

Study on the Distribution Characteristics of Buddhist Temples in Northern Jiangsu Province: A Case Study of Xuzhou

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Abstract

Since Buddhism was introduced into the Central Plains during the Han Dynasty, it has become one of the important components of the social and religious structure of China. In different social stages, the distribution of buddhist temples can reflect the characteristics of the social structure of a region. The Han Monasteries originated in Xuhuai, Pengcheng in the Han Dynasty. The present northern Jiangsu is the earliest birthplace of Buddhism in Jiangsu. Liu Ying, the king of Chu who ruled Xuzhou in the Han Dynasty, was the earliest ruler who believed in Buddhism in history. In recent years, under the relaxed social environment, the protestant population grew rapidly, and the rural area was relatively remote, which caused the government departments to understand the current situation and development direction of religion in northern Jiangsu in a timely mann er. The investigation on the status quo of Buddhism belief in Xuzhou shows the interaction between religion and society, which can be used for reference by the government and religious departments, and has great practical significance and social value.

Keywords

Buddhism; Rural areas; Buddhist temple; Northern Jiangsu; Society.

1. Introduction

Buddhism has a long history. Since it was introduced into the Central Plains during the Han Dynasty, it has become one of the important components of China's social and religious structure and the core content of Chinese religious belief. It has been closely linked with traditional culture and national spirit for a long time. The study of Buddhist belief can reflect the structural characteristics of a region's politics, economy and culture from the side.

Xuzhou is the birthplace of Han culture and the starting point of the Silk Road. "Liu Ying, the king of Chu in the Eastern Han Dynasty who lives in Xuzhou, believes in Buddhism and worships the Buddha." His faith will naturally have an impact on the local people. Pengcheng in the Han Dynasty, now in northern Jiangsu, is the earliest Buddhist center, which shows that there are detailed data and more convincing research on Buddhist beliefs in northern Jiangsu.

It is mentioned in *The Influence of Religion on the Construction of Spiritual Civilization* that since the reform and opening up, under the policy of freedom of religious belief and relaxed social environment, the number of religious believers in northern Jiangsu, especially rural Buddhists, has increased rapidly, which has brought some new changes to the region, which means that new research in rural areas is urgently needed to show the picture of rural Buddhist belief.

2. Buddhist Temple Distribution

As an important place for Buddhist believers to carry out religious activities, it can help us understand the specific situation of Buddhist religious ceremonies in Xuzhou area. At the same time, the distribution of Buddhist temples reflects the regional characteristics, customs and

social characteristics to a certain extent, which are closely related to the activities of Buddhist believers.

The whole administrative division of Xuzhou presents the characteristics of "one city and five counties", with the urban area as the main body and in the central position, and five county-level administrative districts distributed around it. The urban areas are Yunlong District, Gulou District, Quanshan district and Jiawang district in turn, and the "five counties" are Pei County, Feng County, Pizhou, Suining and Xinyi respectively. On the whole, the distribution of Buddhist temples is consistent with the administrative divisions, and they are relatively scattered.

The author visited and investigated 9 Buddhist temples in urban areas, namely Xinghua Temple and Zhulin Temple in Yunlong District, Puzhao Temple and Taishan Temple in quanshan district, Baolian Temple and Baiyun Temple in Gulou District, Baolin Temple in Tongshan New District and Longhua Temple in Jiawang district.

