

Rethinking Religion in Chinese Society——Comment on Religion in Chinese Society

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Abstract: In the 1990s, foreign sociological theories of religion were introduced into China on a large scale, and a large number of excellent translations appeared. However, many scholars have found that the research theories and research results in many translations are difficult to explore the religious phenomenon in Chinese society. The publication of Yang Qingkun's book "Religion in Chinese Society" can be said to have created a new chapter in the study of Chinese society and religion. Yang creatively regarded religious organizations and religious phenomena in Chinese society as "divergent religions", which roughly summed up the essential characteristics and manifestations of religions in Chinese society. This book comprehensively and systematically studies the relationship between religious entities, religious ceremonies, and grassroots society in Chinese society. His research involves the growth and development of Chinese mainstream religions in rural communities, trying to break free from Western definitions of religion. It is a pioneering work to study Chinese religion from a sociological perspective. From the perspective of social structural functionalism, it is important to study the formation, characteristics and relationships of "divergent" religions in our country. This paper briefly reviews Yang's works, and explores the formation of rural social order with the help of Yang's research vision and research methods on Chinese social religion.

Keywords: divergent religion; the social function of Chinese religion; the formation of rural social order

1. Introduction

1.1. The "institutional nature" of religion in Western society and the "divergence" of religion in China's rural society

Before Yang, some scholars had done some research on Chinese religion, but none of them had a good understanding of the overall appearance of Chinese society and religion. The question that has puzzled scholars at home and abroad for a long time is whether religion exists in Chinese society? Some scholars have also expressed their views on this. For example, the famous Chinese philosopher Liang Shuming once said: "The weakest place in the world is China, where Chinese people have the least attitude towards religion, and Chinese philosophy research can almost occupy the majority of Chinese people. For a lifetime, therefore, there is no need to scrutinize the question of whether there is a religion in China." [1] Weber, a well-known German sociologist, expounded the religions in Chinese society—Confucianism and Taoism from the perspective of Western thought in the book "Religion in China: Confucianism and Taoism". Yang thought that whether Weber's interpretation of Confucianism and Taoism was not in line with its real situation, the question he raised was whether Weber used Confucianism and Taoism to explain religion in Chinese society. From this book, Yang puts forward a different view on Weber's point of view: "Confucianism only cares about the ultimate meaning of life and death, but it is mainly reflected in people's social and moral responsibility, and does not pay attention to any supernatural factors." [2] Yang pointed out that the views of Hu Shi et al. are actually a reaction to viewing Chinese culture with Western religious values, and he believes that Chinese society is also a religious society. First of all, religion is the belief of the soul and the ritual behavior derived from this belief, and the Chinese-style discourse on religion is the standard that distinguishes religion from non-religion by taking supernatural factors as the central object. Secondly, in terms of practical functions, Chinese religion has a wide range of functional factors, such as providing social organization integration and order, economic development, and God blessing health. Therefore, Chinese society is not without religion, but is ignored because it does not have the specific organizational form of Western religions. It can be said that religion in Chinese society has the characteristics of low organization, strong function, and wide distribution.

In the early days, Li Tiangang believed that religions in Chinese society and culture were underdeveloped, and there were almost no religions; if there were, they were all foreign religions. ^[3]The above viewpoints are based on the concepts and characteristics of Western religions, such as a unified belief subject, a unified group of believers, and a unified organizational norm system, which reflects the high degree of institutionalization and unity of Western religions. Durkheim defines religion from a substantive definition. From his definition, we can know that Young's definition is basically inherited from him.

