

The Water-oriented Religious Activities in Licheng

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ABSTRACT

The water fields in the urban communities are usually cognized for transport, livelihood, and artisan productions. However, in Licheng, a city in Northern China, religious sites occupied a tremendous portion of urban lands surrounding the water-fields in the Ming-Qing period, thereby series of religious activities like the Obon festival held in the religious space of water, even nowadays. How did those religious sites maintain lands and conduct religious activities? As previous literature on urban studies cannot deliver convincing explanations for such a phenomenon, local chronologies also have not recorded the original formation of the city's religious spaces. In integrating and analyzing historical accounts, including chronicles, epitaphs, and notes, we argue that religious groups first established their settlements around the water-fields and then expanded to neighboring lands in legal and/or illegal ways.

Keywords: Religious space, water-field, symbolism, religious economy

1. INTRODUCTION

The water fields in the urban communities are cognized essential for transport, livelihood, and artisan productions. Occasionally the official lands may occupy water fields to serve aristocracy. However, few occasions except for Licheng illuminated another phenomenon, that is, some religious sites occupied a tremendous portion of urban lands surrounding the water-fields, thereby series of religious activities like the Obon festival held in the religious space of water, even nowadays. The functionalist theory by Skinner[1] may interpret it that religious sites convey a commercialization orientation, and actually, there does appear a commercial orientation of religious activities regularly. However, with the robust duration of the market, temples and monasteries chose a distinctively impressive approach to select the market location, which was guided to near the water-fields instead of the places with less cost of transport and larger scope of service. We still desire a new explanation on the motivation and mechanism of those market organizers and congregations' choices not purely based on the previous historical researches like those by Duara[2] and Zhang

Huasong[3] with little reference to its current status, which is still dynamic.

We want to ask how those religious sites still maintain high-value lands and conduct religious activities surrounding those precious water fields relying on their commercial or cultural values under interventions by the government if any. This can hardly be explained by the chronologically historical account adopted in explaining the Irish monastery-community relationship in Clonmacnoise[4] on account of the irregular establishment of religious sites in Licheng, which mostly are detected in different periods after the formation of urban communities. As previous literature on urban studies cannot deliver convincing explanations for such a phenomenon, local chronologies also have not recorded the original formation of the city's religious spaces. In integrating and analyzing historical accounts, including chronicles, epitaphs, and notes, we argue that religious groups first established their settlements around the water-fields and then expanded to neighboring lands in legal or illegal ways.

We split our reasonings into three parts, demonstrating the water's religious and commercial values in Licheng. The first part is a historical review of

the water fields within the ramparts occupied by religious sites in Licheng. Then in the second part, we discuss the religious and commercial values of the water-fields, home to the water-oriented activities. In the third part, we explain the water-field occupying religious spaces as an interplay between the religious groups and commercialized crowds.

2. THE HISTORICAL REVIEW OF LICHENG

Besides introducing the research phenomena in Licheng, the historical review helps understand and exclude the factors not constituting the water-oriented religious activities. The water here is treated both as resource and medium on the religious aspect, and with multi values on other aspects, like transportation and commercial transaction. According to previous research, the process of religious sites occupying extra fields sometimes occurred in the regime transition or disasters. To identify the first part of the argument, it became necessary to confirm that neither transport nor the political and historical reasons like urban expansion, war, and catastrophes had intervened in the process of religious sites occupying water-fields.

In Licheng, many significant religious sites were built by the water, for example, Heihu Temple was built by the Heihu Spring, Yuantong Temple and Shuichao Monastery were by the Spouting Spring. Previously, Licheng was the county's capital with the same name, and after the early Ming period, Jinan was established its status as the capital city of Shandong. Thus Licheng, as the capital, unified prefecture, and county, promptly became the home to Jinan prefectural government. And this process of merging the prefectural and county governments, which led to larger spaces occupied by the government offices, is called Fuxianheyi. After the completion, with large water and the narrow area within the rampart, most of the land in Licheng was occupied by government agency and gardens belonged to the aristocracy. The rest of the urban area undoubtedly had a high population density. With those governmental facilities and bureaucrats' households, Licheng was faced with heavier pressure on water and land than other towns. Astonishingly, religious sites occupied many lands surrounding water, including the springs, rivers, and lakes. Based on the figures from local gazetteers, there were 14 Buddhist temples occupying water resources in the urban communities in the Qing period.

