundation to the specific festivals, today when the festivals are generally without contents or with only superficial things, "in tune with the world" is certainly a key theoretical basis for advocating the return of the cultural values of the festivals. Specifically, its theoretical value is mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

First, "in tune with the world" as a festival theory is a universal reference value. It is undeniable that Pieper, influenced by his Catholic background, attributed the motivation of affirming the world to the Christian belief,^① which leaves the universality of the theory inevitably questioned. Specifically, in the book *In Tune with the World*, Pieper was always reserved about the possibility of people without Christian beliefs enjoying happy festivals, and repeatedly emphasized the relevance of festive happiness and Christian beliefs in the book. However, the answer from the Christian classic "The Gospel of Mark" is "belief makes people happy." It is important to know that faith is pluralistic, not a proper noun of religion. There are also "primitive beliefs," "philosophical beliefs" and "political beliefs" in addition to "religious beliefs." Moreover, belief is universal. In He Lin's view, wherever there are people, there are beliefs, no matter in the East or in the West.... Orientals also have this kind of thinking (thinking about the ultimate primitive)" (Tang, 2008, p. 103). Besides, Schopenhauer even said bluntly that human beings were "animal metaphysicum," and that "metaphysical needs closely follow the physiological needs of human beings," and most people can only have such needs satisfied via beliefs (Schopenhauer, 2015). Thus, if the Christian belief can be used as a motivation for affirming the world, then other beliefs can do the same.

Further, affirming the world is the result of the belief being confirmed, and festivals are the way and place in which the belief is confirmed. Therefore, no matter in what kind of culture or belief, the relationship between "in tune with the world" and festivals is unquestionable. Although beliefs can be an explanation for metaphysical questions, they are not the answers, for the answers are often on "That Shore," making it difficult for people living on "This Shore" to perceive or verify. Of course, the adherence to faith cannot rely solely on stubborn believers, and the belief that is completely beyond reality will not last long. To this end, they have to prove in a certain way to others that what they say is true, and with the attributes of joy and profoundness, festivals have been one of the main places for faith to prove itself. For example, Plato once explained the origin of festivals this way, "The gods pity our human destiny in hardships and misfortunes, having arranged a number of festivals to alleviate this plague. In addition to the Muse, their leader is Apollo. They also give us Dionysus to share these festivals and the festive spiritual nourishment from the gods." (*Plato Complete Works*, p. 399). In this way, the participants associate the happiness of festivals with the things they believe in, and get

① In the world, the Catholicism, the Orthodox Eastern Church and Protestantism all take the Bible as the classic, so they are collectively called Christianity.

further assurance through the answers given to them. Also, elements of belief are included in the celebration of festivals and continue to enrich festivals. The beliefs and festivals complement each other, and ultimately affirm the world. From this we can see that “in tune with the world” as the significance of the festival boasts profound universality, and naturally it can also be used to explain Chinese festivals subject to adaptation.

Second, “in tune with the world” not only points to the developmental direction of contemporary festivals, but also reveals the core issues of modernization. In the past, people didn’t believe that the phenomenal world could be directly affirmed, unless it had a general expression outside itself, and thus to affirm the strength of totality means affirming the whole world. In the West, “God” had apparently been such a totality strength, and even Kant, who strongly advocated breaking the strong narrative of God, failed to fundamentally deny his existence. In fact, Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” presupposed two unquestionable preconditions for modern philosophy: Man as a creature created is destined to exist as a finite person in essence; the phenomenon is just a *schein* (false form), and only its essence is the truth of existence. So, he believed that “only God can endow everything with truth” (Schelling, 2016, p. 17), otherwise the recognized appearance cannot be objectively proven to exist. Kant had apparently inherited Descartes’ skepticism, because according to the judgment of *Critique of Pure Reason*, transcendental reason is unquestionable, that is, there must be an insurmountable gap between thinking and extension. And human thinking cannot pass such a gap without an intermediary. Even if Kant was not willing to recognize God as the intermediary, as Schelling (2016, p. 97) said, “If this unknown thing is not God, what else?” In fact, Kant (2004, p. 111) later made a compromise, “It is absolutely necessary that people believe the existence of God, but not to prove it.”

However, the absolute narrative of God was finally deconstructed by Hegel (Hegel, 2015, p. 23), who pointed out in the *Phenomenology of Mind* that there is no such thing as a gap between thinking and extension—“Essentially, it is the past or inner existence of oneself.”

Cognitive behavior can only be the relationship between “spirit” and “object.” As an intermediary, God is not necessary to exist. In addition to Hegel, the phenomenological method of Husserl and Heidegger’s inheritance of Hegel’s phenomenology have also continued to promote the phenomenological philosophy that gets to the essence directly from the phenomenon (common phase). In this context, the discourse logic of “affirming God is affirming the world” is clearly untenable.

It is undeniable that only when the narrative of God is deconstructed can the modernization process take a substantial step forward. But at the same time, it should be noted that human metaphysical needs have always existed. If a new totality cannot be developed after “God,” people will inevitably fall into the anxiety that the world cannot be affirmed. However, the reality is that after deconstructing the old totality with the power of reflection, the enlightenment rationality itself is imprisoned in reflection and degrades into intellectuality, which means that it no longer involves metaphysical problems, and thus cannot generate any narrative that has a totality. So, we see that the inability to “affirm” has become a common problem in modern festivals. At the same time, the modernity is also criticized for its one-sided emphasis on “progress.” To this end, postmodern theorists are repeatedly emphasizing the necessity of re-endowing the world with charm through culture and art and one of the most important measurements is festivals. Just as Hegel once asserted, although it is difficult to make it with scientific rationality, if “rational religion” can appear in festivals and worship, it is possible to obtain religiousness that leads morality (Habermas, 2011, p. 28). In addition, Habermas was even optimistic that it is not impossible to develop a new totality based on the rationality of enlightenment. Exploring the

possibility of “in tune with the world” via contemporary festivals not only concerns the survival of festivals, but also exists in the epoch topic of reflection and revision of modernity.

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