Research on Buddhist Elements in Liuzhou Shigong Ritual of Guangxi Zhuang Nationality

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***Abstract*—The religion named after Shigong has a long history, and it is very popular in the Zhuang folk. Through the way of fostering apprentice and the compilation of the rituals, Shigong religion has accomplished inheritance of culture. Shigong has the ability to hold a series of activities in order to pray for people's daily wedding, funeral, and expiate the sins of the dead. Gradually, a set of complex Shigong Ritual has been formed. The elements of necromancy, Taoism and Buddhism coexist in Shigong religion, in which the elements of Buddhism include the hell concept, the Kuan-yin mantra, and quotations of related Buddhist vocabularies, etc. There are many causes leading to Buddhist elements'existing in Shigong Ritual: Firstly, the primitive witchcraft in the ritual has a distinct practical function; Secondly, the strong temptation of the spiritual event will always influence the tendency of the people's thought and behavior for a long time; Thirdly, the ritual itself has the effect of maintaining the social order; Lastly, national integration provide external conditions for the compilation of the rituals based on various cultural confluence.**

Keywords—Shigong religion, Buddhist elements, Culture convergence

I. INTRODUCTION

China is an ancient country with a rich culture and many nationalities. Since ancient times, the collision and integration of ethnic cultures have always existed. The three cultural systems of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have gradually developed into a pattern of mutual absorption. During the process of cultural and historical evolution, The culture of ethnic minorities have been affected, and shows phenomenon of the elements' coexisting of necromancy, Taoism and Buddhism. Liuzhou Shigong Ritual of Guangxi Zhuang Nationality is one of examples. On the basis of introducing Shigong Ritual's structure and content, this paper is going to discuss the historical causes of Buddhist elements in Shigong Ritual.

II. LIUZHOU SHIGONG RITUAL'S CONTENT

The birthplace of Shigong religion is in Liuzhou where ethnic minorities gather with popularization of necromancy and the tradition of spirit worship. When Buddhism and Taoism were introduced into Liuzhou where Zhuang nationality lived, Liuzhou Shigong religion came into being by absorbing the thought of Buddhism and Taoism. Shigong, who can get married and has no dietary taboos, is responsible for presiding over religious ceremonies for people's daily wedding, funeral, and expiating the sins of the dead, as well as compiling ritual text. Pang Shaoyuan, who is a famous professor, through hard collection, has published Liuzhou Shigong Ritual Compilation, which is used in this paper.

Existing ritual books are all manuscripts, including two functions that this ritual serve people for releasing the spirit of the death and praying for people's daily wedding, funeral, and so on. Besides, there are some activities which invite many immortals to ritual occasion before the beginning of the formal ritual. For thousands of years, the Chinese people have always believed that a person will become a ghost living in the world of the underground after death. Therefore, people have to save deceased relatives by means of religious ritual. The spirit systems believed in consist of the gods of the ethnic minorities, Buddhism, and Taoism. This article will reveal the origin of Buddhist elements in Shigong Ritual.

III. BUDDHIST ELEMENTS IN SHIGONG RITUAL

The elements of Buddhism in Shigong Ritual include the underground concept, the Kuan-yin mantra, the quotations of the related Buddhist vocabularies, and so forth:

The underground concept. The origin of the underground is very long. Now the generally accepted view is that the underground concept comes from Sumerian civilization. The Sumerians believed that the underground was a existence. Later, Indians also believed that there was a "unerground" where the dead were located. Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism inherited this viewpoint which was recorded in the Buddhist sutra. As many Buddhist sutras were translated into China, the underground concept began to influence Chinese belief. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties of China, fantasy fictions became an important means of the propagation of the underground concept. Since then, this belief in the underground has become indispensable for Chinese people who believe that there are many punishers and the wicked will be severely punished in the underground.

Shigong has the ability to save people from the underground by holding a series of ritual, and send them to the heaven. The whole ritual includes that: Firstly, Shigong makes people see the tragic situation of the underground in order to let them give birth to a heart of repentance; Secondly, Shigong asks the person in charge to release sinners out of the underground. Lastly, Shigong waves a big knife and chopped the clay basin while yelling, which is meant to successfully save the sinners. This ritual takes more than one times so as to let the dead get to a higher level of heaven. In the next ritual, Shigong will light the light in the darkened underground for the soul of the dead, and lead them to the ruler of the underground. Only in this way can

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Shigong save the sinners. The people believe that Shigong's ability is bestowed by the Great Spirit, thus, the ritual held by Shigong have supernatural power.

It is said that there are ten kings ruling Chinese underground. The belief in ten kings is also reflected in Shigong Ritual. In the Tang Dynasty, an important sutra written by one monk, Zangchuan, came out, named after Ten Kings Sutra, which affected Chinese Buddhist believers greatly. As Xiao Dengfu said:

"The fact that ten kings became the representatives of the underground has deeply affected Chinese people, and changed Chinese people's customs and belief. Nowadays, the way of releasing souls and retreat and ablution origin from Ten Kings Sutra. "[1]

The contents of Ten Kings Sutra is composed of Buddhist and Taoist doctrines. Similarly, it is transculturation and utilitarianism that lead to Buddhist elements in Shigong Ritual. It is important for believers to gain the comfort and consolation of the mind, and not to understand profound religious philosophy.