The temple occupation can be reflected in the case of Kaiyuan Temple. The Kaiyuan Temple, located at the foot of Mount Qianfo, originally possessed tremendous urban lands before being used as a commission bureau in the early Ming period. The archaeological excavation of the underground palace of the temple in Xiandong Lane revealed valuable information of the Temple's borders in four directions. From its borders, it can be

confidently confirmed that the area of the original Kaiyuan Temple was over ten thousand square meters, equating to one forty fourth of the Licheng area and covering a large range of ditches, springs, and rivers. Considered the total land and water possession of contemporary 13 temples within the rampart, to be conservative, the total area would take up one-seventh or one-sixth of urban areas. The estimation was based on the statistics of temples' property in the Ming dynasty, mainly reflected by Temple's land, which was not included in the major taxation, strongly identified the fierce land occupation of temples in the Ming-Qing period. Moreover, according to the stele records of Lingyan Temple, the lands of the temples as Qizhuang Di were largely admitted and protected by officials just as other regions. Tenants might be permitted to cultivate and reclaim the temples' lands in a rural area, but not occasionally in the urban due to the limited lands for agrarian production. The temple's land was packed with palaces, courtyards, monks' residences, and squares for pujas, even forbidden commoners' demand for water. Therefore, various religious sites, whose religious activities such as rites and fairs were approaching the water-oriented religious activities, virtually implemented the short-term opening to the right to use water and water fields. Among those activities, the Obon Festival, an originally Buddhism festival, soon became a secular ritual both available to Buddhism and Taoism. It combined the religious activities with its sites to successfully expand its reach. Normally, in most places in China, the Obon Festival falls on the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the Chinese calendar once a year, while in Jinan, there was twice, separately on the fifteenth day and thirtieth day of the seventh month. Besides, in the Obon festival, both temples and monasteries would open their water fields to hold Puja and give permission to hold markets near the water. Market participators were willing to come, as they could set a street market without taxation or rental in such a densely populated area. Many Taoist monasteries, like the Beiji Shrine in the north of Daming lake, compared to Buddhism temples, had a no different attitude towards this kind of commercial activities. Of course, the Obon was not the only chance for religious sites to permit holding markets in their water-fields. There were Ghost Festival temple fairs and markets in days of religious sense. To sum up, the exclusive function of religious activities was to some extent deprived.

Initially, the control of religious sites to the water resources was not connected to the cross-region trade-in Ming and Qing Dynasties. During that time, Jinan became the growing center of trans-regional trade in the north of China. Hence, the rivers and canals played a more important role in shipping, attributing to an increasing need for cross-basin management. However, only the state government can take this enormous responsibility, integrating resources crossing regions or

forming regulatory agencies. Take salt as an example, a significant component of the state fiscal revenue, strictly under monopolistic control of the central authority. According to the Record of Rebuilding of the Stele of Daqing and Xiaoqing River, the waterway was usually utilized to transport from Lijin, a port near the delta of Yellow River, into the inland rivers, including the whole net of water channels in Shandong Province and also reached transfer station, Luokou, Jinan. Entering Jinan, salt went along the Daqing and Xiaoqing River. The former was a tributary of the ancient Ji River. The latter was canalized in the Southern Song Dynasty inconvenience of selling salt to the south. The two waterways were both connected to the commercial towns, mainly represented by the two regional cities, Yanzhou and Dongchang. Also, in case of floods, to eliminating losses to the salt trading posed by river blockages, according to many records of Jinan County Annals, it was the state's urgent task to arrange imperial envoys to dredge waterways in Jinan. From the seacoast of Guangrao to the very heart of Licheng, the salt trade took such a long journey, affecting so many waterways. It would be impossible for any religious sites to control such large scale of transportation, let alone its management or raising funds to canalization and urgent situations. Moreover, according to Hu Mengfei[5], beyond the regular assumption that the dense waterway network contributed a convenient transport environment in Licheng, the actual situation was that the waterway network. Most of them were originated in the southern mountains and poured into Daming Lake, is consisted of narrow creeks and ditches. The width and depth of most channels cannot even accommodate the sampan, not to mention the cargo ships. The cargoes assembled at Luokou were transported by livestock carriages to continue the last mileages, therefore successfully abandoned the possibility that the religious sites conducting the water-oriented activities were either built nearby the water or occupied the water out of the consideration of transport. Consequently, we can remove the transport factor in the circumstances of water fields within the ramparts occupied by religious sites.

