

Interaction Between Humans and Gods: How Rain-praying Ceremonies Worked in Guizhou During the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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Abstract. Dry disasters happened a lot in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It's because Guizhou has a special natural and geographical environment. So local people created special rain-praying activities. These activities mainly worship the Dragon God. They also include beliefs in wind ghosts, the City God and some historical people. They are very different from the rain-praying ceremonies held by the central government. Many people held the rain-praying ceremonies. They are local officials, Taoist priests and local people who organize the activities by themselves. The steps of the ceremonies follow the rules of the central government, and also keep the local features. The rain-praying in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties shows the local wisdom of dealing with disasters in the traditional society.

Keywords: Ming and Qing Dynasties, Guizhou, rain-praying, disaster response

1. Introduction

Rain-praying is an activity to stop disasters. People do it when there is a dry disaster. They ask supernatural powers for help. This activity has a very long history in China. What is rain-praying? It means people hold ceremonies to ask for rain. This activity exists in every place in China. In 1413 AD, which is the 11th year of Yongle in the Ming Dynasty, Guizhou became an official province of the Ming Dynasty. The central government began to rule Guizhou. The influence of the central government became stronger and stronger in Guizhou. Governing Guizhou also showed the interaction between the central government and local areas. Rain-praying is not only a simple wish of people. They wish the wind and rain come at the right time. It also becomes a part of the national rules and local government work. It is an important way to see the ruling strategies of the dynasty, the social structure of local areas and the mix of different cultures.

2. Natural reasons for rain-praying in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties

First, Guizhou's land conditions make it hard to keep rainwater. Guizhou is in the west of China, in the east of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. 92.5% of the province is mountains and hills. Its average height above the sea is about 1000 meters. The land is high in the west and low in the east. It slopes

from the middle to the north, east and south. It has a typical land feature that "there is no flat land for three feet". Guizhou is one of the most typical karst land areas in China. The development of karst makes surface water go into the ground quickly. It forms underground water systems like dark rivers and caves. Also, the soil layer in karst areas is very thin. It can hold very little water. Water runs away fast after rain. When there is a drought, there is no soil water to adjust. The Li Ping Fu Zhi of the Guangxu period wrote: "All the land in Liping is mountains, so the land is not flat. Even if it rains for a long time, the water runs away easily. And the roads are all paved with stones, so there is no trouble of mud." [1] Guizhou's land is rough. Mountains and hills take up more than 90% of the land. In this case, the surface water runs fast. It is hard to store. The land surface is easy to dry when there is little rain. Guizhou's special environment makes local people pay more attention to drought disasters. So it is reasonable to study rain-praying.

Second, droughts happened very often in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Guizhou was affected by the global "Little Ice Age". The climate was generally cold and dry by turns, with many disasters. The average annual temperature was 1-2 °C lower than now. The cold and freezing period in winter became longer. According to the statistics of China Meteorological Disaster Canon · Guizhou Volume, droughts happened 300 times in all counties of Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Most droughts were in summer, and then in spring. Summer droughts mostly happened in central and eastern Guizhou, while spring droughts mostly happened in western Guizhou. According to the statistics of Guizhou local chronicles and other materials, places with frequent droughts in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties included Guiyang, Zunyi, Tongzi and Renhuai. These places were mainly in the south and southeast of Guizhou. Droughts often happened many times in ten years [2].

In general, droughts had a big influence on agricultural production and social stability. It shows that abnormal climate is closely related to regional disasters.

3. Rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties

To understand the rules of rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, we need to look at three important parts: the people who led the ceremonies, the beings people prayed to, and the things used in the ceremonies.

3.1. The leaders of rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou

I counted information from Guizhou's local historical records. I found that the main leaders of rain-praying in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties were local native people, local government officials, and special people like Taoist priests who knew secret skills for rain-praying.

