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The Transformation and Spread of Five Sacred Regional Mountain Belief in China—A Case Study of Mount Yi Belief

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Abstract: *The sacred regional mountain belief originated from mountain worship in ancient times. It is an important part of the national mountain and river sacrificial system. Through related literature analysis, it is found that the sacrifice of the mountain god actually was a medium for the emperor to communicate with heaven. For reasons such as war, natural disasters, or praying for blessings, the emperor offered sacrifices to the god of Mount Yi, which not only demonstrated the imperial power's control over the gods, but also declared the central government's control over the localities, highlighting the legitimacy of imperial power.*

Keywords: *Sacred regional mountain belief; Mount Yi; Chinese traditional culture*

Introduction

In the long feudal history of China, offering sacrifices to natural scenery such as sacred mountains, rivers and oceans has always been an important part of the national sacrificial system. The establishment of sacred regional mountains sacrificial offerings has undergone a long process of development. In the course of the dynasty for more than two thousand four hundred years, the pattern of regional mountains sacrifice in our country has experienced great changes. However, no matter how it is changed, East sacred regional mountain Mount Yi firmly occupies the first place in regional mountains sacrifice sacrifice due to its unique geographical location.

In general, the change and spread of Mount Yi belief demonstrates the state's control over official sacrifices and at the same time incorporates the characteristics of folk beliefs and worship of various dynasties, and is influenced by other beliefs such as Taoism and Buddhism. It is a microcosm of deep mountain belief in ancient Chinese history, and it has far-reaching significance for our research on related mountain god belief and mountain god sacrifice.

Mount Yi Belief in Ancient Times

Mount Yi Belief in Four-sacred-regional-mountain Period

Mount Yi is generally known as Mount Dongtai because it is located in the east of Mount Tai and its body is smaller than Mount Tai. Besides, it is also believed that there are some celestial being due to its beautiful scenery. The folk worship the mountain as the head of the five regional mountains in the continuous development of ancient mountain worship in China.

The mountain has gain its name since the Yao Shun Yu era. In the reign of emperor Shun, Mount Yi first was listed as one of sacred regional mountains in China. Later, in order to stabilize the whole state, Xia Yu divided his land into nine parts, with each part having its own sacred mountains. And the nine famous regional mountains are Mount Heng in Jingzhou, Mount Huain Yongzhou, Mount Tain Yanzhou, Mount Song in Yuzhou, Mount Heng in Bingzhou, Mount Yi in Qingzhou, Mount Kuaiji in Yangzhou, Mount Yiwulu in Youzhou, and Mount Huo in Jizhou. In the beginning, the so-called regional mountains refers to all the mountains that can suppress one part in a universal sense. All these nine mountains are regarded as sacred ones and should be worshiped at this time.

With the continuous strengthening of centralization in ancient times, the more majestic mountains among the nine mountains have gained a more important position and gradually become a symbol of the country's domination of the four directions. Among them are Mount Tai, Mount Heng, Mount Hua, Mount Song and Mount Heng. The remaining ones are called regional mountains, and still occupy an important position in the mountain and river sacrificial system even though their status is not as important as the former. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Zheng Xuan explained that the four great regional mountains are: "The most important of the four mountains are called Mount Kuaiji in Yangzhou, Mount Yi in Qingzhou, Mount Wulu in Youzhou, Mount Huo in Jizhou". As the country continued to unify, the pattern of four major mountains was established in the Sui Dynasty, including Mount Yi in the east, Mount Kuaiji in the south, Mount Wu in the West, and Mount Yiwulu in the North.

The claim that the Yellow Emperor named Mount Yi as Eastern Tai originated from Shih Chi. In this book, it is recorded that in order to persuade Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty to grant Mount Yi, one minister named Gong Yudai told the emperor that Huangdi was able to gain immortality by sealing the two fairy mountains - Mount Yi and Mount Chan Wan. Following the period of the Yellow Emperor, during the Yao and Shun era, the central government first divided the world into twelve states and each state was safeguarded by a regional mountain. On important festivals each year, the emperor would carry out the etiquette of taking a far-sighted view. This kind of etiquette is divided into three levels. The five most majestic mountains would be worshiped as duke, the four seas treated as the marquis, and the rest of the mountains as earls. This is also the reason why we can know that during Emperor Shun's reign, Mount Yi was sacrificed in the respect of earl. In the 11th century BC, during the process of Zhou Mu's feting Mount Yi, his concubine Sheng Ji suddenly died of illness and was buried on the top of the mountain. In the Western Han Dynasty, during the process of offering sacrifices to the god of Mount Tai, Emperor Wu of the Han also offered sacrifices to Mount Yi, accompanied by the minister Gongyu dai. He also ordered people to build the earliest recorded ancient building - Taishan Temple on Yuhuangding of Mount Yi.

