

A Brief Introduction of History and Religious Beliefs of Ancient City Gaochang in Western Regions

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Abstract: The ancient Gaochang's four different periods of history was told and then in every historical stage of religious belief situation also made a general list. The Buddhism was the dominant religion, while other religions were believed by the residents in Gaochang at the same time. This belief situation was advocated by the Gaochang's ruling class and its special geographical location, which made Gaochang the place with different religious culture.

Key words: Gaochang • History • Religions • Belief • China

INTRODCTION

Gaochang, built in the 1st Century BC the Han Dynasty, was one of the world's religious cultural treasure. Gaochang was an important site along the Silk Road. Gaochang played a key role as a transportation hub in western China and it was also one of the ancient Xinjiang's political, cultural and educational centers. The city was rectangular, 5 km circumference. The ancient city was composed of three parts: the outer city, the inner city and palace city. The ancient wall base, built by compaction soil, was width 12 meters, 11.5 meters high wall, a total area of 2000000 square meters. In 1961, the Gaochang was listed as national key cultural relic protection units. Nowadays, Gaochang ruins is located in Halahezhuo which is 40 kilometers east of Turpan city, Xinjiang China. Gaochang used to play an important role in east-west political, economic and cultural communication. Based on the achievement of previous scholars and lots of literature, the author analyzes the history and religions of ancient city Gaochang in four periods in brief.

The History of Gaochang in Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties:

Since the road to the Western Regions was founded by Zhangqian, the Western Regions began to be ruled by the government of the Western Han Dynasty. In the 60 B.C, the western Han dynasty set up Western Regions Frontier Command central government, which marks the

Xinjiang officially incorporated into the domain of the Chinese territory. In the 48 B.C, because of the fertile soil in Jiaohe and its the important position, the government sent officials and built barracks in Jiaohe and at the same time set troops in Jiaohe, Gaochang. As for the explanation of its name, there is an saying in *The Book of Wei Dynasty-GaochangHistor*, "Because the terrain was high and spacious and the town was thriving and prosperous, the country was named Gaochang. And there was also another explanation that there was Gaochang stronghold built in Han Dynasty". There were many wars in Central Plains in Wei and Jin Dynasties, so some prominent families moved into Gaochang to seek refuge from war. In A.D 329, Zhang Jun, the Former Liang Dynasty, personally led a military expedition and won the war, then set the county government in the Gaochang, Which was the beginning of the county government in the western regions.

The Religious Beliefs in Gaochang in Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties:

Religious belief is the core of people's mental life. And it belongs to the special kind of social awareness and culture. During this period, apart from ancestor worship, there were other religious worships.

The Buddhism: Around the third to the fourth century, the Buddhism spread to Turpan basin. In the A.D 400, when Buddhist monk FA Xian travelled to Gaochang, he got the material supplies. The Buddhism had an early

influence on the people in Gaochang. The Japanese Otani expedition had got a Buddhist scripture called *Zhu Fo Yao Ji Jing* in Turpan Tu YuGou, which was the earliest Buddhist scripture written in 296 (Yuan Kang Jin Dynasty for six years) in Western Regions. The scripture called *Zhu Fo Yao Ji Jing* was unearthed from Turpan and had the exact time. "In the middle of 5th century, the princes of Turpan were all the pious Buddhists., GaoChang seemed to become a Buddhist Centre in accordance with the model of Western Qiuci state" [1]. Therefore, from the above we can see that the Buddhism was the dominant religious belief in Gaochang and the ruling classes like the Princes became devout followers of Buddhism.

The Taoism: The majority of Gaochang residents was Han people, who believed in Taoism tradition. "Since North Wei Dynasty, Gaochang was ruled by in order of Kan, Zhang, Ma, Qu four mainland surname giants of establishing Han regime. Taoism spread and developed quickly in Gaochang which could be proved by the cloth and vegetable buried with dead. Most of the cloth and vegetable buried with dead had magic figures and Taoist incantations on them. 'Such as emergency laws and orders'" [2] Except that, according to the book written by Chen Guochan *From Burial Etiquette of Deity View See Taoism's Population in Gaochang*, "There were magic figures and incantation on some wooden tablet buried in grave or put on the top of the grave" [3]. Then it's obvious to see that Taoism not only existed but also had great influence on people's life.