First, the leaders were local native people and ordinary residents. There is a record about Zhenyuan Prefecture: "Taiping Mountain is 25 li east of the city. It is the highest mountain here. There is a little water on it, about a dou. Local people take this water to draw talismans when they pray for rain, and it always works." [3] There is also a record about Sinan Prefecture: "Yuping Mountain is 130 li east of Mushe government office. There is a small pool in a stone cave on the mountain. It is the place where local people pray for rain." [4] Taiping Mountain and Yuping Mountain were the places local people chose to pray for rain by themselves. This tells us that when there was a serious drought, local people in Guizhou had a tradition of praying for rain on their own. From the places local people chose, we can see most of them were mountains with water left. Even in droughts, there was still water there. People thought these places were spiritual, and praying for rain there was more likely to work.

Second, the leaders also included local government officials like county magistrates. There is a record about Guiyang Prefecture: "The county often had droughts. When the county magistrate went to pray for rain, he must walk on foot. Under the hot sun, he walked back to the city with a headscarf. But the people in the city closed the city gate and would not let him in. They only opened the gate when it rained. At first, the magistrate walking to pray for rain was a good thing. Later, it became a bad custom. Sometimes it did not rain for days, and some bad scholars used this to threaten the officials. The officials felt very troubled by this." [5] In Guiyang, the county magistrate had to walk to show his sincerity when praying for rain. If the prayer did not work and it did not rain, the people in the city would not open the gate for him. Later, some scholars even threatened local officials because the rain-praying failed. Sometimes, the places where officials' rain-praying worked would become very famous. There is a record about Anshun Prefecture: "Yuling Spring is behind East Mountain. The deputy prefect Yan Xizhen prayed for rain here, and it always rained. So people named it Yuling Spring." [6] The geography part of local historical records wrote down the places where officials' rain-praying worked. Anshun Yuling Spring is just this kind of place where an official once prayed for rain and it worked.

Besides these, the leaders also included local Taoist priests in Guizhou. There is a record about Anshun Prefecture: "Taoist Pan, no one knew where he came from. He had Taoist magic skills and lived in Chongzhen Temple. He was good at praying for rain." The Guizhou General Chronicle of the Qianlong period also recorded: "Taoist Zhang was from Guiyang Prefecture. His first name was unknown. He had good Taoist morality. He never married since he was a child and learned the secret skills of rain-praying. During the Wanli period, there was a drought. The provincial governor Guo Zizhang invited him to come and pray for rain." [7] From these historical records, we can clearly see that when droughts were serious, the local government would invite these Taoist priests who knew the secret rain-praying skills to hold rituals and ask for rain. These Taoist priests and magic men could pray for rain with their skills. They knew the secret rain-praying methods. Some even could make it rain right away after holding the ritual—this is called an "immediate response".

Local native people, government officials and Taoist priests all led the rain-praying ceremonies. This shows that rain-praying in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties was a diverse system. It included folk beliefs, the work of local government, and religious participation. Local people organized rain-praying by themselves based on traditional beliefs. Local officials organized it because of their duties and pressure. Religious people with secret skills organized or joined in it too. They all dealt with droughts in different ways. This shows how all parts of Guizhou's local society acted when facing a crisis.

3.2. The objects and places of rain-praying in Guizhou

To hold a rain-praying ceremony, people need to have specific objects to pray to. These objects can be dragons, fish, wind gods, the heaven and other figures that are related to water or can control water. People also build altars by themselves to pray for rain. They may go to the City God Temple to pray to the City God, or pray to some famous historical people. The choice of rain-praying places is also related to these prayer objects.

First, the dragon was the main object of rain-praying in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. There is a record about Dading Prefecture: "People pray to the Dragon God for rain, and pray to the Fire God for sunny weather." [8] People prayed to the Dragon God for rain and to the Fire God for sun. This tells us the Dragon God was clearly recognized as the object for rain-praying. The Guizhou General Chronicle of the Jiajing period recorded: "Longtan Cave. When there is a drought every year, people pray for rain here and it always works. A Dragon King Temple was

built on it."Dragons were thought to be spiritual beings that control wind and rain. The belief in dragons decided the main object of rain-praying.Place names like Longquan (Dragon Spring) and Longtan (Dragon Pool) in Guizhou's local records are mostly connected with rain-praying.The Guizhou General Chronicle of the Qianlong period recorded: "There is a pool on the left of the Chengshui River in Bijie County. People say a spiritual being lives there, so it is called Longtan (Dragon Pool). In the second year of the Longqing period of the Ming Dynasty, there was no rain in June and July. Censor Sun Zhongye came to Bijie on official business. He prayed for rain here with all his sincerity, and heavy rain fell at once. Then a hall was built to worship the dragon, and it was named Dragon God Hall."The block-printed edition of *Dian Qian Zhi Lue* from the 28th year of the Qianlong period recorded: "At the foot of the mountain, there is Longdong Spring (Dragon Cave Spring). It can water a thousand mu of farmland. People say a spiritual being lives inside. Praying for rain here always works." [9] Most place names where such spiritual beings live are related to the image of the "dragon".

