

Research on the Symbolic Meaning of Sacrificing in Raza Ritual in Northwest Ethnic Corridor

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Raza Festival is a harvest festival in Taomin region of Northwest Ethnic Corridor in China. Its celebration ceremony Raza Jump can be divided into Small Jump and Big Jump. There is a ritual called the Lingsheng, in which cocks, pigs, and sheep are sacrificed to ancestors and the god of Raza, having own symbolic meaning.

Keywords: Raza Festival, Raza Jump, sacrifices, symbolic

Introduction

Raza Festival is the first batch of intangible cultural heritages in Gansu Province. It is a traditional folk festival held by more than 200,000 people in Northwest Ethnic Corridor in autumn and winter to celebrate harvest, visit relatives and friends, and offer sacrifices to ancestors and reward gods. The main activity is the sacrificial ceremony Raza Jumping (Sun & Ma, 2020). The Festival of Raza is a regional traditional festival produced by dealing with the relationship between man and nature, ethnic groups, and the relationship between people's basic living and spiritual needs in the long-term production and living practice, with the kinship geography as the link and the village as the social unit. Taking Northwest Ethnic Corridor as the background, this paper sorts out the historical and cultural meaning of sacrificing in the sacrificial ceremony of The Festival of Raza, and investigates its symbolic meaning.

From White Horse to Black Ox

Day by day, day by day/Black water waves the heaven, red water waves the earth/The flood, against the chaos/In the hands of congenital eight diagrams, there is no god, no ghost, and no human beings/To the day acquired eight diagrams period/First King Pangu dispells the wind, and then he created the world/Three emperors rule the world/Five emperors rule the world/Yu the Great prevents floods by water control/Killing a white horse to offer a sacrifice to heaven, slaughtering a black ox to offer a sacrifice to the earth, slaughtering a black pig or sheep to offer a sacrifice to the god/Smoke from god, from human habitation, from ghost smoke/Gods, men and ghosts are the only in the world.¹

A sacrificial lyric, just 145 Chinese words, contains extremely rich contents: There are ancient people's cognition order of the universe, the time order of the "congenital eight diagrams period" and the "acquired eight diagrams period", the space order of the sky, the underground and the intermediate space order and the corresponding earthly order of gods, humans and ghosts. There is the creation myth of Pangu and the earth, and there is also the folk legend of Dayu controlling the flood. Among them, "killing a white horse to offer a

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¹ Song composer: Zhao Wenwu, male, born in 1960, from Yaxia Town, Lintao County, Gansu Province, non-hereditary inheritor of Pan Si Jia, time: October 2019, location: Sujiashan Village, Yaxia Town, Lintao County, Gansu Province.

sacrifice to heaven, slaughtering a black ox to offer a sacrifice to the earth, slaughtering a black pig or sheep to offer a sacrifice to the god” is the folk memory of the sacrificial order and sacrifice.

Heaven and Ground worship is one of the most important rites in ancient Chinese dynasties. The Son of Heaven (the king or the emperor) worships the heaven in the south Circular Mound and the earth in the north circular Mound. It is called the suburb ceremony. The emperor’s sacrifices are to the gods in the heaven including Haotian, God, the Sun and the Moon, stars, wind, thunder, and rain, and to the gods on the earth, the Sheji, Five Mountains, forests and other natural gods. Worship to heaven and the ground can be in the same or separated sacrificial situations. The emperor offered sacrifices to the millet, offering all three of the cattle, sheep, and swine as “too strong”. Governors sacrifice ShaoLao, only including sheep, swine, no cattle. It says: “it does not use both the two animals and dedicated to a sheep or a pig, it is called special sheep, special pig”. Sacrificial animals not only requires “feather completion” (Zheng Xuan’s words), but only “pure color” can “be sacrificed”. Different times, advocating different colors, sacrifice, and color requirements are also different. *The Book of Rites—Tan Gong* provides the ruler:

Xia Empress worships the colour of black. They held an obsequies ceremony in the evening of the day. The pure black horse is for the war sacrifice, and other animals should be black. The Yin worships the colour of white. They held an obsequies ceremony at noon of the day, and the sun is in the sky. They use the pure white horse before the war, and other animals should be white in all ceremonies. The Zhou people’s colour is red. They held an obsequies ceremony at the time of sunrising. They use the pure red horse before the war, and other horse and ox should be red too. (Hu, 2017, p. 105)

It is the duty of the king to offer sacrifices to heaven and earth. So, where does the memory “kill a white horse to worship heaven” thus come? Sorting out the function of white horse in ancient sacrifice, I found that the symbolic meaning of “white horse” in Central Plains culture and minority culture is different. Pre-Qin, especially Yin Shang period, attached great importance to “white horse”, but the sacrifice of heaven and earth is Tailao, including an ox, a sheep, and a pig; After the Qin and Han Dynasties, white horse, as the god’s ride, was often associated with plain chariot, covenant, and water god. After the Song Dynasty, Nuzhen, Liao, and Jin ethnic minorities in the north, often offering sacrifices to heaven and earth with “a white horse” and “a black ox”, continued to the Qing Dynasty.