Zoroastrianism: Zoroastrianism was founded in the 7-6 century. in Persia. The religious believers used fire as the symbol of kind and light and especially worshiped fire. Historian Ma Dazheng considered that in the fourth century, Zoroastrianism was introduced into Xinjiang from Central Asia. In 1965, in Turpan An Le ancient city unearthed Sutra of golden light (Volume II inscriptions mentioned the Hu Tian of South Empress Dowager temple in Gaochang east). The literature written in Hu Tian referred to worship the deity of Zoroastrianism places. The Gaochang city set up Hu Tian of Zoroastrianism worshiped Hall in the early period of the Gaochang county government. According to the records "Gaochang sacrifice" Ding GuTian Tian was another name of Hu Tian, which was also an indeed Zoroastrian Temple. All these provided that Zoroastrianism spread and indeed possessed land in Gaochang" [4].

Other Beliefs: During the Gaochang county government, Han people in Western Regions had the customs to offer sacrifices to ancestors and swept the ancestors' tombs. Believing in Confucianism and Buddhism at the same time was the main characteristic of belief. The Confucianism was considered as a national basic to the management of state and the governor used the Buddhism to control people. At the same time, most of Gaochang people believed in Nature. Therefore, The Buddhism was the dominant religion while other religions were believed by the residents in Gaochang during this period.

The History of Gaochang in Northern and Southern, Sui, Tang Dynasties: During middle of 5th century to middle of 7th century, there were four depended country respectively, Kan, Zhang, Ma, Qu four Gaochang Kingdom. In the 640, Gaochang was destroyed by Tang dynasty, then Tang government set up Gaochang County and established the Anxi Duhu frontier command mechanism to control it. During the period of An-Shi Rebellion, Gaochang was once invaded by Uighur.

The Religious Beliefs of Gaochang in Northern and Southern, Sui, Tang Dynasties: Although Gaochang was destroyed, the religions culture of Gaochang not only didn't disappear, but also lasted for many years. Tang government set up Xizhou management mechanism to control Gaochang. Since then Gaochang regions went to be prosperous. The main religion beliefs are as follow:

The Buddhism: Kingdom Gaochang in Qu's reign, the Buddhism was protected by every king. Therefore, the Buddhism was prosperous in this period of Qu reign. When monk Xuan Zang continued travelling to west in 629, Gao King Qu Wentai ushered Tang Empire westbound pilgrimage XuanZang and enshrined as the National Division. In the middle of Tang dynasty, Buddhism had been reached in unprecedented degree of prosperity in Gaochang and this fanatical religion lasted for hundreds of years. Local people spared no effort to believe in Buddhism.

Zoroastrianism: Engaged in commercial activities, Sogdian were together in Gaochang, which made Zoroastrianism in the territory of the Gaochang have a further development. During the Northern and Southern dynasties, Zoroastrianism's prevalence in Turpan could be seen from a word: "People's worldly things in Gaochang believed in Zoroastrianism and at the same time trusted Buddhism"£~*The book of Wei dynasty*

Volume 101£©Historian Ma Dazheng said, “It had been showed that Zoroastrianism believed by the majority of people was mainly popular in folk beliefs and the Buddhism had Gaochang official support, which Buddhism was used to curb the development of Zoroastrianism forces” [5] We can see easily that the dominant religion for the ruling class was Buddhism, while Zoroastrianism was popular for the common people to believe in.

Taoism: In Xinjiang, Taoism was popular in some areas where mainly Han people were concentrated. The Tang Dynasty rulers worshiped the Taoist policies which helped promote the development of Taoism in Xinjiang. “In order to avoid rejection and strike of Buddhism, Taoism had to gradually absorb the contents of Buddhism and fused with Buddhism for their own painted colors of Buddhism, which Taoism formed the distinctive features of Xinjiang” [6]. In this period there were many religions being existed in at the same time in Gaochang. Buddhism was generally dominant and Zoroastrianism was more popular in folk. Other religions also had some followers, but not as good as the prevalence of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

History of Gaochang Kingdom in the Late Tang, Song, Liao, Jin Dynasties: In 866, a Uighur family seized the Gaochang region under the rule of the Tang Dynasty and established Gaochang Uighur kingdom. Gaochang Uighur kingdom had been subordinated to the Tang, Song, Liao and Yuan Dynasties, which helped Gaochang create a new prosperity. Gaochang Uighur still kept good relationship with Tang Dynasty in Mobei period, calling Central Plains Dynasty “uncle”, while calling itself to be “nephew”. In 916, after the establishment of the Liao regime, the Gaochang Uighur became a part of the West Liao. During Liao, Jin, Yuan Dynasties, Gaochang had been called the “fire state” etc.