Second, the objects and places of rain-praying were also linked to the image of "ghosts". This was probably because local people in Guizhou had a custom of worshipping ghosts.These ghosts were either the spirits of real people after their death, or seemed to be ghosts born from nature. There is a record in Yuqing County about the ghost of a famous person after death:"Before the Bo Rebellion was put down, there were three Tusi clans in Bainian—Upper Li, Middle Li and Lower Li, all with the surname Yang. Yang Zaiguo, the deputy Tusi of Lower Li, was killed long ago by Yang Zhenggeng, the grandfather of Yang Yun, the official Tusi of Middle Li. Later, in the 11th year of the Jiajing period, Yang Yun planned to kill Yang Song, the deputy Tusi of Upper Li. Yang Song's son Yang Tongxian went to the imperial capital to report this. The emperor heard about it and ordered to remove Yang Yun from his Tusi position. After that, local people said Yang Yun became a fierce ghost and caused droughts. So they set a seat for Yang Yun at the rain altar and sacrificed to him when praying for rain. All this happened because local people had the custom of worshipping ghosts." [10] People in Yuqing County worshipped ghosts. They thought the severe drought was caused by Yang Yun who had become a fierce ghost. So they built an altar locally to pray for rain and sacrificed to this ghost—Yang Yun. Besides sacrificing to ghosts that were the spirits of specific people like the Yang Tusi, local people in Guizhou also believed in ghosts from nature whose identities were unknown.The most typical one was the wind ghost, which local people also saw as one of the objects for rain-praying.The place where the wind ghost lived was called the Wind Ghost Cave by local people.Volume 2 of the Guizhou General Chronicle of the Jiajing period recorded:"Wind Ghost Cave is at the foot of Long Mountain behind the Shiqian Division government office. It is said to be the home of the wind ghost. There are things like bronze drums and golden basins inside. If you go deep into the cave, a strong wind will blow and you can't go forward. Every year when there is a drought, people go there to get water for rain-praying, and a strong wind always comes with them." [11] There were strange things like strong winds and weird sounds in the Wind Ghost Cave of Shiqian Division. When there was a drought, strong winds always appeared when people went there to get water for rain-praying.Whether there was really a wind ghost living in it or not, people in Shiqian Division believed that the magical things in the cave were all because of the wind ghost. These two kinds of ideas about ghosts show that local people thought ghosts had great power. Some ghosts could cause droughts, and some could answer people's prayers for rain and bring sweet rain.

Third, praying to the City God for rain was also a common practice in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.The City God was the guardian of the city. People thought he was responsible for the environment and the people's well-being in the area he ruled.In the ancient agricultural

society, people relied heavily on rain. Drought was seen as a disaster that threatened people's lives. So it became the City God's duty to drive away disasters and balance nature. There were already examples of praying to the City God for rain as early as the Tang Dynasty. Volume 6 Temple Sacrifices of the Renhuai Zhili Ting Zhi of the Daoguang period recorded: "Did the worship of the City God start from the sacrifice of water dykes in the Book of Rites? The Tongdian quotes Bao Zhi's Nan Yong Zhou Ji: 'There is a Temple of Prime Minister Xiao in Nanyang City, which is said to be the City God Temple.' Han Yu of the Tang Dynasty wrote Praying for Rain to the City God in Chaozhou and Begging for Sunny Weather to the City God in Yuanzhou." [12] Volume 8 of the Bijie County Chronicle of the Qianlong period recorded: "There was a severe drought in the summer of the Yihai year. People were extremely worried. The official left his office and went to the City God Temple to pray for rain. He kowtowed every three steps, ate only vegetarian food, and knelt to beg the god. Three days later, heavy sweet rain fell." [13] This record shows how scared people in Bijie were during the severe drought in the summer of the Yihai year. Facing this crisis, local officials led the rain-praying ceremony with great sincerity and self-sacrifice. They successfully asked for rain three days later, which eased the drought a lot. This successful rain-praying must have made the people who suffered a lot from the drought think the rain was because of the officials' complete sincerity and ability. So people felt very grateful to, trusted and supported the officials. Ancient local officials often strengthened their political status by holding sacrificial ceremonies. Successful rain-praying could not only calm people's hearts, but also make their rule more stable. This example proves that the City God was seen as a local guardian with divine power to control nature, and his duties were closely connected to people's daily lives.

