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Brief Analysis of Religious Sacrificial Activities in Agricultural Production of Ethnic Minorities in China

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Abstract China is vast in territory and there are 55 ethnic minorities. Due to the geographical location, the experience in the development process and the stage of cultural development, ethnic minorities show great differences with Han people in many aspects, so that in the process of obtaining food, they manifest different cultural characteristics, especially the religious sacrifices and taboos present in the agricultural production process show more uniqueness and retain more primitive features.

Key words Ethnic minorities in China, Agricultural production, Religion and sacrifice

1 Introduction

China's ethnic minorities mainly live in remote mountainous areas, the traffic is not convenient, and the productivity is low. Some ethnic minorities still remain in the primitive slash and burn agricultural stage; some ethnic minorities remain in the rough stage; some ethnic minorities with frequent exchange with Han people have entered the intensive farming stage, but the agricultural harvest is subject to the natural factors. In the agricultural production, there are many worship objects and have formed a series of ritual ceremonies. In sum, the object of worship basically belongs to the category of natural worship. Natural worship is that people think that some natural things and natural phenomena have the ability of life, willpower, spirituality and magic, and can affect the fate of mankind, and thus are taken as the object of worship, to express their respect for their protection and blessing. In agriculture, it is manifested as the factors affecting the agricultural harvest, such as heaven, land, mountain, water, wind, fire, *etc.*^[1]; the worship of gods and spirits in all stages of agricultural production process, such as breaking the ground, sowing, seedling, tasting the new, harvesting, grain soul, and putting grain into barns; and worship of livestock gods that help farming, such as cattle god.

2 Agricultural sacrificial activities of Bai People

Bai People mainly live in Yunnan, and Guizhou. The sacrificial activities of Bai People mainly include offering sacrifice to mountain god, offering sacrifice for earth breaking, offering sacrifice for dragon, offering sacrifice for seedling, and offering sacrifice for cattle king. The purpose of offering sacrifices to mountain god is to pray for agricultural harvest and livestock safety. Offering sacrifice for the mountain god for sowing the buckwheat is called opening the mountain top. In one day before the sowing, every family should use colored rice flour, ver-

micelli, eggs, rice flour cake and cooked rice as sacrifice, to ask the mountain god to protect the growth of buckwheat from the beasts. The sacrifice for breaking the soil is also called the sacrifice for communes. On the Spring Festival, Bai people will hold sacrificial activities in the auspicious direction and on auspicious days. On this day, the head of every family takes the meal, meat, wine, incense and so on to the edge of the field to worship and pray for favorable weather for crops. After the sacrifice, waving the soil means the beginning of farming. Offering sacrifice to dragon is the token of rain. In the beginning of summer, they offer sacrifice for the dragon on the dragon's pool. Where there is pool and well, there is board of the dragon king. On August 8 of the lunar calendar, some villagers go to mountains to worship the white dragon to pray rain but not hail-stone. In every villages of Bai People, there is five-grain temple. On June 6 of the lunar calendar, villages go to the five-grain temple to offer sacrifice to crown price of seedlings. On October 11 of the lunar calendar, all villages slaughter pigs and chicken and hold sacrificial activity in the five-grain temple for the cattle king. After completion of spring ploughing, Bai people will slaughter chicken at the door of cattle pen and insert green pine branches and white flowers, to express gratitude for the cattle.

3 Unique set of agricultural worship rites of Lisu People

Lisu people live in Yunnan Province and have formed a set of worship rites. In agricultural production such as sowing the buckwheat, they wrap the buckwheat seed with egg shell, rice, and salt, then tie on bamboo pole, to pray for protection of crops. When rice seedlings get green, Lisu people slaughter chicken in the edge of field to pray for rice harvest. When the rice becomes ripe, Lisu people will hold sacrificial activities, every family slaughters pigs and chicken and offer new rice as sacrifice for ancestors. Lisu people are mainly distributed in Yunnan and Sichuan, and few live in Tibet. Naxi people mainly undertake the