Besides, there was no evidence that the power of religious sites to control the water resource in Jinan is endowed by the state and has relevant vicissitudes with the regime. During the substitute, a new regime for the old, most of the main religious sites maintained their status even the central government had been changed. The main structure of Licheng has been set since Song Dynasty, as the rainwater gathered in the down-fold of North Jinan. Eventually, Daming Lake formed, the big lake that greatly expanded the city and changed its water environment. In accordance with the North Water Gate, recorded by Zenggong[6], Luoyuan Bridge in the west of the city[7] as well as Shunquan in the south recorded by Suzhe[8], all of which can be found the

corresponding places in Ming and Qing Dynasty, thus it can be inferred that the occupation land of Jinan remained the same till then. During the process of Fuxianheyi in the Ming Dynasty, Licheng gradually became the location of most provincial government agencies, further extension, and rebuilds of the city were necessary. Some religious sites did move out of the city as the growing occupation of government buildings and gardens. However, their migratory routes followed the course of important canals and rivers in Jinan, which was also the distribution of the growing commerce. But important religious sites such as Lingyan Temple, which remains its existence until today, were built in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), becoming more and more prosperous as time went on and honored as the four great Buddhist Temples in China by the central government. Other great Taoist or Buddhist temples in Licheng like Lingjiu Temple, Xingguo Temple and Shentong Temple, all have a long history of more than 1000 years. Despite the damage caused by wars, natural disasters, or the temporary decline of pilgrims and funds, main religious sites remained. Moreover, to strengthen its domination of the local power, the new regime would choose to draw over the local religious power, gaining their support.

Thereby with the exclusion of other factors like transport and regime changes, we can confirm what value was attached to the water-fields.

3. RELIGIOUS AND COMMERCIAL VALUE IN WATER-FIELD

We find commercial value was coupled with religious value in water-fields in Licheng. We found much evidence in epitaphs, collections of local scholars, family genealogy, tourist notes, and other informal records to continue excluding to illuminate that.

First, religious symbolism in water fields has always existed in China, obviously and extensively in Licheng. Due to the special social environment and cultural background, to stabilize and extend their rule, the Chinese dynasties all regarded the worship of various water deities as an important political activity, which flourished from the Qin Dynasty and reached its peak in the Ming and Qing Dynasty. For example, Jidu Temple is a Taoist monastery used to worship the god of water called Jishui, which was built in the Tang dynasty. Moreover, the unique fertile groundwater compared to the frequent droughts made it more inclining to the god's power for ancient people in Licheng. Apart from the normal water worshipping activity, Licheng constantly suffered continuous and destructive droughts after the late Ming dynasty in the 17th century and even till now. The serious droughts made popular religions worshipping water as well as god relating to water normally and widespread. Li Weichun[9] once summarized the droughts that happened from the 17th to

20th century and the water worshipping religions in local Licheng. Li noticed that some popular religious sites worshipping the Dragon Lord are always located at the water-fields earlier than we found. The Five Dragon Pond Shrine located under the west gate of ramparts by Five Dragon Pond, the Dragon Lord Temple located in the Furong Street by the waterway through the urban community, the Shousheng Temple worshipping the Dragon's cave God located in the southeast Licheng by ponds in the Mount Dragon's cave. The Dragon Lords in Licheng only reside in the caves, puddles, or ponds with unio mystery, therefore only taking effect when the religious sites nearby their residence. Also, the water-fields represented by ponds and puddles are supplied by groundwater which has another externalized form-spring characterized by abundant and continuous water source.

Meanwhile, the religions in Licheng are complex, so it is hard to infer whether water became an independent and visual deity individually accepting worship and performing miracles. Still, it does illustrate the religious value of water-fields. To be more accurate, in the Sun Fang's [10] investigation towards the custom of praying for rain in Huang Chao, Jinan, various deities not limited to the Dragon Lord were invited to the rituals nearby water-fields when droughts came. When we see the folk custom concretizing the water into a god and reifying induction of heaven and mankind into the relatively simple activity preying to certain gods, the images of cults in Huang Chao were almost applied. When the ritual held, actors undertaken by villagers dressed as the Dragon Lord, the Thunder God, the Wind Mother and Rain Mother and the Water Yasha. Meanwhile, Huangchao, the respected statesman who associated the rebellion against the Tang reign, was invited to the ritual by brandishing an apricot dragon tiger military banner. Also, the Supreme Deity Taoism was included for its status governing water gods and respected statesmen. In the ritual praying for rain, almost all the deities relating to the water were included in the pantheon as a system permitting or forbidding the rainfall. The religious symbolism of water functioned as a catalyze to associate all deities with achieving the practical aim. Almost all villagers participated in the ritual to convey their devoutness and worship deities as a whole. However, some of the deities were not worshiped by many villagers. The religions in Licheng are even more complex, and some other proofs identified an even larger pantheon praying for rainfall, including Buddhist and Taoist deities, ancestors, and more meritorious statesmen. Sun and Li's case cannot indicate the water became an independent and visual deity that could individually accept worship and perform miracles. Still, it does illustrate the religious value of water-fields, which contains participation of various deities even a pantheon and may prompt the

direct communication with deities when congregations are near enough.

