

The Avoidance of Disasters: A Perspective on the Suburban Temple Songs of the Han Dynasty

Yubin Zhong, Meijing Hu

College of Arts, Chongqing Three Gorges College, Chongqing 404020, China

Abstract: The story of the avoidance of disasters is a special perspective of Han dynasty suburban temple songs. This genre has a cultural basis in the Han dynasty's concept of celestial induction, sutra, prophecy and agriculture. The Han dynasty suburban temple songs and rhymes express their wishes for disaster avoidance with respect to astronomical, climatic, geological, and biological disasters. In terms of aesthetic value, the suburban temple songs from the perspective of disaster avoidance are characterized by a combination of poetry, music and dance, exuberant imagery and divinity.

Keywords: Disaster avoidance; Han Dynasty suburban temple songs; Music poems

1. Introduction

To avoid disasters (禳灾), i.e. to get rid of them through special rituals, is a manifestation of the cognitive finitude of the ancient ancestors (Min X. 2014)^[1]. Han Dynasty suburban temple songs and rituals were used to sing praises to ancestral deities and were an expression of Han Dynasty theological thought. Exploring the writing of Han Dynasty suburban temple songs for disaster avoidance can uncover the rich ideological, cultural and literary values of the Han Dynasty^[1].

2. Cultural basis of disaster avoidance

The Han Dynasty was a period of integration of pre-Qin thinking. The scholarship of the pre-Qin dynasty served for the grand unification politics of the Han dynasty. These cultures, too, became the cultural foundation of the songs and rhetoric for disaster avoidance.

First of all, it was the induction of heaven and man. Dong Zhongshu, the main founder of the idea of the induction of heaven and man, believed that if heaven and earth were displeased with mankind, they would inflict calamities. In order to quell the discontent of heaven and earth and get rid of earthly calamities, it was necessary to avoid disasters, and the writing of disaster avoidance songs in Han Dynasty was guided by the concept of celestial induction^[2].

The second is scripture. One of the influences of Han scholarship, which was based on sutra, was that the Seven Classics recorded a large number of calamities, and the perspective of calamities was inherited by the poetry of disaster avoidance (Zhao M. 2004)^[2]. Secondly, the Seven Classics, including the Shijing, were instrumental in leading the poetic style of Han music. Embodiment three, the Han dynasty style of interpreting the scriptures made the intellectual community focus on the interpretation of calamitous phenomena, and the results would be reflected in disaster works.

Once again, it is prophecy science. Prophecy is the way in which tiny signs and weights stand in theological perspective to interpret the scriptures. According to prophecy, tiny events are harbingers of disasters, which requires people to avoid disasters by holding timely rituals to avoid disasters after the appearance of visions (Yan Z & Wang J. 2016). These phenomena are the key to define whether the works belong to the theme of disaster avoidance.

Another second is the agricultural-based concept. The main focus of the works is on disasters that affect agricultural production, and people express their desire to avoid disasters to protect agricultural production through suburban temple songs and rituals.

3. Types of disaster avoidance

The ritual subjects who used the suburban temple songs and rhymes wanted to eliminate the phenomena and disasters through the power of the gods and ancestors.

The first is astronomical phenomena. The Han Dynasty had a keen interest in unusual astronomical phenomena. First, solar eclipse was regarded as a manifestation of yin and yang imbalance in Han Dynasty: The rotation of the sun and the moon, the order of the stars, the five elements of yin and yang conversion, are in a continuous cycle (精建日月, 星辰度理, 阴阳五行, 周而复始), and was the key object of writing for disaster avoidance songs: Jing. Secondly, the astrological astrology of the Han Dynasty considered that the irregular movement of the stars was a manifestation of the discontent of the gods and the need to sacrifice the stars to avoid disasters: The Jing stars appear in the sky, and the Zhen stars are clearly arranged (景星显见, 信星彪列). Third, comets were regarded as uninvited guests by Han astronomical institutions because of their irregular frequency: The stars noticed the sacrifice of the people and showed their promise by emitting light. (星留命, 塞陨光).

Secondly, it was a climatic phenomenon. Climate disasters were often not effectively prevented in ancient times, and the people pinned their hopes on the rituals of disaster avoidance, conveyed by the suburban temple songs. The first flood is a scourge that the Han Dynasty suburban temple rhymes hope to avoid: When the gods arrive, the divine light pervades, and once they come, they first sow rain and dew, and everything is a peaceful appearance (灵之来, 神哉沛, 先以雨, 殷裔裔). For the second drought, the Han dynasty suburban temple songs mostly expressed prayers for wind and rain: The long hot summer makes everything grow, trees grow lushly, don't stop (朱明盛长, 敷与万物, 桐生茂豫, 靡有所诟). In addition, there are also wind and cold disasters, which are also taken into account in the Han Dynasty suburban temple songs and written accordingly.

Again, it is geological phenomena. Earthquakes are a geological phenomenon that must be recorded in the Spring and Autumn Period, and the picture of earthquakes causing landslides and water springs to gush is very shocking, so the suburban temple songs pay attention to earthquakes: In a distant land, it took the efforts of countless people to build this palace (浼浼四塞, 遐狄合处, 经营万亿, 咸遂厥宇).

4. Aesthetic value of the songs for disaster avoidance

In terms of aesthetic value, the suburban temple songs are a feast for the eyes and ears, and at the same time contain religious aesthetic values.

First of all, it is a combination of poetry, music and dance. As the music to serve the gods, the suburban temple rhymes, especially the music and dance to convey emotions and needs, so the combination of poetry, music and dance is a necessity for the writing of the disaster prevention rhymes.

Secondly, the imagery is very beautiful. Because of their use in rituals, the suburban temple songs were composed with romanticism, and the imagery was chosen with great imagination. For example, the imagery of gods and spirits: God blesses the descendants never to be cut off (神若宥之, 传世无疆), the imagery of gods and animals: Decorated with dragon and phoenix motifs (鸞路龙鳞, 罔不胖饰), and the imagery of plants and trees: A lingzhi plant grows in the Qi Fang, with nine interconnected stems and leaves (齐房产草, 九茎莲叶).

Again, obscurity and divinity. Critical studies have argued that the rhetoric of the suburban temple songs is obscure and difficult to understand, which undermines their literary value. This view is examined based on the perspective of human nature (Zhang F. 2015).

5. Conclusion

The Han dynasty music and temple songs, as a part of the genre dedicated to praise, have always been controversial in terms of their literary value, but from the perspective of disaster avoidance, they not only have the basis of Han dynasty thinking and culture, but also have various types of texts for disaster avoidance, and have unique artistic and aesthetic value, and are a meaningful part of the vast works of music and temple poetry. It is a meaningful page in the vast body of music poetry.

References:

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About the Author:

Yubin Zhong (1998.01.11-), male, Han nationality, born in Huizhou, Guangdong Province, Master candidate, Research Direction: Chu and Han literature, sacrificial literature.

Meijing Hu (1996.05.04-), female, Han nationality, born in Hanzhong, Shaanxi Province, Master candidate, Research Direction: Western literary theory.