LIU Yonghua

Taoist tradition, gentry culture, and local societies: The cult of Zougong at Sibao in western Fujian Province since the Song and Ming dynasties

Abstract  Zougong, the most important local deity at Sibao, Tingzhou Prefecture, was worshipped by local villagers at least from the Yuan and the Ming dynasties on. The Zou lineages in the area regarded Zougong as their common ancestor. Existing literature usually identifies Zougong as Zou Yinglong, a zhuangyuan in the Southern Song Dynasty. However, such identification appeared only in the late Ming period when local elites of several Zou lineages consciously tried to unite and consolidate their lineages. Before that, Zougong was a mighty ritual master in a series of magic contest stories popular at Tingzhou, rather than a zhuangyuan. The change of his identity from ritual master to zhuangyuan was a result of convergence of Taoist tradition, gentry culture and local culture, which may be called “cultural hybridization,” rather than a simple process by which local culture gave way to gentry culture.

Keywords  Zougong, western Fujian Province, Sibao, Taoist religion, gentry culture

摘 要  邹公是汀州四保地区最重要的地方神, 至迟从元明以来就为当地村落所崇奉,并被当地邹氏视为始祖。文献资料多认定邹公是南宋状元邹应龙, 实际这一说法在明代后期邹氏地方精英开始有意识进行收族活动后才出现, 与汀州流传的一系列斗法传说有关。这些传说透露出邹公不是状元, 而是位神通广大的法师。邹公从法师到状元的身份转换过程, 不应简单归结为士大夫文化取代地方文化的过程, 而应视为道教、士大夫与地方社会几种文化传统相互合成的结果。

关键词  邹公, 闽西, 四保, 道教, 士大夫文化

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LIU Yonghua
Department of History, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China
E-mail: liuyh2211@163.com
1 Introduction

In the Sibao area in western Fujian Province, Zougong is regarded as not only a local patron god but also the founding ancestor of the Zous. On the one hand, the majority of villagers in Sibao, especially those within the Sibao Basin, participated in the cult of this god on the eve of land reform. They either dedicated temples to him or worshipped his statue at home. On the other hand, all the Zou lineages there consider Zougong as their common ancestor. But what is the real identity of Zougong? Though the Zous believe he is Zou Yinglong, a zhuangyuan (scholar who came top in the imperial civil service examination) of the Southern Song Dynasty, the accounts on this idea in their genealogies are quite suspicious. On the contrary, the widely-spreading legends among local people provide that Zougong was a ritual master instead of zhuangyuan. The essay, however, will not focus on discussing whether Zougong is a zhuangyuan or a ritual master but the changing process of the local society and culture through investigating the transformation of Zougong’s two different identities. It can help us reconsider the two mainstream models of studying the cultural transformations in south China.

The two models are the study of social and cultural history and the study of religion. In recent twenty years, remarkable success has been achieved in these two fields. In the respect of religious studies, Chinese and foreign scholars have performed both documentary investigation and field work on the religion in south China, especially on the Lüshan lineage of Taoist religion and Pu’an lineage of Buddhist religion. In the field of social and cultural history, many academics from Fujian Province, Guangdong Province, Hong Kong, Taiwan and even abroad have made researches on such subjects as lineage organization, folk belief and the representations of state in south China, etc. Although some scholars have realized the necessity of coordinating the two academic fields and additionally carried out many significant attempts, enough substantial exchanges have not been established at the present, leaving much space for discussing relative issues. Therefore, the essay attempts to analyze the internal links between the both sides and promote their communication and cooperation by

1 Sibao in local people’s opinion consists of more than 70 villages in the adjacent area of Changting, Qingliu, Liancheng and Ninghua counties. The places mentioned in the paper like Mawu, Wuge, Shuangquan, Shangbao, Huangshikeng, and Changxiao etc. are all belonged to the Sibao area. The villages involving in the cult of Zougong are Mawu, Wuge, Shuangquan, Shangbao, Jiantou, Shexiaqian, Huangkeng, Yangbei, Yanwu, Liukeng, Jiangfang, Xikeng, Xiaoxie, Huangshikeng, Changxiao, and Daliankeng, including all of the biggest villages and many of the middle-size villages.