Fourth, besides the prayer objects mentioned above, there were also cases of praying for rain with fish as a medium, and praying to the Wind God and the heaven. Liping Prefecture held rain-praying ceremonies with fish as a medium. But people here did not regard fish as the incarnation of dragons or other spiritual beings to worship. Instead, they chose to sacrifice fish to pray for rain. There is a record: "There has been a severe drought recently. People agreed that each family should prepare 20 jin of poison, put it into Guanyin Pond to kill the fish, and hold the rain-praying ceremony as usual. Some families did not prepare enough poison. Luo Xiu and other leaders gathered people to break into their homes and confiscated all their property as a punishment." When there was a severe drought, local people decided each family should get 20 jin of poison. They would put the poison into Guanyin Pond to kill the fish, and then hold the rain-praying ceremony following the old rules. Some families failed to prepare the required amount of poison. Luo Xiu, the main person in charge, gathered people to break into these families' houses and took all their belongings as a punishment. The rain-praying place here must be Guanyin Pond in Liping Prefecture, and the fish in the pond were used as sacrificial offerings. Volume 5 of the Guizhou General Chronicle of the Qianlong period recorded: "Santai Mountain... There is a Wind God Cave at the foot of the mountain. Praying for rain here always works." This Wind God Cave is in Anhua County of Sinan Prefecture. This place name is probably related to the fact that rain-praying here is always very effective.

There was also a custom of praying to the heaven for rain in Guizhou. The heaven here is not a specific god. It is just a simple belief of local people when they face natural disasters. Volume 16 of the Guizhou General Chronicle of the Wanli period recorded: "Tianying Mountain is ten li southeast of the Dusu Division government office. In ancient times, people prayed for rain here, and thunder came right away as a response. So the mountain was named Tianying Mountain." [14] Ancient people prayed for rain here, and thunder—a sign of rain—appeared at once. So people thought this was the heaven's response to their prayer for rain. Building an altar to pray for rain was one of the

ways for people in Guizhou to pray to the heaven. There is a record in Kaitai County: "Build an altar to pray for rain." [15] There is also a record in Dushan Prefecture: "Li Yuanzhang was good at the secret skill of Five Thunders. When there was a drought in the prefecture in the past, he built an altar to pray for rain." Such altars for rain-praying were usually built by Taoist priests who mastered the secret rain-praying skills. The places of the altars were not fixed. They were often decided according to the needs of the rain-praying ceremony at that time. But the object of the prayer was always the "heaven".

Finally, the objects of rain-praying could also be some famous people in history, who might be officials or generals. Volume 10 of the Guizhou General Chronicle of the Qianlong period recorded: "The Temple of Grand Tutor Kang is in the north of Guiding County. It was built to worship Kang Baoyi of the Song Dynasty. He once served as the military governor of Gaoyang Pass, died in the army, and then became a god who showed miracles. Praying for rain to him always works." Kang Baoyi was a famous general of the Northern Song Dynasty. In fact, he betrayed the Song Dynasty and surrendered to the Liao Dynasty. But the Song court intentionally shaped him as an image of a "loyal and good minister" [16]. The change from "dying in the army" to "becoming a god and showing miracles" reflects the ancient tradition of "heroes becoming gods". It is in line with the description in The Book of Rites · The Rites of Sacrifice: "Those who die for their duties should be worshipped." [17] Building the temple in the north of Guiding County is also in line with the ancient ritual tradition of "worshipping military heroes in the northern suburbs". The existence of Kang Baoyi's temples in the southwest during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and his deification to be the object of rain-praying, also shows that the famous ministers and generals recognized by the government played a role in the construction of the folk belief system.

