

Sacred and Secular: Cultural Connotations of the Eid Rite of Hui Nationality in Yinchuan, Ningxia

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Abstract: the Rite of Eid al-Fitr is a Group Religious Ritual of Muslims. It is the Rites of Passage for Every Muslim to Realize the Transition between Secular Space and Sacred Space. This Paper Intends to Analyze the Process of the Muslim Eid al-Fitr Rite in Yinchuan with the “Passage Theory”.

1. Introduction

In China, the distribution of Hui nationality is characterized by “large distribution and small concentration”. According to the sixth census, in 2011, the Hui population in Ningxia was 2,190,979, accounting for 34.77% of the total population. The number increased 17.14% compared with the fifth census. Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is the main inhabited area of Hui Nationality, with the total Hui population of 1.8625 million, accounting for 18.9% of the total Hui population in China.

The site of this field investigation is the Yuehai Mosque in Yinchuan, Ningxia. Yinchuan is the capital of the autonomous region; it is also the political, economic and cultural centre. Yinchuan governs three municipal districts, two counties and one county-level city. Located in the north of Ningxia, Yinchuan borders the Shizuishan city in the north and the Litong District of Wuzhong City in the south. As for the geographical state, the north of Ningxia is the plain and the south is the mountain area; the landform of Yinchuan city can be divided into two parts: the mountain area and the plain area. Yinchuan is a multi-ethnic area, of which the Han population occupies the largest proportion, accounting for 75.48%; the Hui population is 459,647, accounting for 23.06%. The Yuehai Mosque was built in 2016 on the basis of demolishing five mosques, including the Xiaolibai temple in Yinfeng village of Shanghaixi Road, the Jinjiazhuang temple, the Xihunan temple of Jinghu village, as well as the Mianjiazhuang temple and Xihu temple in the West Lake Village of Fengdeng town. The main building of the mosque is divided into upper and lower floors. The upper floor is the worship hall, which can hold thousands of people.

In view of the process of rite, Arnold Van Gennep put forward a complete model of passage rites, including rites preliminaries (the rite of separation), rites liminaires (the rite of liminality and rites postliminaires (the rite of aggregation). Eid al Fitr is one of the traditional festivals celebrated by the Hui nationality every year. It is a festival with transitional significance. This paper intends to use the passage theory to analyze the Eid rite in Yinchuan. In this study, the author followed the eldest son of Ha family to participate in the whole process of the Eid rite and recorded the process. The eldest son of Ha family was born in 1961. The rite was held on June 26, 2017.

2. The Rite of Eid al-Fitr in Hui Nationality of Yinchuan

In the *Outline of the History of Religious Anthropology*, Ze Jin pointed out that, “in Taylor’s view, religious rites can be divided into two parts that are actually connected with each other in theory. One part has important modelling or symbolic significance; it is the dramatic expression of religious thoughts or the mime language of religion. The other part is the way to communicate with the soul or the way of influencing them.” The rite of purifying the body and mind, such as full ablution and partial ablution, should be carried out before the Eid rite. The prayer in the rite and the grave visiting process after the rite are a kind of “dramatic performance”; the process of the rite

expresses the symbolic significance of the Eid through “the way to communicate with the soul”. The introduction of the book, *Research on the Formation of Islamic Social Organizations in the Northwest* mentions, “religious rite is a symbolic, procedural and standardized behaviour based on a series of specific combinations, which not only permeates the participants’ respect, reverence and fear for the holy, but also carries a specific mission or tires to achieve a specific purpose.” For Hui people, through the rite process of Eid, real life is infused with religious rites. Activities of bathing, dressing, eating and drinking are infused with religious rites. Through the rite process, they express their respect, reverence and fear for the faith. Such religious beliefs are expressed through religious rites, showing the Hui people’s baptism of their bodies and mind.

2.1 Before the Rite

The first thing is to fry oil cakes. On the day before the Eid, namely June 25, 2017, the eldest son of the Ha Family began to prepare the fried oil pancake at 3:00 p.m. His wife prepared a small bag of flour, the yeast, five eggs, some brown sugar and a barrel of oil. She kneaded the dough, and put the dough away for a while. She divided the dough into small balls, and rolled out them with a rolling pin. She used a knife to cut three small holes vertically on the flatten dough, then fried it in the pot to make the oil cake. After the oil pancakes were fried, she started to make the fried dough twist. Finally a big pot of oil cakes and a big pot of fried dough twists were made.

