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On the Relationship between Chinese Taoist Rites and Agriculture

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Abstract There is a close relationship between Taoism and traditional agriculture in China. This relationship is also manifested in the relationship between Taoist rites and agriculture; the Taoist rites have obvious awareness of stressing the agriculture; holding of Taoist rites, gods worshiped in rites, offerings used, and grain consumed are connected with the agriculture; many actions in rites have nature of imitating the agriculture. The concept of "quietness" and "cleanness" in rites can cultivate the awareness of farmers for respecting the agriculture.

Key words China, Taoist rites, Agriculture

1 Introduction

There is a close relationship between Taoism and ancient science and technology. *Taoism Canon* contains rich ancient cosmology, outlook of nature, medical science, pharmacology, chemistry, astronomy, geography, mathematics, technology, agriculture and other scientific ideas and historical data. However, due to various reasons, scholars have made extensive studies of Taoist thought from medical science, pharmacology, chemistry, astronomy, geography, mathematics, technology, history, immortals, philosophy, ethics, politics and aesthetics. There are few studies about agronomic thought of Taoism, and also few papers in periodicals. Some scholars have noticed the agronomic thought of Taoism and made effort to explore the agronomic thought. In particular, it should be noted that Gai Jianmin has put forward the concept of "Agronomic Thought of Taoism" and "Taoism Discipline with Farming" in *Exploration in Scientific Thought of Taoism*, which opened the beginning of Taoist agronomy. In this study, we would discuss the relationship between Taoist rites and agriculture.

2 Awareness of stressing the agriculture in Taoist rites

Religious rites can be divided into rites for meeting social demands and rites for satisfying individual demands. The rites for meeting social demands can be divided into production rites and social organization and management rites. In agriculture-based society, production rites were mainly concentrated on agriculture. Therefore, rites for satisfying agricultural production demands were given more attention by the society than those for satisfying individual demands.

From the holding of religious rites, some religious rites are designed for agricultural production. A large part of the Taoist rites originated from witchcraft, and had a close relationship with traditional religion of China. From the functions, witchcraft can be divided into productive witchcraft, protective witchcraft, and destructive witchcraft. Since ancient times, China has always been a

developed agricultural country. Agricultural harvest determines the survival of people and national security. From top to bottom and from the king to common people, all valued the agricultural ceremonies, forming a set of complex seasonal rites. The sacrifice to Heaven started from Zhou Dynasty is also called suburban sacrifice. On the day of Winter Solstice, the sacrifice to heaven was held in south suburbs of the capital. This rite was prevailing till Qing Dynasty. The sacrifice to the Earth was held on the day of Summer Solstice. The rites were basically the same as the sacrifice to heaven. Rites of sacrifices to the Earth also include sacrifices to mountains, rivers, earth, grain, and society were arranged for praying for the national security and peace.

(i) Rites held in spring included: praying for grain on the first Xin Day of the first month of the lunar year; worshiping ancestral farmers and offering sacrifice to the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the first month of spring; offering sacrifice to Qingdi in east suburb on the day of the beginning of spring; offering sacrifice to wind god in northeast of the country on the second day of the beginning of spring; holding a memorial ceremony in Imperial College on the fourth day of the middle of the spring; offering sacrifice to the land god and grain god on the 11th day of the middle of the spring; offering sacrifice to the morning sun in east suburb on the Spring Equinox; worshiping the ancestral emperors in the month of the middle of the spring; worshiping Duke Tai of Qi in the middle of the spring.

(ii) Rites held in summer included: praying for rain in the first month of summer; offering sacrifice to the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the first month of summer; offering sacrifice to Yan Emperor in south suburb in the beginning of summer; praying for rain in south of the country after the day of the beginning of summer; offering sacrifice to the emperor on the day of Summer Solstice, and offer sacrifice to Five Mountains, Four Towns, Four Seas, Four Ditches, Five Hills, Five Forests, Five Rivers, Five Hillocks, Five Imperial Tombs, Five Tombs, and Five Plains; worshiping the god of grazing in the middle of summer; offering sacrifice to Yellow Emperor in south suburb in the last month of summer.

(iii) Rites held in autumn included: offering sacrifice to the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the first month of autumn; offering sacrifice to Bai Emperor in west suburb on the day of the beginning of the autumn; offering sacrifice to the star god on the fifth day after the beginning of the autumn; holding a memorial ceremony in Imperial College on the fourth day of the middle of the autumn; offering sacrifice to the land god and grain god on the 11th day of the middle of the autumn; worshipping Duke Tai of Qi in the middle of the autumn; offering sacrifice to the horse god in the middle of the autumn; offering sacrifice to the moon in west suburb on the Autumnal Equinox; offering sacrifice to the Jade Emperor in autumn.

(iv) Rites held in winter included: offering sacrifice to the Imperial Ancestral Temple on the first month of winter; offering sacrifice to the winter god after the beginning of the winter; offering sacrifice to the land god in north suburb after the beginning of the winter; offering sacrifice to the star gods after the beginning of the winter in north of the country; offering sacrifice to the Jade Emperor in atlas on the Winter Solstice; offering sacrifice to the horse god in the middle of the winter; offering sacrifice to the land god in the last month of the winter, which was the sacrifice in the end of the year, celebrating the harvest, expressing gratitude to the land god; offering sacrifice to hundreds of gods in south suburb on the eighth day of the twelfth month of the lunar year.

These national sacrifices show great concern for agricultural production. The religious rites held by every family every year also have the same nature and functions, the difference lies only in scale, simple offerings, and simple rites. Specifically, periodic rites held by every family included feeding dogs with turnip (or other vegetable), meat, and rice on the first day of the first month of the lunar year. Hosts cared about which the dogs first eat, because it is said that the thing the dog first eat would become expensive in the coming year. When transplanting rice seedlings, men should send gift to women's family, to express gratitude to women's family for hard work of rice transplanting and adding family members to men's family.