Table 1. Distribution Table of Buddhist temples in Xuzhou

| Administrative division | | Buddhist temple |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Yunlong district | Xinghua Temple and Zhulin Temple |
| 2 | Quanshan district | Puzhao Temple and Baiyun Temple. |
| 3 | Gulou district | Baolian Temple and Baiyun Temple. |
| 4 | Tongshan new area | Baolin Temple |
| 5 | Jiawang distric | Longhua Temple |

We can see that the distribution of Xuzhou Buddhist temples is relatively balanced, not concentrated in a certain district, but evenly distributed in all positions of the city. According to the objective economic development conditions, different districts in Xuzhou have different land area, unbalanced economic development level and different population, but on the whole, the distribution of Buddhist temples is not restricted by these factors, but shows the characteristics of uniform distribution as a whole. Only in the relatively remote Tongshan New District and jiawang district, the distribution of Buddhist temples is relatively small, which is in line with the fact that Buddhist temples are registered institutions in modern society. Compared with ancient times, the factories that give religious activities to believers are increasingly affected by economic factors. The population in the center of the city is large, the level of economic development is high, and the incense of Buddhist temples is naturally more vigorous. Of course, the damage problem is also quite prominent. From the table of personnel changes of Buddhist temples, temples, monks and nuns in Xuzhou, most temples have not been properly resettled since the founding of the People's Republic of China to 1985, and some of them have been destroyed, and most of them have been requisitioned by primary schools, middle schools, military units and public security departments respectively. Xinghua Zen Temple, which only plays the role of temples, has a sweatshirt on the east top. From before and after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the number of monks in temples has been decreasing rapidly, with only one person or no one left in most temples. Even Xinghua Temple, where incense is relatively strong, has changed from 52 people before the founding of the People's Republic of China to 8 people, which requires the supervision and guidance of government departments, and the operation of Buddhist temples will be standardized.

Table 2. Distribution of Buddhist Temples in "Five Counties" in Xuzhou

| Administrative division | | Buddhist temple |
|-------------------------|----------------|--|
| 1 | Feng county | Yongning Temple and Yong anguo Temple |
| 2 | Pei county | Guanyin Temple, Cien Temple and Lindi Temple |
| 3 | Gulou district | Baolian Temple and Baiyun Temple. |
| 4 | Suining county | Baolian Temple and Baiyun Temple. |
| 5 | Xinyi city | Chantang Temple, Hongling Temple and Shanyin Temple. |
| 6 | Pizhou city | Tiefo Temple |

Table 3. Area and Permanent Population of Xuzhou City and County

| | Land area of each county and city (unit: square kilometers) | Number of permanent residents (unit: 10,000 people) |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Gulou district | 66.23 | 38.45 |
| Gulou district | 119.72 | 41.89 |
| Yunlong district | 620.26 | 42.87 |
| Jiawang district | 99.97 | 71.30 |
| Quanshan district | 1871.19 | 104.91 |
| Tongshan new area | 1450.28 | 94.89 |
| Feng county | 1805.77 | 111.68 |
| Pei county | 1769.34 | 102.59 |
| Suining county | 1592.30 | 91.09 |
| Xinyi city | 2084.69 | 143.86 |
| Pizhou city | 66.23 | 38.45 |

In addition to the Buddhist temples in Xuzhou urban area, counties and districts are also necessary to investigate the present situation of Buddhist beliefs. According to the area and resident population table of Xuzhou districts and counties, we can know from Table 3 that the land area of Fengxian, Peixian, Suining, xinyi city and Pizhou all exceeds 1,400 square kilometers, while the five districts in the city only exceed 1,400 square kilometers in Tongshan New District, and even Gulou District and quanshan district are less than 100 square kilometers. Obviously, the huge land area gap between urban and rural areas is a remarkable feature of Xuzhou. Unlike Chikurinji and Xinghua Zen Temple in the city, for example, Yongning Temple in Fengxian County and Kannonji in Peixian County are located in remote places and tourists are relatively scarce, which makes it difficult to intuitively reflect the present situation of Buddhist beliefs in rural areas of northern Jiangsu, and little is known about rural believers. At the same time, it is necessary to realize that "the countryside is an acquaintance society, and villagers know each other. If people around them express themselves enthusiastically, the villagers will accept Buddhist beliefs relatively easily, which makes the Buddhist beliefs spread rapidly.". Therefore, it is of great practical significance and social value to investigate the present situation of Buddhist beliefs of modern people in northern Jiangsu.