The second part is washing and dressing. Before the rite, Muslims who go to the mosque to participate in the Eid rite should first wash themselves (partial ablution and full ablution) to separate the state of body and mind from that before and after the Eid al-Fitr. The eldest son of Ha family got up on time according to the time table of Ramadan in Yinchuan. He drank a cup of Babao tea in the morning and ate a piece of oil cake. The first step is partial ablution and full ablution. It can be carried out at home or in a mosque. All Muslims, except for the disabled and those who can’t take care of themselves, must wash themselves. They took the bottle with left hands and washed themselves with right hands for three times, saying “in the name of Allah.” The sage said, for those who go through partial ablution but do not speak the name of Allah, the partial ablution is not complete. There are 11 steps in total: clean the bottom, wash the hands, rinse the mouth, choke the nose, wash the face, wrap the head, wash the ear, wash the head, wash the elbow and flush from head to foot (for full ablution) and wash the feet. They need to do each step three times and follow the order of right to left. The eldest son of Ha family wore a white hat on that day, and dress in formal clothes. His wife, wearing a colourful head cover, can expose no part of the body except for her face and hands. The family set out for the Yuehai Mosque at 8 a.m.

Third, before the prayer, they need to do compulsory charity, which is one of the “five acts of worship” in Islam. It means to voluntarily giving up money and things before a rite. There are two main purposes of charity. One is that in the eyes of Muslims, wealth belongs to Allah. Through donation, they can communicate with Allah and get the greatest return. The other is to increase their good deeds and make compensation for their mistakes in this year. Some of the family members can’t go to the mosque to attend the rite; the family members who can attend should donate on behalf of them. The eldest son of Ha family arrived at the Yuehai Mosque at 8:30 a.m. He said, “in fact, it’s a kind of dedication. According to the number of family members, we can donate 10 Yuan or 20 Yuan. The minimum amount of money is the price of grain in that year. Everyone must do that.” He needs to donate on behalf of his parents, his disabled elder sister and his wife, so he donate 100 Yuan. On the day of Eid al Fitr, the site of compulsory charity was at the entrance of the mosque. The director of the temple management committee organized three people to put a table and make records.

2.2 During the Rite

The first step is entering the main hall. At 9:00 a.m., everyone successively entered the hall and knelt. Men were in the hall. Both men and women could participate in the rite of Eid in Yinchuan area. Muslims who entered the hall needed to take off their shoes outside the hall and put them on the steps. Before entering the hall, they had to step on the right foot and then the left foot. The male sat in the main hall in turn, facing the direction of Mecca. Women went upstairs and came the

corner of the second floor. In the Nanguan Mosque, there is a special side hall for women to worship, from where they can not see the imam and male Muslims downstairs. Boys follow male family members to take part in the rite. They need to learn and comprehend the Islamic doctrine and liturgy. Girls stay at home, or follow female family members to participate the rite at the corner of the second floor. About one thousand men and ten women entered the hall that day. After entering the main hall, the Hui people usually take up their own scriptures and chant, which is called “Kai Jing”. At 9:30 a.m., the rite officially began.

The second step is expostulation. At the beginning of the rite, the Imam sat in the front of the hall. Students of the Imam sat in the first row. At the beginning, the Imam delivers a sermon for one hour, that is “expostulation”. The main contents come the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. Then the Imam explained the *Quran*, reading Arabic first and explaining in Chinese again. There are two purposes of the sermon, one is to publicize Islamic doctrine; the other is to affirm and praise that Muslims who have passed fasting and completed another baptism. The Islam admonished every Muslim to strictly perform the responsibilities of prophet messengers in words and deeds, love themselves and have filial piety. The expostulation lasted for 55 minutes.

The third step is prayer, which is the core of Eid rite. Muslims stood toward the direction of Mecca in that process. It consisted of two parts. First was to stand and say, “Eid Al-Fitr”. The Imam expressed his intention, which means to pay homage to the Imam and follow him. Then Muslims followed the Imam and read “tekhbiles, Allah akbailey” three times, followed by bowing and kowtowing. The second was to stand still, listen to Imam say, “fatiha” and “solai” and speak “tekhbiles, Allah akbailey” three times. When they spoke for the fourth time, they bowed, kowtowed, meditated, and spoke “sailiangmu” with the Imam. Afterwards, Muslims kneeled to listen to the Imam saying, “hutubai”. After reading, they started to do Duwa and pray to Allah. In the end, all Muslims say “sailiangmu” and went out of to the hall. The rite ended at 11 a.m., lasting for 1 hour and 30 minutes.

2.3 After the Rite

After the rite, some people went to worship the dead and then went home to entertain their relatives and friends, while others went home directly to entertain their relatives and friends. The worship of the dead emphasizes the inspiration to the participants. According to Islam’s “two world view”, people have life, death, soul and afterlife. Others’ recognition comes from dinners with relatives and friends. It is a symbolic rite, which sublimates and strengthens the relationship among Muslims.