Yang obtained inspiration from the investigation of religion from the perspective of structural functionalism, and believed that the phenomenon and content of religion in China should be further understood, and cannot be understood simply by the organization and unity of religion in Western society. He uses a large number of local chronicles to explore the relationship between Chinese local religion and local society, and uses a research paradigm that is very different from Western religions to grasp religion in Chinese society. Yang believes that the temple buildings and worship activities scattered all over China indicate the existence and form of religion in Chinese society, Yang said: "The common religious concepts and activities of the Chinese people fill the whole society, and this religious phenomenon does not require an independent system. , specialized clergy as the basis, whose religious function is mainly through the family system and a large-scale rectification network system". ^[4]Zheng Xiaoxiao said that although China has not yet established a complete religious theoretical system, the religious phenomenon and religious content in Chinese society are very rich, and the people have rich experience in religious practice, and a pluralistic and integrated religious model has been formed.^[5]

It is not unreasonable that Yang's concept of "decentralized religion" has attracted widespread attention from the academic circles once it was put forward. "This concept defines a sociological norm-compliant model for religious forms in Chinese society, and at the same time enables those belief rituals that exist in folk life to be generalized and analyzed as Chinese religions." ^[6]In Yang's writings, "distributed religion" does not have structure and organization. It can be seen from his works that although religion in Chinese society does not have structural characteristics, it is attached to the foundation of institutional religion religious organizations.

1.2. The emergence and continuation of "divergent" religions in Chinese society

Chinese traditional religion is a "generalized" religion, and the teachings, rituals and organizations of this religion are mixed with other secular social life and institutions, and the manifestations are "harmony between heaven and man", "conditioning the four seasons" , Taihe all things" and other metaphysical concepts. ^[7]It is manifested in small traditions and daily life, and can be found in marriage and funeral habits, geomantic geography, and divine rituals. Yang saw the manifestations of Chinese religions and classified them into "institutional religions" and "distributed religions". Since the birth of human society, the development of human society and history has always been filled with the flavor of religion. This is Weber's point of view. The investigation of the early totem system and totem society with the method of empirical research has been confirmed, and the birth of religion in Chinese society can be seen from the works of Weber and Taylor. As a person in a society, being able to join a religion or become a person in a religion is closely related to his way of life, social background and conditions and his own factors. Yang believes that the conditions and basis for the emergence and continuation of religions should be found from the historical environment and background. This can not only be verified from the objective historical background, but also to explore the subjective factors of each person's cognitive, emotional and other psychological activities.

In the past, natural disasters had a great impact on people's lives, production and labor, and people were highly dependent on the natural environment. If you encounter good weather, you can barely maintain food and clothing. However, if you encounter extreme weather, such as heavy rain, sun exposure, etc., it will pose a serious threat to people's life safety. Living in such a harsh natural environment, people are often afraid of uncertain events. Therefore, in order to ensure safety and avoid disasters, people's worship and belief in gods naturally arise. "The sacrificial ceremonies of monasteries and civil communities are based on family and rural society. They carefully arrange various plans and organize various activities to ensure a peaceful and stable life." ^[8]From the history of Chinese social and historical development, it can be found that the frequency of social dynasties changes is still relatively high.

For religious groups and organizations, the attitudes of each ruler are inconsistent , and the dynasties are often confronted with swords and soldiers, life is ruined, and the people are struggling. In this historical period, the society will be in a period of violent turmoil, and to a certain extent It has shaken the original social values and social norms, causing people to feel a certain "anomie". Some members of

society will feel a sense of loss of security, and religion has become a more convenient means and way for these people to obtain spiritual comfort and psychological balance. Therefore, the change of dynasties not only will not disappear because of the "prohibition" of rule, but will continue and retain it.

Each religion has its own specific religious ceremonies. For example, in Shangquan Tun Temple, Qishan County, Baoji City, there are temple fairs that last for 10 days in February and July of the lunar calendar every year. Before the temple fair, the administrators of the temple fair and people from all over the world began to prepare various kinds of incense paper, incense money and cloth for offering. One side is safe. "The temples and ritual activities became tangible proofs of identity, a model for Lukang's social structure, which was provided by the town's temples and its festivals," explains Wu Yashi. ^[9]According to Wu Yashi, grassroots temple organizations and rituals provided a way to maintain grassroots social connection and unity. Taking religious organizations and ritual activities in Shangquan Tun Temple, Qishan County, Baoji City as an example, according to Wu Yashi, the existence of Chinese grassroots religious organizations stems from the regular repetition of such ritual activities every year.