In the period of the Three Kingdoms, Emperor Cao Pi worshiped Mount Yi. After Emperor Wen came to the mountain, he buried the precious jade in the soil to worship the god. In the second year of Huangxing (468 AD), Li Hui made a sacrifice to Mount Yi on behalf of Emperor Xianwen of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Tuo

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Bahong, which is included in Ji Xingtian's "Dongzhen Temple Stele".

In the Sui Dynasty, in 594 AD, Emperor Wen ordered the establishment of a temple on Mount Yi. The Dongzhen Mountain Temple was created. The establishment of this temple is of great significance. Regardless of the state or the people, the establishment of the temple means that the god of the mountain has been officially recognized, and it is the most important material support for the implementation of rituals. In the history of sacrifice to Mount Yi before the Sui Dynasty, the emperor's sacrifice to Yi was temporary and there was no fixed place. Although Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty built the Taishan Temple, it did not recognize the god of Yi as a separate mountain god. For a long time, even though people have known that Mount Yi is a famous mountain and has its mountain god, it is emptiness and abstract. However, after Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty established the Dongzhen Temple, the mountain god of Mount Yi began to have a fixed place for worship, and it began to transform from an imaginary and abstract god from nature to a personality god. Therefore, it can be said that the establishment of temples such as Dongzhen Temple marked the initial formation of four regional mountains in Chinese history. Moreover, the Sui Dynasty specially arranged a person to be responsible for the cleaning and planting of the temple, which meant that from the Sui Dynasty, a special person was sent to manage the temple, and the management system was initially established. In addition, the Dongzhen Temple stele contains the Sui stele "Zhang Xu Tuo Sacrifice Stele" from the second year of Sui Daye, indicating that Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty also sent people to the mountain to worship because Daye was the reign of Emperor Yang.

In general, with the continuous establishment of the pattern of the four sacred regional mountains, Mount Yi began to enter the national sacrificial system as a regional mountain, and became an important part of the national sacrificial system of the natural gods from differnt mountains and rivers. Zheng Xuan of the Eastern Han Dynasty commented on the history of the Sui Dynasty that the emperor would take a far-sighted view mainly towards the five scared mountains, the four regional mountains, and the four seas.

The Transformation of Sacred Regional Mountains Belief

The four regional sacred mountains were established in the Sui Dynasty, and then further enriched and developed during the Tang and Song Dynasties. In the early years of the Tang Dynasty, it inherited the feting system of the Sui Dynasty. It was not until the re-appointment of the gods of mountains and rivers in the Tianbao period of the Tang Dynasty that Mount Huo rose to fame and began to be named alongside the other four sacred ones. In the early Song Dynasty, Mount Huo began to appear in the national ritual system as a new member of the five regional mountains. In the seventh year of Tang Tianbao (AD 748), the sacrifices to the five regional mountains began to formally appear in the national ritual system. In the Huizong period of the Song Dynasty, the sacrifice of regional mountains formally became a part of the national sacrifice system.

The Tang Dynasty was an important period for the development of Mount Yi belief. During this period, the god of Mount Yi was entrusted as Dong'an Duke, which was of great significance because it was the first time that the god of the mountain was canonized by an emperor. According to inscriptions, during the reign of Emperor Zhongzong of the Tang Dynasty (684 AD), Li Xian sent the minister Yin Sizhen to worship the god of Mount Yi in Qingzhou. Later, Wu Zetian sent envoys to renovate the Yi Temple. In the first year of Tang Tianbao (742 AD), after Li Longji ascended the throne, he first sent people to repair the Dongzhen Temple,

and a few years later, he even named the god of Mount Yi as Dongan duke. In the second year of Tang Suzong (712 AD), Deng Jingshan replaced the emperor to worship the mountain. Therefore, from the perspective of time, the sacrifice to Mount Yi in the Tang Dynasty basically never stopped.