The Lingsheng of the Raza Jump

According to the field investigation, there is “white horse black ox” in the Raza Jump, the ritual of Raza Festival, but the three animals in the ritual practice are cocks, pigs, and sheep. Raza Jumping can be divided into Small Jump (which holds every year) and Big Jump (which holds every three or 10 years). The former is generally held a day, inviting one or two Sijia, in the rotation of the God head’s (Shentou in Chinese) home; the latter usually lasts for three days and two nights, and can even last up to seven days and six nights. Five to eight Sijia are invited, and the number can be up to 18. No matter it is “Little Jump” or Big Jump, sacrificing three sacrifices to the gods is indispensable. The sacrifice ceremony has a common name—Lingsheng (which means sacrificing animals to the ancestors and the gods).

Ling is the local dialect, which means accept. Zong Ka-Yang Zhengbo, a Tibetan scholar, makes a textual interpretation of ling sheep: The Tibetan words corresponding to “acceptance”, Len (prototype), Lang (past form), Longs (command), where Len is pronounced the same as “lead”. ... The Han people probably use Len, the prototype of the Tibetan verb derived from Qiang Tibetan (ancient Tibeto-Burman), and the Tibetans (Zong Ka-Yang Zhengbu & Lang Lang, 2014).

Among the rituals of Lingsheng, the ritual of Ling sheep is relatively common and widely exists in the Border zone between Han and Tibet in the Northwest Ethnic Corridor. The sacrificial rites of sheep in the Region of Raza culture mainly include Ling sheep and Rolling ridge, which is only used for the completion of a new temple. The main way to Ling sheep is to sprinkle and wipe the goat with wine or water, so that the “sheep trembles” is regarded as the smooth life of the gods happy acceptance. The ritual of Ling sheep has been specially studied by scholars; we do not take it as the focus of attention.

Cocks have become the most frequently used sacrifices because of their small sizes and low prices. During the Small Jump, the number of sacrificial sacrifices is only small and the variety is single. Most of the sacrifices are two cocks. If the economic conditions are good, a pig or a sheep and a cock will be sacrificed. In Big Jump, a pig or a sheep is generally required, while seven to 10 cocks are required. Another reason is that it has special symbolic meaning in Chinese traditional culture. *The Rites of Zhou—Chunguan Cock Man* writes:

The cock man is in charge of the cocks that are offered for sacrifice and identifies their color. When the great sacrifice is held, and when it was nearly dawn, the cock man should cry loudly: It is Dawn! So as to arouse all of the officials. The same thing must be done when the state is entertaining its vassals, when the king is in council, when the king is leading troops to battle, and when funerals are held. Whenever the time of state affairs is fixed, the time shall be reported to the official in charge. They usually offer sacrifice cocks when getting rid of disasters in four sides or holding temple rituals. (Yang & Zhang, 2017, p. 431)

The local people in the Raza cultural area also have the view that ghost is afraid of cocks. *JinShu* (Fang, 1983, p. 356) also writes: “On the first day of the New Year, standing reed peach stem, cutting cocks would be put in the Palace and Hundred temple doors to get rid of evils”. Night is often a variety of ghosts and evil haunt the time, the crow indicates the night in the past, the arrival of light; therefore, the cock has the function of exorcising ghosts. In many places, people cut cocks or paint or carve it on windows to remove charm. In the sacrifice, the cock with broken neck is sacrificed to the evil spirits and other evil gods. The sacrifice is “hair and blood”, which is not only offered for its sacrifice, but also expulsion.

In addition, a cock is closely related to the phoenix, which is a blessing that is not real. It is recorded in *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers* that there is a kind of bird on Danxue Mountain, “its shape is like a cock, and its name is Phoenix” (2011, p. 135). Xu Zheng’s *The Law of Justice* (Xu, 1839, p. 35) says, “In the reign of the Yellow Emperor, phoenix was the cock”. According to *Origin of Chinese Characters* (Xu, 2013, p. 73), the cock donated its long beak to the phoenix. The cock and the phoenix are not only similar in appearance; the former is good at singing, and the latter is also good at singing. *The Book of Songs, Daya, Volume A* (2020, p. 650) says: “The phoenix is singing, in that high hill”, which means that the phoenix is singing auspiciously, stopping there on the high hill. It is said that the phoenix cries in the morning, and all the animals dance from it. *Taiping Imperial Review* quoted in *ShangShu* (Li, 1960, p. 225), “Emperor Shun said: ‘I just don’t do things, but all the animals do in the morning’”. The original notes say: “All the animals danced, and the Phoenix sang”. The inheritor of Raza explains, “The cock is the replacement of the phoenix in the human world, the king of flat-haired animals. The hen is called the high Phoenix, and the rooster is called the waking rooster”.²

² Interviewee: Wu Yanbai, male, born in 1960, a native of Chuanyasi, Qiuchiwan Village, Weiyuan County, Gansu Province. Interview time: October 2020; telephone interview.

