

# Seeking Calmness and Self-cultivation -- The Thought Embodiment of Dietary Writing in Ji Shen Lu, a Novel of Strange Spirits in Song Dynasty

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**Abstract:** The Song Dynasty developed agriculture, cooking techniques unprecedented development, food close to the people's life became a literary writing subject. The types, production methods and edible effects of diet became a popular concern of the public, which also led to the successful emergence of diet theme in Song Dynasty literature, and a large number of works and poems related to diet appeared. Ji Shen Lu, a strange novel written by Xu Xuan in the Song Dynasty, recorded the supernatural and strange things in plain and simple words, in which the writing of diet occupies a certain length. The supernatural and supernatural features highlighted in daily diet in plain words highlight the human nature and moral proposition behind it, and the height of the prose of the novel and the story gradually rises from the diet life to the spiritual level of seeking calm and self-cultivation.

**Keywords:** Ancient Chinese Culture; Food Culture; Mystery Novels

## 1. Introduction

As Ban Gu said: "the flow of novelists is built by officials, street talk and hearsay." [1] This view highlights an important function of the novel, that is, the content of the novel comes from social reality and often reflects a certain social reality. The diet writing in the vernacular novels of the Song Dynasty gradually turned to the civilian market, the spiritual connotation object carried by the text gradually turned from the nobility to the civilian people, and the social moral phenomenon that the novel can reveal is becoming more and more obvious. Xu Xuan's *Jishenlu* reflects the theory of karma through strange novels. There are strange people and strange things in the book, such as being punished by heaven for greed and extravagant food, living in seclusion and cultivating immortals, looking for fairy herbs and famous medicines, and having strange cooking skills. Behind the record of supernatural is the proposition of morality and the constraint of virtue. The writing of food theme in the book shows the folk food fashion and orientation in the Song Dynasty.

## 2. Dietary Writing Guide in Records of Gods

A total of 23 articles closely related to diet are counted in the book. Among them, the meat diet in "Records of Gods" respectively for pork, fish, beef, chicken, duck, goose and other meat and poultry, and there are many articles and the hero greedy meat, killing excessive and god punishment and disaster related. For example, in Zhu Shi Zi [2], Zhu Shi in Guangling liked to eat beef and killed many cows. Finally, he was punished by God by turning him into a cow and dying. In "Hailing Goose Fight" (page 84), all the villagers who ate goose meat died because of their greed for goose meat.

Mountain and wild vegetable food has always been loved by the literati in the Song Dynasty, one is because of its convenience, and the other is that it often represents frugality and health. In *Shan Jia Qing Gong*, the most representative diet culture work of Song Dynasty, the introduction of vegetable food production almost occupies the whole book. Therefore, vegetative food mostly appeared in the novels of the Song Dynasty with a positive image worthy of praise. So in the book, the literati ate wild herbs and honey, which were delicious and cured of their diseases.

Seeking for immortals has always been a common topic in ancient Chinese novels. Behind this is the moral constraint. The description of immortal herbs in *Records of Gods* not only implies the

restraint of virtue, but also reflects the supremacy of destiny. In "Cui Wan an" (page 18), the family of Cui Wan an prayed to the gods and dreamed of a medicinal herb: nutmeg, which was eaten and cured. Nutmeg is recorded in compendium of *Materia Medica*, a Chinese medicine book, as having the effect of "warming the spleen and stomach and strengthening the large intestine" [3]. The food theme of immortal grass and famous medicine takes root in reality in *Records of Gods*, but is conveyed by the will of gods, which highlights the idea of disciplining people with the mandate of heaven.

Wine in the Song Dynasty literati works plays a role of inspiring poetry, with a sense of awakening and philosophical thinking. In *Records of Gods*, the function of wine is no longer the speculation between drunkenness and wakefulness in the past, but becomes a symbol of exhorting people to be sober. The tragic endings of Jian Kang Le Ren and Huang Ting Ring are both caused by drunkenness and mismanagement (page 28), and the description of excessive drinking reveals the root cause of such tragedies.

Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that the diet of meat and alcohol often represents a negative or even a symbol of greed, while the diet of vegetables and cultivating immortals has become a positive advocate of frugality, self-discipline and natural law life.

### **3. The Pursuit of Self-cultivation and Moral Health**

The manifestation of gods and karma advocated in *Records of Gods* are closer to folk life in the diet theme. In "Lushan Oil Seller" (page 13), the oil seller was shocked to death by a thunderstorm because of oil fraud. In Song Dynasty, there were records of edible vegetable oil. The production process of vegetable oil was complicated, and it was very precious compared with animal oil. The article "Oil Seller in Lushan Mountain" reflected the customs of traders at that time to sell animal and plant oil, and appealed for the moral quality of honest business. But in fact, it more reflects a similar pursuit of health. In Master Chen (page 54), the hero of the novel does not want to seek immortals because he knows that the price of seeking immortals is to eat babies. The reason for this result is the existence of conscience.

From the author's point of view, cultivating immortals and preserving health is not to sacrifice morality and conscience, but to cultivate one's morality by being strict with oneself and to preserve one's health by observing morality. It is the author's intention to express through gods and spirits.

### **4. The Call of the Value Orientation of Seeking Frugality**

Ancient Chinese people advocated integrity and simplicity, especially prominent in the diet. Taking bamboo shoots as an example, people in the Song Dynasty pay attention to bamboo shoots. In addition to bamboo shoots, fresh vegetables in mountain forests are a representative of begging for light. Bee Yu in Ji Shen Lu emphasizes the unique effect of wild vegetables. The quality of Shang Jian is concentrated in the stories of The Rich in Hefei, Pinggu People, Hailing Goose Fighting, Zhu Zi and Zhang's Wife. The tragedies of these stories are all caused by greedy eating, waste and extravagance, and the desire to kill for themselves.

It can be seen from the details of diet that carnivores kill inordinate and vegetarians get sick and keep healthy. From the diet orientation in the novel, we can get a glimpse of the diet view of the Song Dynasty that advocated frugality and frugality.

### **5. Conclusion**

Daily diet shines brightly in the literary works of the Song Dynasty. In the eyes of the literati of the Song Dynasty, diet is no longer a common thing, but a bearing and sustenance closer to the reality of life. The diet of strange novels, with the theme of strange gods, explores the breath rooted in reality and appeals for the emergence of moral conscience. It can be said that dietary elements can not be ignored in *Records of Gods*, so as to better explain the results and strange things, but it is only limited to the novel, which is obviously not far. However, the exploration of food concept in poetry and novels from the perspective of food enhances the realistic significance of the novel and endows the quality of internalization of food in terms of the proposition of seeking lightness and self-cultivation in *Records of Gods*.

## References

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