Such gift presentation also symbolizes the good harvest. At the time of harvest, farmers will hold rites of offering sacrifice when eating new rice to express gratitude to the Heaven. They will also eat some foods to protect stomach because new rice may lead to discomfort of spleen and stomach. When slaughtering pigs and sheep for the New Year, it should be carried out in the hall, to pray to the gods for protecting smooth growth of livestock. If pigs and sheep are slaughtered in the hall for three consecutive years, it is able to protect the security of the whole family members. Especially, the rites of slaughtering cattle are much more solemn. First, it is required to offer sacrifice to redeem their bad acts, then cover the eyes of cattle, and finally slaughter the cattle. In the era of slash and burn, before each time of slash and burn, rites should be held, chicken blood dripped onto the fire torch, and five people are responsible for burning.

3 Acts of respecting and imitating agriculture in Taoist rites

Chinese religion has obvious natural attributes, thus forming the vivid and visual images of gods. There are many periodic activities of offering sacrifice closely connected with agricultural production. Since most periodic ritual activities are connected with the agricultural production cycle, the object of worship of these rites will be the gods in charge of climate and plants. In *Book of Rites*, rites of offering sacrifice are divided into five types: heaven and earth, the country, mountains and rivers, five worships, and ancestors. The main purpose of the first three is to satisfy social demands, including agricultural production. Three Purities, Four Guides, Stars, Emperors of the Three Offices, and Jade Emperor in Taoism are objects of worship, so the gods worshiped include farmer god, wind god, rain god, thunder god, mountain god, river god, land god, and various gods of animals and plants. The importance of traditional religious worship of land god is only second to the worship of heaven. It is developed from land worship and grain worship of the primitive society, the ruler governing large area of land is naturally closing land, while the land is closely connected with crops, thus there is worship of land.

The promotion of agricultural technology is absolutely not lower than requirements of mountain life for agriculture, but religion researchers usually ignore this point, only care about Taoist customs. Thus, scholars consider that there is no agronomic thought in Taoism. If we look at this problem from another point of view, every Taoist rite will consume much food and vegetable, and the nationwide periodic ritual activities are frequent. Without powerful support of agricultural production, the holding of Taoist activity is inconceivable. Therefore, from the perspective of Taoist rites, we can know that Taoist awareness of agriculture and the pursuit of agricultural technology is so powerful. Many of the acts of Taoist rituals have nature of imitating agriculture. For example, the basic acts of popular Yangko are evolved from lifting rice seedlings in traditional agriculture.

4 Influence of Taoist rites on agriculture

(i) Taoist rites are pragmatic Taoist doctrines, so in the chanting of Taoist doctrines, there are thoughts that "if a man does no cultivation, he will get hungry; if a woman does no weaving, she will get cold". Sometimes Taoist doctrines frighten believers through depicting retribution of being lazy, so as to persuade people to do farming. Religious rites care about purities, which have rich meaning, including cleaning dirt in both body and mind, agricultural products not contaminated during production. Even manure as fertilizer should be fermented before use. According to the Taoist thought, things without proper treatment should not be used as offerings.

(ii) No matter what kind of religious rituals, once stepping into the ritual site, believers should keep quiet state of mind, to show the respect for gods. Thus, quietness and respect are inter-

connected. In the primitive religion, the productive witchcraft directly reveres the gods of the animals and plants. Such belief was carried on by patriarchal religion, resulting in various religious taboos, manifested in cleaning, quietness, fasting, offering sacrifice, and praying. Used in agricultural production, these taboos are manifested as the love of agricultural production, the protection of crops and forest, and the rational use and care of livestock. This is of great significance for agricultural production. First, it directly influences cultivation of awareness for stressing the agriculture, which is the religious explanation for stressing agriculture but belittling the commerce.

The close attention and protection of crops, the prohibition of trampling on crops and the waste of food, are foundation for ensuring the harvest of agricultural production and easy and comfortable life of people. The protection of forest land is helpful for keeping ecological balance, and the protection of farming animals is of great significance for modern agriculture with high mechanization level, especially for mountain agriculture. Therefore, the correct understanding of "quietness" and "respect", fasting, and praying activities in religious rites are of great significance for agricultural production.

(iii) Taoist concern about agricultural production and making effort to obtain high yield become goals of agricultural production. For natural disasters in agricultural production, Taoism believes that it is the result of bad mind. In Taoist rites, there are often situations of evil people becoming animals or plants after death. Taoism also takes various measures to avoid or control disasters, such as praying rain or fine days, dispelling locust or evil things, which may seem inadvisable now but give a kind of spiritu-

al comfort in ancient time. In the period of underdevelopment of chemical industry, people could do nothing in the event of locust disaster. However, Taoism combines religious mystery and practical experience to control locusts. In ancient time, Taoist rites were held to dispel locusts and made effort to find out rules of locust growth. They found that it is useful to burn weeds in winter to control locusts. They also found that high temperature is a main reason for prevailing of locusts. These exert a very important influence on the agricultural production.

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, any religion has its doctrine, while the doctrine is the reflection of common demands of the society in certain time. When such reflection gets prominent and becomes religious rite acceptable to non-religious people, human activities will be unavoidably connected with religious rites. China is a large country with agriculture as the primary industry, thus the religious rites are closely connected with the agriculture. Taoist rites value agriculture, respect agriculture, and imitate agriculture. Besides, agriculture also absorbs some parts of Taoist rites as force of its development. Thus, agriculture and Taoist rites are interactive.

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