agricultural economy, some of the sacrificial activities are connected with agricultural production. The activity of offering sacrifices for the heaven is held on the fourth, fifth or seventh or eighth of the first lunar month with the village or the clan as the unit. At the sacrificial activity, the pig heart, liver, and kidney are hung onto the branches (representing the heaven and earth), stone (representing yinyang god), and stones on trees around the sacrificial site. After the live sacrifice, they will hold cooked sacrificial activity, to express thanks to the heaven for bringing the grain and livestock. After the cooked sacrifice, every family will be distributed a slice of pork, to show that everything is given by the heaven. Before the eighth day of the first lunar month, they will offer sacrifice for the dragon king at caves where there is water flow. The sacrificial activities include large and small ceremonies. Small ceremonies are held by each village separately for three days and three nights, while large ceremonies are jointly held by many villages for seven days and seven nights. In the June of the lunar calendar, villages grazing in the same pasture should jointly offer sacrifice for the mountain god and pray for grain harvest and livestock thriving. On November 12 of the lunar calendar, they will offer sacrifice for cattle and horse god, to pray development of agriculture and animal husbandry.

4 Sacrificial activities for agricultural production of Buyi People

Buyi people are mainly distributed in Guizhou. They are good at planting rice and called rice people. The sacrificial activities for agricultural production are taken for four times. On March 3 of the lunar calendar, they offer sacrifice for the tree god or mountain god. They use pig head, five grain and flower papers to ask the mountain god to protect safety of all villagers and livestock. Except the elderly, all other villagers go to mountains, called "hiding in the mountain". After completion of sacrifice, the village head announces matters of preparation for farming. On this day, other people are not allowed to go to the village. The person breaking such provision should be responsible for all disasters of the village. Some areas slaughter dogs to mutually entertain each other, and young women and men participate in social exchanges. On June 6 of the lunar calendar, they offer sacrifices for village god. They worship engraved man or woman statue, or the most senior elder in the village plays the part of god^[2]. They slaughter chicken to pray for good harvest and thriving livestock. All participants should not wear white clothes or flower clothes. At the time of offering sacrifice, they should not talk. After completion, they share the sacrifices. On September 9 of the lunar calendar, they celebrate the good harvest or sweep the tombs. They use pigs and cattle as sacrifice for sweeping demons, and the sacrifice lasts three days. At the time of sacrifice, they mark the village junctions with two wooden knives and some burning paper, to prohibit outsiders to go into the village. In these three days, the villagers are not allowed to take water, fire and other objects to go out. Those whole go out for special matters should return after these

three days. On December 8 of the lunar calendar, they offer sacrifice for the village god and use cocks or pig heads to ask for protection by the village god.

5 Agricultural sacrificial activities of Dong People and Hani People

Dong people living in southeastern Guizhou and Guangxi believe that all things have the spirit, various species and natural phenomena are dominated by god that affects people's production and life, and thus they worship a large number of gods. Agricultural rituals include offering sacrifice for the village god, including land god, land in the edge of bridge, village edge, and mountain ridge. Nearly every village has altar for worship, some villages only have a stone hanging the cheek bone of pig. People believe that the village god controls the thriving of livestock and peace and safety of the village, and frighten the beasts. On festivals or in the event of natural disasters, Buyi people will use pigs, sheep, and chicken to pray for good harvest and safety. On April 8 or June 6 of the lunar calendar, they offer sacrifice for the cattle god. It is called the Birth Day of Cattle or Cleaning the Cattle Body. On this day, they will not let the cattle work, arrange eggs, chicken, and ducks to do sacrificial activities, sometimes, they will feed the cattle with special black glutinous rice to express gratitude for the cattle^[3]. Living in south and southwest of Yunnan, Hani people believe that men and all things are dominated by the soul or the wizard. In various fields and stages of agricultural production, there are specific sacrificial rites and worship contents. The important rites include sacrificing trees and water. Hani people in all areas take the tree as a land god to worship. They think that the trees are tall and have long life, reflecting the land has magical power of nourishing creatures. Villages lay stones around the trees to protect them. They believe that water god has close connection with agricultural production, so they offer plenty of sacrifices to water god, to pray for thriving men and livestock and good harvest. Before sowing, Hani people will hold the sowing ceremony, use chicken as sacrifice to the paddy field. Then, the old women firstly transplant rice seedlings in the first row, and others follow accordingly. Every family has small parcel of paddy field as worshipping field. Rice seedling transplantation starts with the worship of field. The harvest worship includes tasting new rice, harvesting, and storing in granary. The worship of tasting new rice is held when the rice becomes ripe. At the time of formal harvesting, Hani people take wine, tea, rice, and eggs as sacrifices and hang the last row of rice harvested onto the beam. For worshipping the granary storage, Hani people use rice, eggs, tea, and rice wine to worship the granary, and then hold the ceremony of storing in granary. The pack-basket for carrying the rice to the granary should be lined with 9 leaves, covered with men's clothes. Opening the granary also has ceremony, and the family head should carry the pack-basket to walk in and out three times before opening the granary. In the third time of carrying the rice out, catch 3 handful of rice to return to the granary. Every time of entering the granary should do such ceremony.

