

Ritual and Belief: a Case Study of the Consecration Ritual in Guanyin Temple of Xiaochuan, a Yi Nationality Village of Weishan County, Dali, Yunnan Province

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Abstract: the consecration ritual is an important religious activity in which human communicates with the god. Between the worship of statues and the demands of villagers, the taoist who presides over the ritual is the bridge between human and the god. From the perspective of sacredness, statues and tributes are endowed with symbolic significance through the ritual of consecration. From the perspective of secularity, tributes and statues express people's demands in real life through worshiping and consecration. The acquisition of this sense of ceremony embodies the mutual construction and interaction between the sacred and the profane, and expresses the sanctity of the traditional religious beliefs of the yi people.

1. Introduction

The ritual, as an important concept in anthropology, derives various definitions and interpretations from its historical changes. In a broad sense, it is the general term of all activities related to human life ceremonies. According to Geoffrey Leech, words (prayers, incantations and hymns) have the same characteristics and values as gestures and utensils. In the narrow sense, it mainly refers to religious statements, sacrifices, ceremonies, celebrations, worship activities and so on. However, "ritual" has different interpretations in different documents. *Ci Hai* says, "ritual" is the order and form of ceremonies as well as the standardized etiquette. In the *Concise Encyclopedia Britannica*, "ritual" is defined as follows. "Rituals are developed from traditional habits. They are generally accepted ways of behavior. The basic function is to make people understand each other. In this regard, rituals and languages have something in common." Another interpretation of "ritual" comes from the *Concise Dictionary of Cultural Anthropology*. "The ritual refers to a series of arrangements or procedures that have symbolic significance and are carried out according to certain cultural traditions." It is not difficult to find that the understanding and interpretation of the word vary due to different perspectives and backgrounds. But there is one thing in common, that is, the acquisition and interpretation of rituals come from the real human life. In human life, there must be ritual activities in this way or another. As long as you experience the whole process of a ritual, you can combine the cultural connotation and symbolic meaning with ritual activities and then understand and interpret them.

The field work in this paper is carried out in the Xiaochuan village, a natural village under the new village committee of Nanzhao Town, Weishan County, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province. Xincun, located in the south of Nanzhao Town, is 7 kilometers away from the government of Nanzhao Town. Under the jurisdiction of the whole village, there are 9 village groups, including the Xincun village, the Fanjia village, the Luoja village, the Xiaochuan village and others. There are 7 Yi villages and 2 Han villages. There are 27 households in the Xiaochuan village where the consecration of Guanyin temple is held. It is a Yi village.

From July 31 to August 1, 2018, the author watched and participated in the consecration of Guanyin Temple in Xiaochuan village. The ceremony was presided over by Xuanyang Kong, the Taoist priest in Weishan County, and his two assistants. The whole village raised funds to build the temple and participated in the ceremony. It embodies the integration of Taoism and local beliefs of

ethnic minorities.

2. The Worshipping Place and Objects

2.1 The Construction of the Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) Temple

The Guanyin Temple faces north, and its gate faces east. The main building adopts the structure of bricks and tiles. The walls are painted with lotus and green auspicious clouds. The internal structure is relatively simple, which includes the main hall, two compartments in the west Wing hall, and an ash stove in the south. One compartment places the statue of Gongming Zhao, the God of wealth, and the other compartment is built as the kitchen. The overall construction is relatively simple, but has complete functions .

2.2 God Statues

The main god is Guanyin (Avalokitesvara). Villagers in Xiaochuan village believe that Guanyin is the third princess, a mythical figure in local legends. The Taoist who presided over the ceremony thought that the third princess was a Taoist goddess, Miaoshan. It embodies the combination of the gods system of institutional religion with the local beliefs of ethnic minorities. Beside the third princess are her sisters, the eldest and the second princesses. On the left is the waiter Sudhana, the boy of good fortune, and on the right is the girl, the Dragon Maid.

The side hall of the left places the statue of Gongming Zhao, the God of wealth. He holds the shoe-shaped gold ingot in one hand, and the whip in the other. His face is black with thick beard; he rides a black tiger.

2.3 Temple Layout

The walls on both sides of the main hall are painted with Dali local style patterns, with pine and crane on the left and landscape on the right. There are handwritten couplets on the left and right sides. The left roll writes, “let the crane go to visit guests from three islands”; the right roll writes, “invite the plum blossom to drink together with me in the spring”.