4. The uniqueness of rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou

4.1. The rules of rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou

Rain-praying is a kind of sacrificial activity to make wishes. So it has regular ceremony steps. In the central government of the Qing Dynasty, the emperor and the Ministry of Rites led the rain-praying ceremonies. The rules of rain-praying ceremonies in Guizhou were the same as the central government in some ways, and also had its own unique features. The central government of the Qing Dynasty required no killing to show sincerity when praying for rain: "Order that from the 6th day of this month, no animals shall be killed for three days to pray for rain with sincerity. This rule applies to everyone. So killing animals is strictly forbidden from the 6th to the 8th. The attendants and villagers must recite scriptures in all temples to pray together with sincerity. I will eat only vegetarian food for three days. Inform the imperial kitchen of this. Hunting deer and releasing eagles are all forbidden." [18] No animals were killed. Attendants and villagers recited scriptures in temples. Emperor Kangxi himself ate vegetarian food for three days. These actions showed that the royal family of the Qing Dynasty attached great importance to rain-praying. This tells us that rain-praying was recognized by the supreme ruler of the country during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. So it was reasonable for local places to hold rain-praying activities.

Guizhou had its own unique rules for rain-praying ceremonies. First, there were standard rain-praying rituals recorded in local chronicles. In 1729, the 7th year of the Yongzheng period of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing government pacified the Miao borderland in Guizhou, then set up Guizhou Subprefecture, which belonged to Liping Prefecture. A deputy prefect of Liping Prefecture was sent to manage it. There is a record in Guizhou Subprefecture: "There is a water-taking ritual for rain-praying. On the day before the incense ceremony, a band leads people to a deep mountain and an

ancient pool to fetch a small bottle of water. The water is taken back and an altar is set up in the Dragon King Temple. All officials wear official uniforms and perform the ritual of three kneels and nine kowtows. They walk to burn incense and pray every day. This ritual is also mentioned in Chun Qiu Fan Lu. But sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Maybe it depends on the people who hold the ritual?" [19] On the day before the official incense prayer, a band leads people to a deep mountain and an ancient pool to fetch a small bottle of water. The water is brought back to set up an altar in the Dragon King Temple. All officials wear formal official clothes and perform the grand ritual of three kneels and nine kowtows. They walk to burn incense and pray every day. According to my research, the rain-praying method recorded in Chun Qiu Fan Lu · Seeking Rain No.74 by Dong Zhongshu is different from the rain-praying ceremony recorded in the Guizhou Subprefecture Chronicle of the Guangxu period, and it is much more complicated [20]. The rain-praying ceremony recorded in the Guizhou Subprefecture Chronicle shows the uniqueness of rain-praying in Guizhou.

Guizhou Subprefecture also proves that Guizhou knew the rain-praying ceremonies commonly used all over the country: "In ancient times, when praying for rain, people prayed to heavenly gods such as the Wind God and the Rain God, and to earth gods such as famous mountains and great rivers. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, when praying for rain, people first prayed to the famous mountains, seas, rivers and all mountains and rivers that could bring wind and rain. If it did not rain for seven days, they prayed to the God of Land and Grain and the ancient emperors and officials who had benefited the people. If it still did not rain for another seven days, they prayed to the ancestral temples and the ancient emperors who had temples. If it still did not rain for another seven days, they held the Yu sacrifice to pray for rain. When the Song Dynasty was founded, people prayed for rain in the Five Dragon Shrine and the Nine Dragon Hall. The worship of the Dragon God was not heard of in ancient times, and it actually started in the Song Dynasty. Now all these rituals are still followed." With the development of the times, the content of rain-praying ceremonies continued to expand. If the prayers for rain did not work, there were different sacrificial ceremony rules to deal with it in different stages. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, there were nature worship, worship of virtuous emperors and national sacrificial ceremonies to pray for rain, dealing with rain-praying of different difficulties. In the Song Dynasty, the belief in the Dragon God was institutionalized to serve rain-praying activities. This reflects the use of divine power belief by the ancient state power, and reveals the political connotation given to rain-praying. This shows that Guizhou not only had its own uniqueness, but also knew the rain-praying ceremonies commonly used from ancient times to the present.