In the Song Dynasty, the central government made sacrifices to Mount Yi more frequently, and these sacrifices were recorded on 26 steles. In the third year of Jianlong in the Song Dynasty (962 AD), Emperor Zhao Kuangyin rebuilt the Dongzhen Temple. According to legend, at the beginning of Zhao Kuangyin's rebellion, he had a decisive battle with the general Han Tong around Mount Yi. When the war was stalemate, the god of mountain came to help, Zhao Kuangyin finally won the war. This is why he rebuilt the Dongzhen Temple after he became king. In the second year of Song Gande, the new temple was built, and the Yi boundary monument was erected in November that year. After Renzong ascended the throne, he personally went to the mountain to worship and planted two ginkgo trees. Later, during the Xining period, Shandong and Hebei suffered severe drought, and the central government sent envoys to worship and pray for rain. It is worth noting that this worship service to Yi Mountain is different from the previous ordinary worship service. It is a purposeful act of praying for blessings and eliminating disasters. In August of the Song Dynasty's third year of political peace (1113 AD), Song Huizong promoted all regional mountain gods from duke to king, and Yi mountain god became the Dong'an King.

In addition, the Wujiao rituals established in the Sui Dynasty have also been inherited. In addition to the emperor's sacrifice in the capital, the Tang Dynasty's authorities would also send officials to provide sacrifices on their behalf. According to records, the emperors of the Tang and Song dynasties have sent officials more than ten times to worship Mount Yi. Generally speaking, most of the sacrifices in the Tang and Song dynasties are held in March and April each year, because this is exactly the day of spring. Ancient Chinese believed that the location of the regional mountains in the southeast, northwest, and center should correspond to the seasons and the five elements. This is the reason why the sacrifices to Yi mountain are generally arranged at the beginning of spring. In addition, when major events occur in the country, the emperor will temporarily send officials to worship.

The Tang and Song dynasties were a special period of transition from the four regional sacred mountains to the five regional sacred mountains. During this period, the Yi Mountain god was named Dong'an King by the emperor, and the sacrificial rites of offering sacrifices to him on the first spring day were also established. The rebuilt Dongzhen Temple provides a place and material guarantee for sacrificial activities. The state's sacrifice to Mount Yi gradually developed in a regular and standardized direction, which laid the foundation for the further spread and development of Yi mountain belief.

Five Sacred Regional Mountains Belief

After the Tang and Song dynasties, the sacrifice etiquette of Yi mountain was further improved. In a nutshell, the situation of sacrifices in Mount Yi during the Jin, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties can be analyzed from the following aspects: the changes in the titles of sacrifices, the establishment of sacrifice etiquette and personnel, the repair of the Mount Yi Temple and the management of the temple system.

In the Yuan Dynasty, the central government named Mount Yi as Yuande Dongan King. However, after the

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establishment of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang carried out sacrificial reforms and removed all the titles of famous mountains and rivers, and only called them their real names as gods.

Therefore, after the restructuring, the secular title of Mount Yi god no longer exists, and it is only called Mount Yi god. At the end of the feudal dynasty, the emperors of the Qing dynasty did not change the title of Mount Yi, but followed the title of Mount Yi god which was conferred by Ming Taizu. Therefore, the title of Mount Yi was originally given in the Tang Dynasty and was crowned king in the Song Dynasty. However, the secular titles of the Ming and Qing dynasties were revoked and finally restored to the original features of the god of nature. In the process of title change, Mount Yi's regional sacred mountain status has been continuously strengthened, its role in the national sacred mountain sacrificial system has become more and more important, and its functions have become increasingly diverse.

The Yuan Dynasty still inherited the system of sending envoys to sacrificial rites, but there were some changes. According to the location of the sacrificial rites, it pioneered the sacrificial sacrificial system by dividing routes and sending envoys. Mount Yi, Mount Tai, and East China Sea belong to the east rites. This system continued until the end of the feudal dynasty.

In addition to the central government's official rituals, local officials also made spontaneous rituals, mainly because in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, mountain gods had become synonymous with protecting people's livelihood and blessing good weather.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can see that Mount Yi belief originated from mountain worship in ancient times. As one of the many famous mountains and rivers, it did not receive much attention from the state or the people at first. However, as time progressed, it gradually became the top of the five regional sacred mountains and an important part of the national mountain and river sacrificial system. Judging from the state's sacrifice to the god of Mount Yi, it was a medium for the emperor to communicate with heaven. For reasons such as war, natural disasters, or praying for blessings, the emperor offered sacrifices to the god of Mount Yi, which not only demonstrated the imperial power's control over the gods, but also declared the central government's control over the localities, highlighting the legitimacy of imperial power.

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