Wuzhuhuidi of the Raza Jump

The ritual of pig sacrifice includes the ritual of Ling pigs held mostly in the basin villages and the ritual of “Wuzhuhuidi” held mostly in the mountainous villages. Wuzhuhuidi is in Chinese, which refers to the pig hogging the small pile of ground prepared by the local people. The ceremony of Ling pigs is similar to that of Ling sheep, and it is to judge whether the gods accept it by beating drums to pray and striking hexagrams. Wuzhuhuidi is often held at noon. The following is the scene of Wuzhuhuidi I observed in front of a little temple, Sujiashan Village, Lintao County, Gansu Province on 2019, Sept. 9.

Before the ritual, the villagers have already financed jointly to buy a pig for Raza god, whose body is white and limbs are black. It is about 11 o'clock, the noon of the day, out of the temple; a small pile of soil is piled up on the ground, around it putting above the buns, with sweet, wax and such tributes. There are 10 people called “Shentou” (leaders) in the villages kneeling around a semicircle and waiting. The host of the ritual is Sijia; he wipes throughout the pig with burning yellow papers, then spills wine on the pig, and asks the pig to hog the mound. At the same time, other Sijia beat the sheepskin drums; the first Sijia invites the mountain god Raza and all the gods to receive the sacrifice, telling the god that it is the “black pig” offered in return for the protection of the year: “Pull the pig to the face of the mountain god/People and officials do not fall in debt to God/Yin chuan master, Yang Chuan master/Sacrificial swords, black pig hogging the ground/The mountain god and the gods are enough to receive”. But the pig does not hog the pile. Sijia then asks the “black pig’s “wish money”, that is, how many pounds and how much money. Shentou reports. And then Sijia confesses to the “black pig”: “All the villagers wish you to hog the pile, and the mountain god will quickly accept it”. The pig humps about under his own feet, not over the mound. Sijia asks, “Is it not clean?” The heads reply, “It was just washed with water. Aren’t its hoofs clean?” Someone immediately takes water to wash the hoof once again. The people look at the pig hopefully, but it has not yet dug. It is observed that a rope is still attached to one of the hoof of the pig; people suggest that the cause may be found, and that the bound sacrifice would not be acceptable to the gods. After removing the rope, Sijia pours wine on the pig while continuing to pray. The pig still refuses. Someone moves the steamed bun to the front of the pig; the pig is still unmoved. They continue to look for the reason. The Sijia then asks: “Is it the heads of god incomplete?” The “Huishou” of the “god heads” looks around and answers, “There are 12 little villages and 12 god heads, but two of them didn’t come. The women of the family are here. The men went out to work and couldn’t come back”. Sijia prays to the mountain god: “Uncoming people are going out to make a living, but the cost of the ritual are paid, please don’t be offended and receive it early”. The bystanders were whispering, “Time is important, Raza is not coming.” The Sijia waters again in front of the mound, and at last the pig hogs the mound with its mouth, and everyone cheered: “Welcome! It accepts!”

The pig was then killed for a ritual feast, and the pig’s head was cooked whole and placed on a plate in front of the altar of the mountain god for the ceremony. Presiding over the ceremony is still Sijia, with the “head” of the ceremony kneeling on the right side of the case; Sijia holds a sheepskin drum, beating and dancing, and invites the gods to enjoy the sacrifice.

Why would they choose “a black pig” as the sacrifice? That is because ancient Chinese people thought black pigs had something to do with rain. In *Zhouyi—Shuogua* (2020, p. 646), it is believed that “Kangua³, that is Water”. “It refers to a pig”. Zheng Xuan wrote in *The Book of Rites*: “Pigs, aquatic animals”. Pigs and fish

³ One of the Eight Trigrams.

are believed to be aquatic animals. In addition, before rainfall in summer, the weather is hot and stuffy, and pigs like to soak in water to dissipate heat. People observed that pigs' bathing bodies often become the precursor of rainfall, so they came to the understanding that when pigs enter water, it will rain. Mao biography says: "will be long rain, swine into wading wave". Poem carries: "there is a swine with white hoofs involved waves. Then comes the pouring rain". Huang Zifa in the Tang Dynasty also said in *The Book of Rain* (Huang, 1304, p. 12): "There is no cloud in the four directions, but there is a cloud in the river. The three powers are connected, like a pig in a bath, and it rains heavily for three days". The association of black pig and dark clouds makes black pig and rain more closely. Up to now, there is a folk saying in Fujian that "it rains when black pig crosses a stream". In the ceremony of "Lingsheng", Sijia first poured water between the pig and the mound, and then before the mound, which was not only to lure the pig to the muddy land, but also to imitate the image of rain falling and moistening the earth. The main duty of Raza, the mountain god, was to keep the land in good weather for farming. People sacrifice "black pig" to the mountain god, is on the one hand to thank him for his good work during the year, and on the other hand to hope for adequate rain in the coming year.

Conclusion

In the Raza cultural region, the agricultural economy relying on the weather has always been the common way of life for community members. Local people believe that through sacrifice, they can communicate with the gods, make the gods happy, and get the gods' blessing. Thanks to the "protection" of this year of the Mountain God of Raza, willings to good weather and good harvest of the next year become the common responsibility of the community members.

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