1.3. The distribution and manifestations of religion in Chinese grassroots society

According to Yang's argument, Chinese society is full of traces of religious phenomena. Through the author's observation, no matter in northern or southern society, temples, ancestral halls, portraits of gods, etc. are scattered everywhere, and there are countless. According to the Records of Qishan County, in 1984, Baique Temple was opened as the first Buddhist site, and there were 21 other Buddhist sites in the county, such as Nanpo Temple, Huiru Temple, Fengming Temple, Fahua Temple, Longquan Temple, Anguan Temple, Jile Temple, Sleeping Buddha Temple, Shuangfu Temple, Zhangba Temple, etc., there are as many as 30,000 Protestant people. ^[10]According to interviews conducted by the author, there are hundreds of folk religious sites and organizations in a single county in Guangqishan County. These religious places scattered among the people all have their own special sacrificial ceremonies, sacrificial times and procedures. In addition, according to the data, a field survey of a village called Nanqing near Guangdong shows that there are 8 temples, ancestral halls and altars in the village of 223 households. Still in a village called Sangyuanwei in Guangdong, 161 households have 5 temples, ancestral halls and altars, and it is calculated that 32 households have 1 temple on ^[11]average. It can be seen that the number and types of religious places in the grassroots society in China are numerous, and it also shows from the side that the content of religion in Chinese society is vast and rich.

For a long time, when the orthodox sects of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were recognized as official religious systems, the above-mentioned religions rooted in traditional Chinese rural society were forgotten. ^[12]The development of traditional religions in China can be traced back to the Zhou Dynasty and was fully developed before the introduction of foreign Buddhism. The grassroots social organization in China is the family. Understanding the religious worship in the family can also help us understand the religion in Chinese society. In a northern Chinese family, different gods have different functions. The land master who keeps the whole family safe, etc. It is necessary to worship a specific god on a specific day, and the time, food or fruit of the worship are all very particular.

Ancestor worship is the ultimate content of family religious activities, and its role helps to strengthen the cohesion of family members and promote the degree of solidarity among family members. Through a series of operations such as funerals and mourning, the family of the deceased can maintain its social status in the village community, and determining the family's status in the community is also a role played by ancestor worship. Family members offer food to the deceased at the meal money, and then take it down and share it among family members to express their memory of family members and maintain the relationship with the deceased.

2. Chinese Religion from the Perspective of Functionalism

2.1. Religious organizations and their social functions in grassroots society

Unlike Western countries, Chinese history has not had a strong and highly organized religion for most of its history. China's religion is relatively loose, and it is closely related to the secular legal system. Chinese religion has an important position and function in society, which is manifested in monasteries, ancestral halls, altars and places of worship and their powerful functions. These all demonstrate the powerful and ubiquitous influence of religion in Chinese society. An important reason why religion is in a very ambiguous position in Chinese society is the lack of an organized religion with a significant structure within the framework of the Chinese social system. And people are accustomed to seeing

common people's rituals as unorganized, as if they were less important in Chinese society.

Clans generally have fixed ancestral halls, and one or several ancestral halls will be built. The ancestral halls symbolize the same blood relationship. Clan organizations spread throughout China's vast rural society, relying on ancestor worship to maintain descendant continuity and internal solidarity. The center of the clan's ancestor worship is the ancestor's ancestral hall, which is generally the most striking building in the village. Many sacrificial ceremonies are held every year, and a lot of food is offered during the sacrificial period. The whole sacrificial process is carefully arranged. In the end all clan members are gathered in one place, and intergroup relations are maintained and continued. People have a sense of solidarity and a deep sense of group because of sharing food. Therefore, the cohesion of the group rises suddenly, and the community organization is integrated. For people in rural society, the ancestral hall is not only a place to discuss important affairs, but also to provide economic and material help for people within the clan. The clan organization not only maintains the internal order of the clan with the same surname, but also has the function of resisting the intrusion of foreign clan forces. ^[13]The clan organization has a set of clan rules and regulations for specific matters and the actual situation of the clan. If an individual is separated from the group, it will be difficult to survive, but to survive in the Chinese agricultural society based on the clan system, these regulations must be followed.