On the left side of the gate is, “asking Buddha and Bodhisattva to manifest their golden bodies”, and on the right side is, “building a temple by the strength of unity”. These is another Taoist couplet inside. “The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. Man follows the earth. Earth follows the universe. The universe follows the Tao. The Tao follows the nature.” The horizontal scroll bears the inscription, ”Tao follows the nature.” There is another red horizontal sign inside, which says “grant whatever is requested“. The style of decorative painting and the content of couplets reflect the local cultural characteristics and the integration of various beliefs in ethnic minority areas.

The main altar is surrounded by colorful banners tied by ropes, with the names of various Taoist immortals written on it. During the ceremony, the presiding Taoist priest invited and sent these gods.

2.4 Reasons for Temple Construction

The old site of Xiaochuan village has a history of more than 300 years. The original Guanyin temple has a history of more than 200 years. It was destroyed during the cultural revolution. Villagers raised money to rebuild temples due to frequent natural disasters this year. Inside the temple, there are stone tablets, which record the fund raising process and expense details. It reflects the piety of the villagers as well as their cautious and fair attitude towards religious affairs.

3. The Ritual Process

The ritual lasted for two days. The host was a Taoist, Xuanyang Kong and two assistants. All villagers participated. The first day is the preparation; the second day is the formal consecration.

3.1 The First Day of Preparation

3.1.1 Getting the Water

The Taoist priest dressed in a robe, recited scriptures at the front of the incense burner table, then went out to the door with a water bottle to the gate. He recited the scriptures and got the holy water, and then went into the yard to stand in front of the “crane” to sing the scriptures. The old and young Yi people knelt down and kowtowed, and then entered the main hall to continue sing the scriptures, which means that the disaster can be solved. The purpose of singing in front of the crane is to let all the immortals ride the crane to this place after hearing about the scriptures, because the crane is a common mount in Taoism.

3.1.2 Inviting the God

The Taoist priest prepared an ultimatum in advance to record the names of each family. After chanting the scriptures, the Taoist priest took the “holy water” to the outdoor and asked Gods to enter the alter. Firecrackers were fired all the time in this ritual. The whole ceremony means that after accepting the ultimatum, the gods are invited to enter the alter with the “holy water”.

3.1.3 Worshipping the Goddess Doumu

Doumu was originally the Goddess of stars in Taoism. She lived in Doufu and was the goddess of Ziji who could save lives. “Doumu” is also knows as the “Doumu emperor” or the “Zhongtian Fanqi Doumu emperor”. “Dou” refers to Beidou stars (the Big Dipper) and “Mu” refers to the mother. According to the Taoist Scriptures, Doumu is “the mother of all the stars of Beidou”.

Goddess Doumu is in charge of wind, rain and thunder, so they should sing and recite the Dou scriptures and pray for blessings.

3.1.4 An Luan

The An Luan ceremony means to invite the gods to sit down and wait for the formal ritual of the next day. At this time, the Taoist priest changed his red garment with a black one. The whole process of An Luan used the scriptures of Sanqing. After singing and reciting, they read the Doumu tables of villagers one by one, and burnt the tables of all families, in order to deliver wishes to the gods. At 5:20 p.m. that day, all preparation finished.

3.2 Consecration in the Next Day

3.2.1 Opening the Court

The ritual officially began at 8 o'clock. First of all, the flags of the “crane” were placed smoothly and safely. The next process is An Zhai, namely to make sure that all the immortals invited yesterday have a good meal.

3.2.2 Qing en (Praying for Mercy)

The Taoist priest, dressed in a red robe and armed with a command arrow, sang scriptures to ask the Jade Emperor to set up a forgiveness field in the hall. During the process, the Taoist priest firstly held the command arrow, then changed it with an instrument with the dragon head. After singing and reciting, he handed the dragon head instrument to the old man who knelt down behind him. The old man is the most respected in the Xiaochuan village. The purpose of the ceremony is to ask the Jade Emperor to forgive all the faults of the villagers, and to bless the good weather for the crops, as well as the safeness and good luck for villagers.

3.2.3 Repent to the God of Thunder

The Taoist priest carried the yellow and red mounting texts to sing and recite the mantra. The red text represents seeking wealth, and the yellow text represents seeking peace. The priest prayed for the God of thunder to come to Xiaochuan village. Villagers repented to the God of thunder and prayed for peace.