Second, Guizhou made its own ceremony rules based on the rain-praying ceremonies used all over the country from ancient times to the present. The postscript of the Pingba County Chronicle of the Republic of China records the rain-praying ceremony in Guizhou, which was passed down from the Guangxu period of the Qing Dynasty to the 21st year of the Republic of China: "Killing animals is forbidden the day before the ceremony, and the ban lasts until it rains. All officials fast and wear plain clothes. They do not handle criminal cases. They walk to burn incense and pray every day. They pray at the Mountain and River Altar for seven days, then at the God of Land and Grain Altar for seven days, and perform the ritual of three kneels and nine kowtows for both. Or they pray at the Dragon King Temple, burning incense twice a day in the morning and evening, with the ritual of two kneels and six kowtows for both. In addition, monks and Taoist priests are urged to recite scriptures at the City God Temple, and officials are sent to supervise them." [21] From the phrases "all officials fast" and "do not handle criminal cases", we can see the county magistrate is the prescribed main sacrificer, and all other officials in the county must take part in the ceremony. Besides, supervisory officials are assigned to manage the acts of these monks and Taoist priests. This

ceremony is a drought response procedure in Guizhou, led by state and county officials and participated in by ordinary people.

Third, different from the rain-praying ceremonies led by officials, the ceremonies held by people who know the "secret skills" of rain-praying, such as monks and Taoist priests, show more independence and have no many standard ritual rules. Volume 10 Miscellaneous Records of the Dushan Prefecture Chronicle of the Qianlong period specifically mentions how Li Yuanzhang held rituals to pray for rain: "Li Yuanzhang was good at the secret skill of Five Thunders. When there was a drought in the prefecture in the past, he built an altar to pray for rain. He drew a talisman on an egg and put the egg into a mortar to pound it, but the egg did not break. When he went up to the altar, he threw the egg into the air. At once, thunder rumbled and clouds rose, and a drought rainbow appeared in the east. The Taoist priest used grass to block and chant incantations, then sprayed water to break the rainbow, which split like being cut by a knife. He threw another egg into the air. Thunder crashed into the altar. A thunder claw reached for the token, and the Taoist priest blocked it with the token—there was a thunder claw mark on the token because of this. Three thunders flew up to the sky at once, and then a heavy rain poured down, making the water rise three feet." [22] From Li Yuanzhang's rain-praying ceremony, we can see he must be a Taoist priest. He drew a talisman on an egg and pounded it because the egg symbolizes the chaos of heaven and earth. Throwing the egg into the air triggered thunder and cloud gathering—he used the egg as a medium to connect heaven and earth, and released energy by destroying the medium, which is in line with Taoist thunder magic. He used grass to form a formation and sprayed water with incantations to break the drought rainbow because the drought rainbow was seen as the incarnation of the drought fiend. Grass is a yin object that restrains yang evil, and spraying water symbolizes the five elements principle of "controlling fire with water". The token represents the authorization of divine power, and the thunder claw mark is the proof. Three thunders flying up to the sky triggered the heavy rain—"three" is the supreme number in Taoism, and the return of thunder symbolizes the return of the circulation of heaven and earth energy to normal, meaning the drought is over. Li Yuanzhang was probably a Taoist master in the folk Taoist altar of Guizhou in the Qing Dynasty. Such masters knew Taoist rituals, so they often held rituals to pray for rain to deal with local droughts.

Finally, the ritual rules of rain-praying in Guizhou are also reflected in rain-praying prayers and fixed rain-praying times. For example, the rain-praying prayer of Pu'an Zhili Ting: "I am ordered to govern the people and take charge of this land. The people all depend on me, and I also borrow divine power to hope for the normal change of the four seasons. May your blessing make rain and sunshine come in due time, so that all things grow well and the people live in peace. May the cold and heat be all suitable, so that we all celebrate the good weather and a bumper harvest. I look up to your silent operation of the spiritual pivot, gathering all good omens. Help the great creation to flow smoothly, so that there will be no disasters. May you accept the sacrifice!" Combined with the prayer, Pu'an Zhili Ting set the fixed time for the regular rain prayer ceremony in the early summer of every year in the 7th year of the Qianlong period [23]. The rain-praying ceremonies led by officials in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties not only had a series of procedures and requirements, but also needed prayers or sacrificial texts like this. Only with the specially set rain-praying time could it form a complete ritual rule.