Worship groups. In traditional society, in addition to the clan organization formed by blood relationship, there is also a new social organization and social relationship caused by sworn affiliation. Men and women formed their own fraternities or sororities through "worship" rituals to form brothers and sisters with different surnames. They worship the sky and ghosts, and worship the earth to form a stable and united social organization. We can verify it from the famous historical figures Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei during the Three Kingdoms period. They worship the heaven and earth with incense, kowtow, and make alliances with blood, which means that they will abide by brotherhood in future exchanges, maintain loyalty to each other, and jointly resist social risks. The sworn ritual sanctifies the new social relationship formed under the sworn ritual, implying that anyone in the sworn sworn violates the relationship of loyalty and mutual assistance will be punished by "God". After the formation of this sworn relationship, individuals in the sworn society can not only get emotional needs and comfort, but also get economic and material help, and to some extent, fulfill the function of family.

Temple fair organization. In the past farming society, people had a high probability of surviving only in social groups. This was not only reflected in production development, clothing and food, but also in resisting natural risks and medical security. The people in the traditional society basically rely on the "sky" to eat. Therefore, officials and governments at all levels of the country will make sacrifices on behalf of the farmers to the "God of Agriculture" at a specific time, praying for a blessing from the "God of Agriculture". The bumper harvest of crops brings a year of "good weather". ^[14]The harsh living environment makes people gradually realize the limitations of their own abilities and obtain their own protection by praying to supernatural powers. In the worship of industry gods in northern communities, temple fairs are the largest community gatherings. Most temple fairs are usually held in spring and autumn. People mainly seek good luck and good harvest by worshipping related gods in temples. Community temples do not specifically refer to temple fairs organized by Buddhist organizations. There are many temples that enshrine gods from many different "god" gods. For example, when a child wants to get into a university, he worships "Kui Xing", and a man wants to do business or go out. Just worship the "God of Xing" or "God of Wealth" and so on. However, the author learned that in the northern rural society, some great historical figures can also be worshipped as objects, and they can govern daily life, fortune and official transportation, study, get married and have children, etc. The motivation behind the continuation of the temple fair is the belief that each deity can give back to the prayers.

2.2. Basic religious ethics and its social functions

Chinese folk religions and Confucianism have added the idea of "Mandate of Heaven", and Confucianism and folk religions are all over the traditional Chinese society. In traditional Chinese society, although there are no huge sectarian organizations like Western countries, there are also large and small religious organizations active in the vast civil society system.

Chinese primitive religions is the worship of heaven, the gods and ancestors under the jurisdiction of heaven, where "heaven" has the supreme power, and the gods under "heaven" are responsible for governing people and ghosts world. "The Mandate of Heaven" is attached to the infinite worship of "Heaven" and the system of gods belonging to "Heaven". This system includes the occurrence and development of all things in the world. This concept is not only respected by the regimes of the past dynasties, but also by ordinary people accepted. "In the solemn sacrificial ceremony of the empire, the

emperor as the representative of the people will appear on the majestic Temple of Heaven. After fasting, accompanied by the flamboyant court officials, the emperor slowly walks to the Temple of Heaven. At this moment, the sacred existence is immediately shrouded. On the earth, the four seasons are guaranteed, the weather is good, and the people live and work in peace and contentment; and only through the orders of heaven, the emperor can become the king of a country." [15]The concept of "mandate of heaven" also depends on the people taking heaven as the supreme power, and this power can be predicted and change everything in the world.