3. Investigation

According to the thought of historical materialism, social consciousness has the principle of counteracting social existence. At present, while Buddhism plays an active role, there are also some problems. Therefore, if we don't pay attention to and solve the problems in the process of spreading and developing Buddhist faith in rural areas, it is bound to have a certain impact. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the guidance to the society, especially the left-behind elderly and children in rural areas, so as to promote the smooth progress of socialist spiritual civilization construction and building a harmonious socialist society.

With the improvement of economic conditions, more and more young people choose to work in cities or stay in urban areas. Nowadays, the majority of rural residents in northern Jiangsu are the elderly after 40-60, and even the middle-aged after 70 are few, followed by young and middle-aged women and left-behind children. According to our investigation, there are about 200 permanent residents (excluding migrant workers) in a village in northern Jiangsu, and the number of religious believers is 80, of which 65 are Buddhist believers. It can be said that there are not a few people who believe in Buddhism. The people who believe in Buddhism are mainly empty nesters (that is, those who have no children or are not with them), young and middle-aged women, some young and middle-aged men who are keen on Buddhist faith, and some young students under the influence of adults.

During the visit, considering the possible knowledge level of the interviewees, we adopted questionnaires and interviews respectively. We mainly focus on "What do you think Buddhism is", "Why do you choose to believe in Buddhism", "What do you think are the usual forms of Buddhist belief" and "What religious activities have you participated in? Are these activities held regularly?" "What do you think is the biggest change brought to you by Buddhism?" And other issues to investigate.

We analyzed the survey materials according to the four major subjects of believers (i.e., empty nesters, young and middle-aged women, young and middle-aged men, and teenagers), and summarized the following conclusions:

3.1. Believers' Motivation

Table 4. The Main Unit of Buddhists in a Village in Pei County, Xuzhou

| Population category | Empty nester | Young and middle-aged women | Young men | Teenagers |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Total number of people | 56 person | 27 person | 3 person | 14 person |

In the survey, we found that most of the elderly in the village believe in Buddhism because they are old and have nothing to do. Believing activities can not only seek health and peace for themselves and their families, but also help them find fun and spiritual sustenance, and dispel the loneliness when their children are not around. Most young and middle-aged women spend their spare time reciting Buddhist scriptures and burning incense at home in groups of three or five, or going to temples to burn incense on the first day, the fifteenth day and major festivals. When talking about the relevant questions about why people believe in religion, most people will say that it is because Buddha can bless the whole family and solve the difficulties they encounter. The reason why some teenagers will believe in religion is influenced by their families. If there are family members who believe in religion, they will influence teenagers directly or indirectly by their words and deeds, which makes teenagers become potential believers in a considerable proportion. A few people say that because of their own life experiences, they are interested in Buddhism, and devote themselves to Buddhism, so that they can fully understand themselves through pious beliefs. "The countryside is experiencing a silent

belief change, which can be reflected in the old folk custom, modern life, and a new folk custom, with new changes."

The following table shows the belief motivation of believers more clearly and intuitively. The following table shows the statistical results of the questionnaire and interview records issued by us in a village in northern Jiangsu in July 2020 on the reasons for believers' belief. The results are as follows:

Table 5. Investigation Unit of Buddhist Belief Purpose in a Village in Pei County, Xuzhou

| Purpose | Devotional believers. | Pray for peace | Bless the exam. | Trial stage | Know little about |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Total number of people | 13 person | 59 person | 9 person | 7 person | 12 person |