6 Agricultural sacrificial activities of Zhuang People

Zhuang people mainly live in Guangxi. Spirits they believe are various. In agricultural production, they worship many gods. Land god is the master of an area and controls the flood, drought, and livestock pestilence of the area. On festivals or in the event of serious disaster, the villagers must go to the land temple to pray. Before praying, they should not eat dog meat. Every year, the whole village will hold a ceremony of small sacrifice offering; every three years, they will hold a ceremony of grand sacrifice offering. In the beginning of every spring, Zhuang people will pray to ask the land god to protect good weather, bumper harvest, and peace and safety of men and livestock. In autumn, they will redeem their vow, to express gratitude to the land god. The land god is the patron saint of villages. In the event of the pest disaster, the villages will hammer at the gong to gather villagers, kill pigs, sheep, and chicken as sacrifice to make public offering, and use animal blood to stain paper, insert in the field, to signify that the land god has arrived there, then the disasters can be avoided. On June 6 of the lunar calendar, every family kills chicken to worship the land god and drink wine and sing songs, and insert small paper flags, to pray for bumper harvest. In the event of pest disaster, they play dragon game to dispel pests. At the time of sowing, they sprinkle few rice seeds or peanut shells along village roads, to pray for even growth of seedlings. In July, some villages offer sacrifices to seedlings, offer pork and wine as sacrifice, and both the young and old villagers drink wine together. In autumn harvest, Zhuang people hold a ceremony of eating new rice. They should not harvest rice until they offer sacrifices. According to legend, the cattle are dispatched by the heaven to help farmers. April 5 of the lunar calendar is called the birthday of cattle king. On this day, it is forbidden to use cattle. Instead, they offer colored glutinous rice to feed cattle. After busy spring plough, they hold a ceremony of collecting the soul of cattle, called the festival of cattle soul. On this day, they put chicken, fish, meat, and glutinous rice into the cattle pen, and use such rice and meat to feed cattle.

7 Agricultural sacrificial activities of Yi People and Tujia People

The Yi people are distributed in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and

Guangxi. They believe that the gods make all things and dominate everything; the land is the source of food and clothing, so every year they will choose auspicious day to worship the gods; and the water gods dominate the fields and protect the fields from floods and droughts. They offer sacrifices to the fire god to pray for bumper harvest. Qiang people live in the upper reaches of Min River. They worship various gods. Offering sacrifice to the heaven is the grandest activity, it is generally held in March or May of the lunar calendar. In case of drought, they hold a ceremony for praying rain. Before praying, everyone is not allowed to cut firewood, dig herbs or hunt, called "forbidden mountain", if violated, patrol villagers will beat them to bleed to please the gods. After the forbidding the mountain, the wizard wields the magical power to pray rain, if not effective, the wizard leads villagers to the top of the "holy mountain" to shout the rain. Tujia people mainly live in boundary area of Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guizhou. They believe that all things in the world are dominated by the gods, and thus they worship a large number of gods. In agriculture, they worship the land god. In the Spring Festival, they slaughter pigs and take pig hoof as sacrifice of land god. On February 2 of lunar calendar, they kill chicken to offer sacrifice to the land god. Li people live in Hainan Island and believe that harvest of crops is the charity of land ghost. They believe all things have spirits and in some places, there are still relics of totem adoration; they all respect seniors and ancestors, and during festivals, they will go to them to pray for peace and harvest. Owing to the spread of Christianity, some of Li have taken to this religion. Before transplanting rice seedlings, they firstly transplant several rice seedlings to play the rice soul; when the rice becomes ripe, they should offer several rice dumplings to express gratitude to the land ghost. And the wife should go to the field to greet the land ghost.

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