Later, in order to legitimize their own right to rule and consolidate their own rule, the ruling class deduced the theory of "harmony between man and nature". After Dong Zhongshu's explanation, the theory of "unity of man and nature" gradually became a guiding political principle in the Han Dynasty. concept. [16]The idea of "harmony between man and nature" is very simple. When the monarch or the people do something that violates the laws of nature and social morality, it means disturbing the norms stipulated by "heaven"; therefore, "heaven" must warn or punish people. Such warnings and punishments are presumably expressed in the form of some abnormal natural phenomenon, such as droughts, floods, unseasonable snow and rain, and the destruction of human habitation by fires. The uncertainty of nature, coupled with the ruling class's vigorous promotion of the idea of "harmony between man and nature" in order to maintain its rule, the supreme power of "heaven" was transferred to the ruler through "unity of man and nature". In short, the core of the ethics and morality of the society as a middle and grassroots religious belief is that the ideology of "Heaven" and "Heaven and Man are one" continue to continue.

2.3. Religious ceremonies and their social functions in grassroots society

Whether it is ancestor worship or deity worship, different community organizations and ethnic groups have their own specific ritual process and content, which are directly related to their social background and social environment. [17]Religious ceremonies place people in a sacred environment. For family sacrifices, the general sacrificial forms are: in the first three years of the death of family members, incense can be burned every morning and evening, and in front of the tablets or portraits symbolizing the dead, the devout bowing and bowing, In his mouth, he narrated some thoughts about the deceased, and the smoky scene of burning incense seemed to be endowed with a kind of sacredness at this moment. Yang believes that this is the way the living and the dead in the family communicate, showing that the dead still play a role in the world of the living. This is a simple ritual activity, but it strengthens the cohesion of the family, strengthens the members of the group to become more united because of the nostalgia for the deceased, and realizes the function of community integration within the family.

In every aspect of everyday life at the grassroots level, the pervasive taboos and certain sacred rituals make us aware of the influence of supernatural forces on people. In a traditional society, most people do not have much knowledge. Generation after generation, people mainly pass on production and life skills from the previous generation. Most of the customary sacrificial regulations of the previous generation are derived from myths and legends. For example, it is said that the old man ties a pair of men and women together with an invisible red rope, indicating that the marriage in the past life will continue in this life. The girl should stare at the sky the day before July 7th, and if she sees two stars crossing the Milky Way, it means that the marriage destined in the previous life is about to come. Another example is that when a child is born to a hundred days, it is necessary to avoid some special people, so as not to bring uncertainty to the child. The observance of these religious taboos is based on the belief that human destiny can be either good or bad under the influence of supernatural factors. These taboos actually help people to keep striving to comply with ethical norms and social constraints, which in turn contribute to a stable community environment.

3. The Construction of Local Social Order and Religion in Grassroots Society: Taking Temple Fairs as an Example

Religion in Chinese society does not have a unified institutional and strictly hierarchical religious system like that in Western countries. The objects and methods of belief of the Chinese people are determined by the functions of gods, and gods and ancestors are the main objects of worship. There are many temples in the northern counties, and there are temple fairs during the slack season. The local people generally call this "following the temple fair". Since ancient times, this "following the temple fair" has been an important interpersonal activity for people.

Wuzhangyuan Zhugeliang Temple was built in the Yuan Dynasty, and the temple fair also began. During the Ming Dynasty, local officials held temple fairs twice a year, which have continued to this day.

The temple fairs are mainly funded by the local government or social elites. Later, it was expanded and rebuilt with the efforts and help of the county magistrates and wealthy businessmen at that time, which ensured the social voice of the elites.