Second, religious sites were also public activity spaces open to common people in imperial China, especially those near water. Because the urban public area was narrow and closed. In the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Buddhism and Taoism began to flourish, which leads to the increasing number of temple buildings. Because of that, a large number of believers gathered here, which provided objective conditions for various cultural entertainment activities and commodity exchange activities. At that time, the temple economy is more developed, which leads to the appearance of Zhai meeting and Obon meeting. In particular, Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty was in great prosperity. To compete with Taoism for more followers and make itself more popularized and folk, it created folk speech and literary forms such as folk speech to attract audiences, making temples become the stage for artists who performed such as acrobatics, music, and dance in streets and alleyways. Also, because in Ming and Qing Dynasties, Jinan became the growing center of trans-regional trade in north China. The rivers and canals undertook more and more shipping functions. The commercial value in water fields is more obvious.

4. THE MECHANISM OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES' WATER-ORIENTED STRATEGY

Space gives religion a substantial visible presence and therefore makes religions tangible. Very confirmed, the water fields have dual attributes. On the one hand, they constantly function as religious space with cultural symbolism, which is always related to the Dragon Lord or the worshipping of mountains and water-fields. On the other hand, the commercial space, which is a partial social space, directly connects with the water-oriented activities with ample public transactions. Building on these ideas, Orlando Woods [11] defined space as both a medium through which religions are presented to society and a resource that religious groups compete for. As a medium, space reveals the physical presence of religion. However, importantly, space does not refer just to formally designated religious places (as shown by the presence of religious buildings, shrines, and symbols) and the more informal presence of religion in ostensibly non-religious places. As a resource, space both reflects the ordering of a religious economy (with monopolistic religions having a bigger and more symbolic spatial presence, for example). It informs how it works. Woods utilized the religious spatial development in Singapore, which is completely an urban community that can better match our cases in Licheng, Jinan to give several contributions. First, it helps argue a spatial perspective to religious economy theorizing. Analyzing the spatial practice of religious groups helps understand how the

principles of the religious economy are interpreted and applied. Moreover, it has challenged one of the normative principles of the religious economy—that regulation reduces competition between religious groups—by showing how the regulatory framework of Singapore’s secular monopoly minimizes land supply for religious purposes and thus increases competition for space. More than the innovative connection between space and religious economy, this article alarmed us a prerequisite under the strict supervision of government both in Licheng and Singapore, which may be a reasonable interpretation on the commercial function of water-fields occupation. Beyond these contributions, this article also brings to attention three areas for further study. That is kind of general and relates to the effects of spatial and organizational boundary-crossing strategies on the experience of religion. In countries like Singapore, congregations are challenged to identify with and practice religion in ways that forego the symbolism of religious buildings and the security of a fixed location.[12] How such challenges intersect with the growth and/or decline and the congregational structure of religious groups will help to generate new perspectives on the applied workings of a religious economy. To sum up, Woods’ interpretation in Singapore prompted a reasonable hypothesis on the intrinsic nature of competition on religious preference for water-fields, ditto for the process religious sites and congregations practice activities surrounding the “water”.

The theory of religious space revealed three contributions to our topic. First, they provided similar competitions both in the premodern period and modern China. Second, which is more noteworthy, it introduced a negotiating process between popular society and state authority on the attitude towards the religions. The water-oriented religious activities relating to the market transaction, no matter out of functionalist motivations or cultural norms, were the religious practices on behalf of organizers and congregations and the negotiation results in a dual-track society where different religions have a different inclination to the dual structure. And third, it eventually jumped out of history and was able to take the initiative to explain contemporary cultural phenomena, which are still dynamic in present Licheng.

5. CONCLUSION

Back to the religious activities in Licheng, the multi-functions of water-fields for those religious sites participating in the competition are both medium and resource. From the two vectors, we hence can easily exclude the religious sites not participating in the competition brightly and positively. They are sites exempted from the responsibility to attract congregations or without the ability to hold grand rituals attracting congregations and turning to seek other

meanings. With the negotiating with the state authority, apart from the officers’ commonly respecting to both local gods and Buddhist and Taoist deities, the market transaction is equipped with another weight for religions. Those water-fields with the abundant religious symbolism of water prompted market gathering in the religious activities. The admires towards the water, and the willingness to gather by water-fields made market transactions in those water-oriented religious activities extraordinarily assignable, which delicately match the urban society’s demands for more commercial transactions. Under the gentry’s awareness of the market, the religious activities surrounding water-fields were not forbidden. Once the regular market locations were confirmed in practice, the customized cognitions in the popular society made government awkward unwelcome repossess market plots, thereby the long-term maintenance of large water-fields occupied by religious sites. But after the People Republic of China, the intervention of central authority eliminated space for negotiation both with popular society and religious sites, many religious activities represented by Yaowang Temple Fair were banned. The cultural norm replaced utilitarian aim for participators and organizers of such religious activities after the mid-20th century.

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