The Religions of Gaochang Kingdom in the Late Tang, Song, Liao, Jin Dynasties: The ethnic composition of the territory in Gaochang Uighur was complex, not only a large number of Han Chinese, as well as ethnic groups that spoke Turkic language. At the same time, there were some Sogdian and Tibetan people. In addition, the ruling class religion was particularly tolerant. Therefore, the Gaochang Uighur Kingdom exhibited the belief systems that a variety of religions were in parallel. Early royal family believed in Manichaeism, then converted to Buddhism, while people were mostly

converted to Buddhism. At the same time, Nestorian, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Islam, Shamanism also had their own followers.

Manichaeism: Manichaeism was also called the Ming Sect. Manichaeism was founded in the 3rd century. Manichaeism stressed “light” and “dark” two forces and especially worshiped “light”. Manichaeism was introduced to China in the Tang Dynasty, then gradually developed. Von Le Coq in his second Turpan visit found Mani frescoes in Gaochang. “What Wang Yande saw and heard was recorded in the document-*The History of the Song Dynast-Gaochang*, ‘Mani Temple’. The Persian monks’ (Manichaeen) was explicitly mentioned in the document. This was the official compilation of history on Xinjiang Manichaeism, which was the earliest records” [7] . “Manichaeism was the second largest religion in kingdom. In the Westward beginning of Uighur, Manichaeism overshadowed the local long history Buddhism forces within the Gaochang Kingdom. However, about 10th century, Buddhism again became the dominant religion of the Kingdom. The royal family and the nobility of Gaochang Uighur mostly converted to Buddhism and many Manichaeism temples had been changed to Buddhist temple, which still can be identified until today” [8].

Buddhism: In the 9th century, Uighur moved westward to the Gaochang. Under the influence of the original local residents, Uighur had gradually accepted Buddhism. The ruling class took supported attitude to the Buddhism, which contributed to Buddhism’s dominant religion situation in the kingdom. At the end of the 10th Century to the 11th century, the Gaochang Uighur Kingdom intensified contacts with the Tibetan. Therefore, Buddhism began to spread and develop in the Kingdom of Gaochang. Gaochang Buddhism had a great prevalence and spread deeply, lasting until the Yuan Dynasty. After Uighur moved into Gaochang region, the Uighur gradually turned to a transformation from Manichaeism to Buddhism, which suggested that in Gaochang Uighur Buddhism was the main religion in this period.

Nestorian: Nestorian was created by Nestorius in 1st century, which was a sect of Christianity. In the 11th century, Nestorian was prevalent in Central Asia. “Only a small number of Gaochang Uighurs residents believed in Nestorian and in the latter kingdom, Nestorian in some extent mixed with the local customs,

then there were some changes in the form..... However, before the 13th century, there was no doubt that Nestorian was popular in Gaochang Uighur territory” [9].

Islam: Islam is the religion of Allah monotheistic religions. “Islam was also spread within the Gaochang Uighur Kingdom and Islamic infiltration occurred in the West Liao Dynasty. Because of the tolerance religious policy Liao used, all pagans were exempted from persecution. Therefore, at that time various religions were free to preach. By the late 12th century, Islam had spread throughout the west of Changji territory belonging to the Gaochang Uighur Kingdom” [10].

Shamanism: Gaochang Uighurs residents retained some Shamanistic customs which Uighur were originally faith in Shamanism in Mobei Mongolia, which still had some influence on the Gaochang Uighur. At that time, There were some Taoists in Han Chinese in Gaochang Uighur. In this period there were several religions in Gaochang Uighur: in the start of Gaochang Uighur founding, Manichaeism was as the ruling class’s religion, but after Westward Migration, Buddhism replaced Manichaeism dominant status and became the first major dominant religion, while Manichaeism had become the second largest religion of the kingdom. Meanwhile, in the country, there were still other types of religion, but other religions and believers had less influence compared with Buddhism and Manichaeism.

The History of Gaochang in Yuan, Ming Dynasties: In 1209, Genghis Khan personally led a military expedition to the Gaochang, then Gaochang yielded in Mongolia. In 1275, Haidu, Mongolia imperial ogadai sun, had led 120,000 troops to siege attack the Gaochang city. The war lasted for about six months, at last the Gaochang city fell into other’s hands and Gaochang perished. Since then, the Gaochang Uighur was toward the end of history. Gaochang, which had been flourished for nearly a thousand years, was also declined and eventually abandoned. Yuan and Ming Dynasties also called Gaochang to “fire state” and so on.