4.2. A comparison of ceremonies between the central government and Guizhou

Rain-praying was a way to deal with droughts. At the national level, this activity could be traced back to the Yu Ritual for rain in the Pre-Qin period. Rulers of all dynasties inherited this official sacrificial rain-praying activity. It developed political meanings of orthodoxy and the thought of

putting people first. By comparing the rain-praying ceremonies of the central government with those of Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, we can understand Guizhou's rain-praying ceremonies more clearly.

Because of the diversity of materials, we mainly compare the central government of the Qing Dynasty with Guizhou in the same period. Rain-praying in Beijing of the Qing Dynasty generally had the following forms: The most common one: the emperor ordered the Ministry of Rites to pray for rain with sincerity. The second one: religious people such as monks and Taoist priests led the rain-praying ceremonies, which were basically organized by the imperial court. The third one: the emperor prayed for rain in the palace or went to the Temple of Heaven and other places in person [24]. From the analysis of the central government's rain-praying, we know that most of the activities were organized by the emperor or departments such as the Ministry of Rites. Guizhou's rain-praying was the same as the central government in some ways. For example, both were mainly led by the official side, and both invited religious people to host the rituals. But there were more unique features in Guizhou's ceremonies. The differences are mainly reflected in many aspects: the main holders of the ceremonies, the objects of sacrifice, the operation procedures, and the political and cultural connotations behind them.

There were obvious differences between the rain-praying ceremonies of the central government and Guizhou in the Qing Dynasty. In terms of ceremony leaders and prayer objects, the central government's rain-praying was centered on the emperor, with the Ministry of Rites in overall charge. The emperor went to the Temple of Heaven in person to host the highest-standard sacrifices. They strictly followed the procedures of fasting, wearing ceremonial clothes, and music and dance as stipulated in the Great Code of the Qing Dynasty. The central government formed a hierarchical god system by sacrificing to the heaven, the God of Land and Grain, mountains and rivers, focusing on highlighting the connection between humans and gods. Guizhou's rain-praying showed diverse characteristics. In terms of leaders: there were not only ceremonies led by officials, but also those organized voluntarily by Taoist priests and local native people. In terms of prayer objects: besides orthodox beliefs such as the Dragon God, it also included the worship of natural places like the Wind Ghost Cave, the deified historical figures such as Kang Baoyi, and the special ritual of sacrificing fish. In terms of rain-praying procedures, Guizhou not only imitated the rituals of the central government, but also kept its local characteristic ceremonies. These differences reflect the unity of the national sacrificial ritual system, and also show the uniqueness of Guizhou society's rain-praying rituals.

The comparison between the central government and Guizhou shows that Guizhou's rain-praying ceremonies had both similarities with the central government and specific contents that reflected the characteristics of local society.

5. Conclusion

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, rain-praying in Guizhou had the clear feature of diverse ceremony leaders and beliefs. As a typical karst land area, Guizhou had frequent and harmful droughts. This made local government rain-praying ceremonies, local beliefs and ethnic minority customs all exist in rain-praying activities. A rain-praying system was formed, which focused on the worship of the Dragon God and also included various objects such as wind ghosts, the City God and famous historical people.

The leaders of rain-praying activities could be divided into three main types: rural people, local government officials, and Taoist priests and monks who knew secret skills. In terms of ceremony

rules, rain-praying in Guizhou not only followed the rituals of the central government, but also kept its local uniqueness.

In summary, the rain-praying practice in Guizhou during the Ming and Qing Dynasties was a result of the combination of natural conditions, political governance and local customs and culture. It is an important perspective to understand the expression of Chinese god beliefs in Guizhou, and also a starting point to understand how Guizhou society dealt with droughts.

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