3.2.4 The Formal Consecration

After lunch, the formal consecration began.

First, the Taoist priest held the command arrow, steps Yubu, and sings the scriptures. Yubu, also known as Jiuzigangbu, is the step of Taoist rites. Baopuzi records, “all laws are connected with Yubu”.

Second, the Taoist priest stood on the platform with a towel. He wiped the face, hands, the neck, sleeves and legs of the statue. After wiping, he lit two rows of six candles, bowing to God and chanting scriptures.

The third step is taking blood. The villagers delivered a rooster prepared in advance. The Taoist priest took the rooster, walked Yubu, drank the holy water, sprayed three mouthfuls at the head of the rooster, and then cut off the crown of the rooster and let the blood flow down. Then he dipped the chicken blood with a brush and marked the statue in the center of eyebrows, eyes, the nose, the mouth, earlobes, sleeves and the front part of feet with the chicken blood. After finishing the ceremony, the consecration ritual is completed, marking the official presence of gods in the temple.

3.2.5 The Sanguan Sanzhuan Scripture

After the statue's consecration, the Taoist priest sang the Sanguan Sanzhuan Scripture (heaven, earth and water) for the villagers to pray for the good weather.

3.2.6 Untangle Star Knots

Villagers' representatives walked around the beam column on the stage. The Taoist priest holds his command arrow and sings the scriptures. Two red ropes which are entwined and another black rope are hung on the column. The black rope represents safety; red ropes represent health and longevity. Under the leadership of the Taoist priest, the villagers turned around, burned a rune and untied a knot until all the red knots are opened. Finally, the red rope was wrapped around an old man's waist to worship the statue of Guanyin and pray for health and longevity. The black rope was thrown down to be picked up by the villagers. Those lucky enough to get the black rope will be blessed by the gods.

3.2.7 Offering Sacrifices to God

The Taoist priest poured wine and offered it to each deity. Then the Taoist priest and his assistants stood on both sides of the hall, chanting and sending away gods in the banners on both sides of the hall.

4. Appealing: Blessing and Protection

First of all, the folk traditional religious belief is rooted in the hearts of villagers. The traditional religious belief of the third princess is deeply rooted in the minds of villagers in Xiaochuan village. The villagers later moved to three scattered areas under the coordination of the government; there were only 27 families in this village. But it is precisely because the belief of the third princess occupies an extremely important position in everyone's mind that they have a strong sense of religious ritual.

Secondly, the centripetal force of the Yi and Han nationalities is condensed through the religious ritual. Xiaochuan village is a traditional natural village of Yi nationality, but in the whole process of the ritual, Han people also participated. For instance, the Brother Fan who painted the statue has been helping Yi villagers to make portraits and take care of the surrounding areas for two days although he is the Han nationality. The whole process of fieldwork truly revealed the unity and integration of national relations.

Moreover, the consecration ritual bears the wishes of villagers. The reason for the construction of Guanyin Temple is the frequent occurrence of natural disasters. The reconstruction of Guanyin temple and the grand consecration are the appeal and wish of all villagers to seek the God's blessing. The construction of Guanyin Temple bears the collective demands of villagers.

5. Conclusion

A two-day consecration of the Guanyin temple was held in Xiaochuan village, where there were only 27 households. No household was absent. It can be seen that the villagers of Xiaochuan attach importance to religious beliefs and rituals. Durkheim once summarized the four functions of religious ceremony: punishment, cohesion, giving people vitality and entertainment. The sense of acquisition of the traditional religious rituals in Xiaochuan village comes from villagers' daily life. The collective practice of religious rituals reaffirmed the social unity. This kind of social cohesion can unify villagers through the power of religion. However, the communication between man and God should be realized through the Taoist priest, through a certain “threshold” and the space of rituals, which contain various religious instruments, offerings, scriptures and incantations which are endowed with sanctity. Sacrifice is the product of secularization, but secularization and sacredness can form a good interactive mode, and then form a harmonious, stable and convergent relationship. These secularized products express and convey the real demands of people behind the worshipping of God through the solemn rituals. Only by following all kinds of religious regulations, the worship and appeal can realize people's long cherished wishes as much as possible through the Taoist priest's orderly communication, which also maintains the balance between the material world and the spiritual world. More importantly, through the acquisition of these religious rituals, people can interpret the spiritual value behind them, and fully integrate the understanding of human and God into the whole religious ritual process.

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