The first part is the grave visiting rite, which is a kind of family behaviour of Hui people in memory of the deceased. Some people choose to visit the graves on the birthday or death day of the deceased. Usually, only male Muslims participate in the rite. In the same day after the prayer, the eldest son of Ha family drove to cemetery to commemorate the dead. At 12 o’clock, he arrived at the cemetery. When visit the grave, Muslims generally ask the Imam to read the relevant chapters of the *Quran* for the dead. Therefore, the eldest son of Ha family temporarily asked an Imam to read the *Quran* at the cemetery. The grave visiting lasted for 30 minutes. At 12:50 on June 26, 2017, he drove to his mother’s house in the city. Women could not enter the grave, and the eldest son only had two daughters. So he was the only one who visited the grave that day. According to Islam, when living people visit the graveyard in person, “they can associate death with the last judgment, which will encourage them to do more good things, abandon evil thoughts, and be upright and devout Muslims.” Visiting graves is a kind of rite for Muslims to commemorate the dead, and also a way for Muslims to understand life and realize self reflection. The rite has always been valued by the Muslim public.

The second part is entertaining relatives and friends. On June 24, 2016, the mother’s family began to prepare food for the day of Eid on June 26. The food included oil cakes, sugar tea, mutton, beef, chicken, fish and various vegetables. At 7:30 a.m. on June 26, 2016, all women in the family came to help prepare the dishes for the Eid. The eldest son of the family is the only male of his generation, so the other 15 people need to wait for him. They cannot start eating until the eldest son

come back from the grave. But in the feast, the father should eat dishes first before everyone start to eat. Before the meal, a plane of oil cakes and a plane of fried dough twists were placed on the table. On June 26, 2016, at 1:30 p.m., the eldest son of the Ha family arrived at home and the banquet began. According to Victor Tumer, “the rite is a prescribed standard behaviour serving various occasions, and a belief in mysterious or non experiential things or magic. Rite is regarded as a political means to restore social balance and stability.” The rite of all relatives and friends celebrating Eid together is a way to link everyone’s feelings together with the flow of material objects in interpersonal relations. It can increase the affection between Muslims and maintain social stability.

3. Analysis on the Rite of Passage in the Eid al-Fitr of Yinchuan

3.1 The Separation Stage

First, the separation phase dates back to Ramadan. Through the strict requirements of diet and daily five practices during the Eid, Muslims can achieve the separation of body and consciousness from the secular world. Until the day of Eid, the requirement of ablution before the rite and the requirement of dressing and eating during the Eid rite make the Hui people aware of the beginning of the separation rite. At the beginning of the 20th century, a Dutch scholar, A. van Gennep, wrote *Etiquette in Life* and put forward the famous “rite of passage”. That is, with the help of this kind of rite, individuals and their associated communities can easily enter another new stage of life, and can smoothly pass through in interpersonal relationships and the mental world. The collective Eid rite of Hui nationality belongs to a group passage rite. The day of Eid is in hot summer; it is the turning point of Hui people from one stage to another in one year. Hui people believe that people’s bodies are easy to get sick and their food is easy to rot in the hot summer. Fasting in the hottest summer is not only a test of people’s physical and mental will, but also a punishment for the mistakes they made in this year. After the fasting, the Eid rite is a kind of group rite of passage for Muslims, which allows them to separate the Eid day from the ordinary time by means of purification, and start to enter the separation stage.

3.2 The Liminality Stage

After the ablution rite, the Hui people enter the main part of the rite. In this process, every Hui entering the hall of worship should be separated from their identity state before. They enter a fuzzy stage of identity state through the Imam’s expostulation the prayer led by the Imam. In the *Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep said: “anyone who goes through this region to another region will feel a special situation for quite a long time in the sense of body, witchcraft and religion. He travels between the two worlds. It is this situation that I call ‘edge’”. This kind of edge is mainly manifested in the separation from the original identity. For every Hui people involved, there is no difference in rank, status or property of the secular society. This is a state different from the original secular world. After entering the main hall, through religious rites, they repent what they were in the secular world before. There will be a holy and fuzzy stage which is inconsistent with later life.

3.3 The Aggregation Stage

When the Hui people walked out of the hall, the core ritual of the whole Eid rite had been completed. The Hui people who walk out from the inside come back to the secular world. After the passage of the sacred rite in the liminality stage, the relationship between the Hui people and the faith is strengthened again. After that, the secular identities of Muslims are strengthened through grave visiting and dining; Muslims who participate in the Eid rite enter the stage of “aggregation”. After the grave visiting and dining rites, the religious aggregation rituals of Muslims are all performed.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis of the three stages of the rites of passage for Muslim in the Eid al-Fitr shows

that the process of Muslim identity transformation is based on the Islamic belief of the Hui people. The related rites in these stages not only restrict the words and deeds of every Hui people, but also unite the group of Hui nationality.

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