In addtion, there are also some Buddhist terminologies in lyrics of Shigong Ritual, such as three classes of beings(the realms of desire, of form, and of non-form), the six directions of rebirth, the four modes of birth(born alive, egg-born, moisture- or water-born, born by metamorphosis), a willow twig, pure water, etc.

Moreover, prayers said by Shigong during the ritual for expiating the dead that I sincerely ask Lord of the Hades to save the dead full of moral defilement from the underground, let them get to the heaven, and transform all horrible weapons into auspicious things highlight Shigong's ability to communicate with Yama.

The Kuan-yin Mantra. The Kuan-yin Mantra is endowed with the power to get rid of calamity andsubdue evil, as a result, often chanted in the course of ritual. The contents which entrust one's spiritual growth and well-being to the Three Jewels and Avalokiteshvara are located at the beginning of the Kuan-yin Mantra, but the latter part of which tells Chinese immortals. It is the words of the Tathagata of the seven ancient Buddhas with the magic function of getting rid of calamity that are the important part of the Kuan-yin Mantra.

The quotations of related Buddhist vocabularies. Firstly, buddhist elements in rites of welcoming immortals. Wearing one mask, the symbol of the god, accompanied by music, Shigong sings and dances so as to invite the god to come. In the end of the ritual, Shigong will piously send the god to leave by burning incense and tell a piece of lyrics. There also are Buddist terminologies in the content of this lyrics, such as Bodhi, Potala, etc. Secondly, repaying favours and saving from suffering. It is inevitable that Shigong ritual text has been compiled by the influence of transculturation. Buddhism advocates that four favours should be repaid, Sakyamuni once said that we must never forget favours given from parents, kings, the Three Jewels, and all living beings. [2]It is a virtue for Buddhist believers to help people in distress. Some words in Shigong ritual indicate that the compilation has also been influenced by the above two Buddhist ideas.

IV. THE CAUSES OF BUDDHIST ELEMENTS IN SHIGONG RITUAL

The history of world civilization has showed: it is by communicating with each other that the development of any national culture makes progress. Owing to social environment with several nationalities living together and migration of population, the phenomenon of cultural confluence will take place. Then what is the driving force of cultural confluence during the compilation of Liuzhou Shigong Ritual? This article shows that there are four causes as driving force leading to Buddhist elements in Shigong Ritual:

Firstly, one of the features of Shigong ritual text is the existence of witchcraft which has distinct pragmatic function. As Malinowski thinks that Witchcraft is a set of actions with practical value and a tool to achieve its purpose. [3]In a sense, utilitarian pragmatism promotes the convergence of different cultures.

Secondly, efficacious legends emerged in an endless stream, which were recorded in history and passed down from generation to generation. People firmly believe that these legends are true. Whenever war comes, natural disasters often occur and the age of class oppression is great, and people always feel the end of the times, people all yield to temptation and prefer to believe these legends. As a result, the act of devoutly worshipping and praying for the gods spread. Gradually, the compilers of Shigong ritual text were concerned about these efficacious legends, and recorded them in the text.

Thirdly, cultural confluence contribute to maintenance of stability of social order. Religious sociology points out that people's religious activities are collective and objectively conducive to social harmony and stability. The value of Shigong ritual is not only to soothe people's broken hearts, but also to maintain unity and peace of society and family. As Pritchard said"the characteristics of being transmitted have undergone various modifications and changes in the process of borrowing and merging into another culture"[4].

Lastly, Buddhist culture introduced by ethnic blending provides raw materials for compilers of Shigong ritual text. In the Ming Dynasty, the Zhuang people mainly believed in ghosts and gods. [5] However, with a large number of Han people who believe in Buddhism entering the Zhuang nationality area and married with Zhuang people. In addition, the government implements Han culture education in Zhuang nationality areas in order to change the Zhuang people's beliefs. [6]To a certain extent, it was inevitable in history to absorb the essence of Buddhism, Taoism and other doctrines in Shigong ritual text.

V. SUMMARY

In summary, this belief in Shigong has a distinct mass character. By integrating witchcraft, Buddhist and Taoist elements, this belief has comforted people's spiritual dilemma and inspired people's love for a better life. Shigong also bears the responsibility of teaching the apprentice, so he objectively contribute to the inheritance and development of culture. In the process of absorbing different cultures, it seems to be the best satisfaction that people live happily and do not fall into hell after death.

On the one hand, the way of cultural diversity and transformation came from inherent requirements of the Zhuang people, on the other hand, it was affected by outer different culture. The interaction of internal and external factors has created the religious culture of the Zhuang nationality.

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