Thus, Buddhist beliefs are common in rural areas of northern Jiangsu. "Buddhism's doctrine of great mercy, accumulating virtues and doing good deeds is positive on the whole, which is conducive to purifying people's hearts and is consistent with basic social moral concepts." People may be believers, but they are not necessarily the most devout believers, and they are more spiritual sustenance and comfort, especially in order to pray for a series of visions such as peace. To a certain extent, rites and Buddhas can help farmers get rid of some negative thoughts when they encounter difficulties in life. Since Buddhism was introduced into China, from the perspective of social reality, our ancestors, or farmers relying on the small-scale peasant economy, did not believe in Buddhism in order to achieve a certain spiritual realm. They were utilitarian. In ancient times when the scientific and cultural knowledge was not so developed, they hoped to meet their individual needs and interests by means of evil spirits and disasters, and this habit has continued, and it is still prevalent in rural areas of northern Jiangsu until today. Utilitarianism inevitably brings some negative influences, such as feudal superstition and exaggerating the function of Buddhist belief.

3.2. The Main Problems of Buddhism in Rural Development

Before discussing this problem, we should first clarify one problem: the difference and connection between Buddhist belief and folk belief. Folk beliefs are mostly polytheistic worship, with a strong superstition, and often seek solutions to inner incomprehension and pain by divination, asking gods and psychic media. After Buddhism was introduced, folk beliefs and Buddhism infiltrated and influenced each other. Folklore, folk customs, traditional habits, etc. make use of Buddhism, and even completely transform it. Therefore, we need to understand that the Buddhism that most people contact and believe in now is the Buddhism that has been secularized and localized, which makes it easier for Buddhism to gain a broad mass base, and the folk beliefs and religious activities caused by worshipping Buddha and seeking God have been integrated into people's lives.

Secularized Buddhism will inevitably be negatively influenced by traditional folk customs in the process of spreading and developing. On this issue, we have an understanding with local village committee members. It is understood that at present, the problems brought about by Buddhist belief mainly include the following points:

First, some people take advantage of people's religious psychology for personal gain, especially in rural areas, where there are quite a few villagers with low educational level. They can't treat Buddhist beliefs objectively, don't have a deep understanding of religious beliefs, and are too superstitious about folk religious people, even to the point of fanaticism, and are deceived without knowing it. During the investigation, we also interviewed some non-religious villagers, who thought that there was nothing right or wrong in believing in Buddhism, but they were too

superstitious, and even some people around them did not go to see a doctor but prayed at home, which made them disapprove.

Second, because there are quite a few religious groups that believe in Buddhism in rural areas, the appeal and cohesion of these groups have affected the villagers' trust in local rural grass-roots organizations to a certain extent, which has led to some obstacles encountered by village committees in carrying out their work. Most of the people who believe in religion are the "three-odd people" (women, the elderly and those with lower educational level) in rural areas of northern Jiangsu, and the hierarchical division of such people in cities is also very obvious. "At present, some lawless elements have seized the weakness in this respect and used Buddhism to collect money and swindle, thus accelerating the decline of Buddhist culture, which is a microcosm of the drawbacks in the development of Buddhism."

Third, the management mechanism of rural religious affairs is not perfect, and there is no specific specialist in charge of religious affairs management among villagers. Most of the relevant managers in villages are part-time, and even some village committees ignore this position. During the interview, we found that many village committee members didn't know much about religious affairs and China's religious policies, and couldn't distinguish between normal religious beliefs and feudal superstitions. Of course, they didn't give enough guidance to formal religious activities, and they couldn't deal with the problems in the dissemination of Buddhism in a correct way. Due to the lack of attention to religious belief, the protection and supervision of temples are not in place, resulting in villagers having to organize their own group religious activities, which is confusing and difficult to manage.

3.3. Countermeasure Analysis

Although there are some problems in the spread of Buddhist faith in rural areas of northern Jiangsu, its positive role can not be ignored. Buddhism plays an active role in social stability, harmonious family and neighborhood relations, interpersonal relationships and personal psychological comfort. Therefore, we should aim at the problems mentioned above, proceed from reality, and give appropriate solutions, so as to better serve the construction of socialist spiritual civilization.