Locally, Zhuge Liang was known as the "Eternal Dragon", who devoted himself to the unification of the Central Plains by Shu and Han. His historical image of his great personality charm and wisdom, being kind to the people, and strategizing strategies made him an omnipotent figure in people's minds. god".^[18]February every year is the grandest time of the Zhuge Liang Temple Fair. During the temple fair, incense-sellers, tourists, livestock sellers, and goods sellers all come to the temple on time. The incense-sellers will pay their respects for peace and a good harvest. People who sell goods will also come to pay their respects.^[19]There are special people who set up the stage to sing opera and sing Zhuge Liang's great achievements to show their memory, and there are special Taoist monks and nuns to recite sutras. On the second day of the temple fair, the organizers of the temple fair and the more prestigious elders in the village or the young people with status will hang red for the "Jade Emperor", "Queen Mother" and "Nine Heavenly Mother", and then drip the blood from their hands into the temple. In the bowl, elders with higher social status threw blood and water on the statues. This ritual activity promoted the mutual communication between people, strengthened the unity of grassroots social organizations, and further consolidated everyone's relationship. Common cognition concept. There are also people with higher status who guide a group of people with more status and prestige in the local area to recite a passage of scriptures together, and after the recitation, participate in and manage important things during the temple fair, so as to re-emphasize the hierarchical order in the village community.

The regular holding of grand temple fairs is often accompanied by the penetration of religious beliefs into the daily life of the people. The author explores the domination of social power within the village community through the investigation of the Zhuge Liang temple fair. After analyzing the rebuilding process of people, villages and regional temples and folk beliefs, the research results are: local elites, local governments and social elites play an important role in the formation of villages, regional temples and beliefs have a dominant position.

When discussing religious ceremonies and etiquette, Yang focused on the important role of religious ethical concepts and factors in the rationality of the regime, the establishment of people's values, and the stimulation of people's emotions in life. The author believes that regular temple fairs and corresponding ceremonies have inherited and strengthened the inter-village and inter-village exchanges to a certain extent. The process of holding activities in the temple fair realizes "ritual" and "teaching", but this "ritual teaching" is carried out by the gods on the surface, but it is actually the belief in people's hearts. "Ritual is the behavioral expression and symbolic expression that best reflects the essential characteristics of human beings. It reflects and expresses local people's understanding, interpretation and view of people and the world, and reveals the basic structure of their cultural and social life and the overall operating norms. , Logic and Order ".^[20]People's unified recognition and respect for "Zhuge Liang"'s loyalty, intelligence, and the spirit of pioneering the country. On the surface, it is to worship "Gods" like Zhuge Liang. In fact, it is also a recognition of the more prestigious and powerful people in temple fairs. and attachment. During the Zhuge Liang Temple Fair, if someone violates the long-standing folk customs, they will be criticized and abused by people, which is considered to be disrespectful to "Zhuge Liang". The above research shows that religion in Chinese society plays an important role in the construction and maintenance of social order at the moral level and the level of the rural contract system.

4. Conclusion

Based on Waha's structural perspective and Tian Like's functional analysis, Yang Qingkun's book Religion in Chinese Society was published, opening a new world for the study of Chinese religion at home and abroad. Yang put forward the term "divergent religion" through a large number of local chronicles investigation and research, and explained its concept and characteristics in detail, and showed that the religion in Chinese society has low organization, strong function, and wide distribution. Features. There is a strong refutation of the claim that there is no real religion in Chinese society.

Furthermore, this article interprets Yang's interpretation of the emergence, development and continuation of "distributed" religions in China. The emergence of religions in grassroots society is due to people's fear of the unknown, social turmoil, and incomprehension of nature. The continuation of development is because the rulers and grassroots leaders maintain their rule, and the local people's view of "mandate of heaven" and the theory of "destiny" naturally formed.

At the end of this paper, based on the author's own field investigation observation and analysis, it is

concluded that: first, regular temple fairs and corresponding ceremonies are held, which to a certain extent inherits and strengthens the communication between villages and between villagers. Second, it ensures the social domination and discourse rights of the local power classes and elites. Third, the regular holding of religious ceremonies helps to strengthen people's rural contract system and moral concepts that have been inherited from history, and invisibly strengthens people's recognition of grassroots rulers and social norms.

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