The Religions of Gaochang in Meng Yuan, Ming Dynasties: The rulers of Meng and Yuan Dynasties in their areas of jurisdiction adopted the religious policy of “tolerant and loose”, which were the coexistence of various religions. Influenced by the policy of “tolerant all

religions” in Mongolia, the Gaochang people had believed in Buddhism, Nestorian, Islam, Manichaeism, Taoism, Shamanism, etc in Yuan and Ming Dynasties.

Buddhism: During the West Liao and Meng Yuan Dynasties, Buddhism in Gaochang Uighur Kingdom was still very prosperous. In 1221, a Taoist named Qiu Chuji travelled to “Uighur Chang Ba La city” (now Xinjiang Changji City), the local “Uighur Monk” told Qiu Chuji “the east of here in the past belonged to the Tang Dynasty, there was no monk and Taoist to the west”. This is to say, across to Chang Ba La city, which was out of the scope of the prevalence of Buddhism in Gaochang Uighur region. Further to the west, there was no longer a monk and priest, where was other religions areas. According to the unearthed documents’ records, many Buddhist monks were Han Chinese in Gaochang Uighur region in Yuan Dynasty, for example, the most famous masters, Dinghui, etc..... Buddhism’s influence in this region had been in effect until the Late Ming Dynasty. At the beginning of the founding of the Ming Dynasty, Buddhism was still dominant in Turpan and other places.....” [11].

From the above we can see that until the late Yuan and early Ming Dynasty, Gaochang residents still mainly believed in Buddhism.

Islam: Islam was introduced into Xinjiang about the late 9th century to the early 10th century. In the West Liao and Meng Yuan Dynasties, Islam had been widely spread to the Gaochang Uighur country. “Long before Gaochang Uighur region submission to Mongolia, there had been individual Muslims spreading the doctrine. In 1209, Iduqut called Ba Er Shu Al Te Jin sent diplomatic envoys to the great Mongolia in which there was a Muslim called Ummah” [12] It suggested that Islam in the upper society had a certain influence. Around 1392, Islam Khan took the “holy war” military conquest policy to Turpan “Fire state” (Gaochang) where was the last remaining Buddhist center in Xinjiang region. After the Gaochang captured, Buddhism was replaced by Islam. Buddhist forces withdrew from Gaochang and Islam eventually replaced Buddhism and became absolutely dominant religion in Gaochang. In 16th Century, Islam dominated in the north and south of the Tianshan Mountain in Xinjiang. The Gaochang occupied marked the Uighurs Islamization substantially completed.

Manichaeism: According to the unearthed Uighur literature, Uighur people also believed in Manichaeism in Yuan, Ming Dynasty. From the unearthed Manichaeism, such as *Two Religions Scriptures*, *Manichaeism Confessions* and contents of many of the hymns, which could be seen that “Hara Fire state” (Gaochang) had had a huge, organized Manichaeism groups and monasteries, such as “Gaochang Moni Temple”, etc.

Local ethnic believers must consecrate items to the temple and the temple itself was equipped with all kinds of factotum craftsmen specially used, which showed the more developed Manichaeism temple economy existed [13].

Taoism: In Yuan Dynasty, that Uighur people believed in Taoism also had historical evidences. “When Qiu Chuji arrived the Uighur region, Hundreds of the local king, officers, scholars, common people, Buddhists, Taoists with dignity welcomed him from, among people who accompanied Qiu Chuji dining and entertainment was some Buddhism monks, Taoist and Confucian scholars” [14]. Here what LiZhichang wrote “Tao” was clearly the Taoist believers and not just lived in the area of Han people.

Shamanism: Mongolian worshiped Shamanism and believed in animism nature. Shamanism was a messenger regarded as the exchange of man and God. It was with the support of the shaman that Kublai Khan unified the Mongol tribes in 1206 and thus made Shamanism dominance in Mongolian society and the shaman had become a special class in Mongolian ruling class.

CONCLUSIONS

In different historical periods, there were a variety of religious beliefs in Gaochang. On the whole, diverse religions co-existed, but Buddhism accounted for the pattern of dominance. During Han and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism was predominant while other religions also existed at the same time. In early Gaochang Uighur Kingdom, Manichaeism belief was main worship, latter the pattern was based on the Buddhist belief’s leading standing and multi-religious coexistence. In the Meng Yuan and the early Ming Dynasties, the dominated pattern of religious belief was Buddhist and latter Islam was the absolute dominant religion pattern.

To sum up, the Buddhism was the dominant religion while other religions were believed by the residents in Gaochang at the same time. This belief situation was

advocated by the Gaochang’s ruling class and also the consequence of its traffic hub, which naturally made the ancient Gaochang city into eastern and Western religious culture gathering place.

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