3.3.1. The Degree of Commercialization Needs to be Controlled

The Buddhist temples in Xuzhou are not too commercialized as a whole, but they still need the guidance of the government and religious affairs departments. During the visit, we found that most temples are closed, but once opened, they are not open to the public, but provide places for some activities or organizations, which is also a manifestation of commercialization. In modern times, Buddhist temples not only are places for religious activities, but also bear certain social responsibilities and obligations, and they need to return to their origins. All believers are treated equally, and Buddhists are given a place where they can engage in religious activities. The standardization of formal places of activities will inevitably bring about some favorable social factors, which will naturally reduce the number of religious scams in society, and Buddhists can correctly view religious beliefs.

3.3.2. Guide People's Beliefs

We should strengthen correct propaganda and guidance and establish scientific belief. The village Committee can make use of the local traditional culture, organize colorful and popular cultural activities, provide more leisure and entertainment activities for the villagers, meet the spiritual needs of empty nesters, housewives and left-behind children, and alleviate their excessive dependence on religious beliefs. Through the propaganda of scientific and cultural knowledge, the villagers' understanding of religious beliefs is more objective and rational. At the same time, we should further publicize the religious policies of the Party and the country,

respect the freedom of religious belief of every citizen, and not simply equate religious belief with feudal superstition.

3.3.3. Introduce Professional Buddhist Talents

Management should be strengthened. In view of the confusion of religious activities and difficulties in management, grass-roots organizations should not retreat from difficulties, but should improve the management mechanism and attach importance to the training, selection and appointment of special religious affairs managers. The introduction of professional Buddhist talents will make Buddhist activities more standardized, and the people will be exposed to Buddhist knowledge. Communicate with local religious groups and believers, and timely understand and master the religious status of villagers, so as to facilitate the management work.

3.3.4. Increase Capital Investment

The government should send commissioners to strengthen and communicate with the rural people, so as to know and master the religious status of the villagers in time, and facilitate the management work. To strengthen the management and standardization of temples requires certain investment and corresponding financial subsidies, so as to solve the situation that the villagers organize their own groups because there is no formal place for religious activities, and the religious activities are chaotic and difficult to manage. If cult organizations or other illegal religious activities are found, the government should also ban them in time and resolutely crack down on cult activities, so as to keep villagers away from cults and maintain normal production and living order.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the distribution of Buddhist temples in Xuzhou is relatively balanced as a whole, and the gap between urban and rural Buddhist temples is not very large in terms of quantity or scale. The incense of Buddhist temples in Xuzhou city is relatively strong, but there are also damaged and used for other purposes after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Buddhist temples requisitioned by schools, troops and public security have not returned to the functions of Buddhist temples, and only less than 20% of them have continued as Buddhist temples. Rural Buddhist temples, such as Yongning Temple in Fengxian County and Kannonji in Peixian County, have relatively few tourists due to their remote geographical location, which is far less than Xinghua Temple located at the top of Yunlong Mountain in the urban area and Chikurinji with superior geographical location. This shows that only Buddhist temples are concerned in rural areas, and the present situation of Buddhist beliefs in rural areas of northern Jiangsu will be difficult to intuitively reflect, and little is known about rural believers. Therefore, it is of great practical significance and social value to investigate the present situation of Buddhist beliefs of modern people in northern Jiangsu. Through visiting and investigating in rural areas, we found that the people who believe in Buddhism are mainly elderly people, and the motivation is often not pious belief in Buddhism, but a vision of peace. Under the current situation of rural belief, the government and relevant religious departments should strengthen religious propaganda and guidance, and strengthen the introduction of professional Buddhist talents, and resolutely ban illegal religious activities prostrate in rural areas, so that rural people can be exposed to correct Buddhist knowledge, and a series of religious activities in rural areas will also be standardized. Xuzhou, as the place where Buddhism was first spread in China in history, should consciously assume the bridgehead to continue and standardize Buddhist activities in the new era, so as to make the Buddhist belief adapt to the socialist culture and carry forward a better educational function.

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