

# TWO PATHS OF THE GENERATION OF FAITH RELATIONSHIP: CASE STUDY ON NORTHERN SHAANXI AND CHAOSHAN

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**Abstract:** This paper will use the Hei Long Temple in Northern Shaanxi and the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple in Eastern Guangdong as comparative cases. By analyzing the administrative legalization path of Hei Long Temple from a folk temple to an artifact repository, and its transformation from a Taoist temple into a tourist attraction, as well as interpreting the phenomenon of Xuan Tian Ancient Temple and the Buddhist Jingxin Hermitage actively integrating into the Huang clan to gain social legitimacy, it aims to explore the issue of faith relationship construction in folk beliefs. It seeks to supplement the binary discussion on institutional and diffusion, state and locality in religious social studies, revealing two pathways for the generation of faith relationships in local belief practices: upward legalization and downward legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Folk belief; Faith relationship; Legalization; Legitimacy

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The institutions and rituals of folk beliefs have long been two important perspectives in the study of religious societies. Incorporating them into discussions on faith relationship has become a popular topic in constructing a discourse system of Chinese religious sociology with distinctive characteristics. For instance, Li Xiangping mentions in "Interpretation of Legitimacy and Sacredness: Core Propositions of Chinese Religious Sociology and Their Forty-Year Evolution" that "religion and its beliefs are a power relationship constructed based on the relationship between gods and humans, presenting an overlapping and interactive power theory among individual beliefs, family, ethics, state, and power[1]." Wang Zihan notes in "How is De-Boundary Sacredness Possible: Construction Models of Sacred Space from the Perspective of Heaven and Humanity" that "the paradigm for constructing indigenous sacred spaces in China is the life connection between heaven and humanity, and through modes such as form representation, experiential creation, ritual linkage, and order structuring, it completes the expression and interpretation of a de-boundary, non-heterogeneous sacredness[2]."

Then, from the perspective of folk beliefs, what is the logic, direction, and type of constructing the faith relationship? From the "institutional-diffusive" viewpoint that has been discussed for a long time in religious sociology[3], institutional religions have established clear sacred relationships, with systematic theological theories, complete organizational structures, and strict distinctions among clergy. In contrast, diffuse religions, despite thriving locally, are compelled to actively incorporate institutional elements due to the needs of local administrative management, attempting to shift from grassroots society to a national perspective, aiming to achieve upward legalization at the macro level. Based on the attention given to rituals by the folkloric "North China Model" and anthropological "South China Model[4]," the autonomous collective consciousness of folk beliefs and their reflection of state power in rituals and symbols reveal the impact of state power on local societies, leading to proactive ritual changes in folk beliefs, which continuously draw down usable elements of legitimacy from the micro level. The same theme of faith and social relations, however, different theories emphasize different aspects of the state and local levels, reflecting the different models of constructing faith relationships in the practice of folk beliefs.

The different emphases of institutions and rituals, the state and local authorities, and the two legitimate paths of folk beliefs seem to be the sanctification of different regions and types of beliefs. In reality, they are issues concerning how folk beliefs construct faith relationships from various perspectives, which is also about the legitimacy of folk beliefs. To clarify the complex construction of faith relationships in Chinese folk beliefs, extensive field research and case studies of folk beliefs are required. In terms of the construction of faith relationships, from the perspective of practical methods, the legitimate paths of various temples should be seen as reasonable and important angles for the self-expression and self-construction of folk beliefs in changing social environments. Therefore, this article will use two temples (Hei Long Temple in Northern Shaanxi and Xuan Tian Ancient Temple in Eastern Guangdong) as examples to compare their content in temple venues, temple fair organization, and social participation, in order to explore the issue of the generation of faith relationships in folk beliefs.

## 2 A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE ON THE GENERATION OF FAITH RELATIONSHIPS

In 1899, Durkheim published the book "The Definition of Religious Phenomena," where he first used the term "sociology of religion." Later, in his 1912 publication "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," he defined religion as "a system of beliefs and rituals that are associated with sacred things that are both distinct from and inviolable, binding all who believe in them into a moral community known as the church[5]." What exactly are these

"sacred things"? Durkheim believed that sacred things are embodied and personified collective forces, which are essentially society itself. In other words, "religion is a symbol of society."

Unlike Durkheim, Weber set aside the discussion of the essence of religion and focused his sociological research on religious behavior. Weber believed that religious behavior is worldly and rational, guided by empirical rules. He argued that primitive experience could not distinguish things as modern people do; their experience distinguished between the ordinary and the extraordinary. On this basis, primitive experience formed the belief in spirits (Geisterglaube), which was the source of the shamans charisma (Charisma). From this, the "beings" of the supernatural were symbolized and personified as tribal deities. Subsequently, ancestral worship, patriarchal sacrificial systems, political groups, local gods, and monotheistic beliefs gradually took shape in what modern people recognize as religious forms. Based on this view that attributes the origin of religion to differences in the thinking of primitive humans, Weber suspended the discussion of the essence of religious belief. In his book *The Sociology of Religion*, he shifted his focus to prophets, rituals, religious ethics, taboos, and sects[6].

Durkheim and Weber's studies on religion represent two approaches in the sociology of religion. The former equates religion with society, tracing the origins of religion and its sacred nature as social essences. The latter views religious belief as a mode of behavior, analyzing the relationship between its various elements and society as a social fact. This approach of studying religion as a social fact has influenced later sociological theories such as functionalism, conflict theory, and compensatory theory in their studies of religion. In the functionalist theories of Parsons and Merton, religion becomes part of the social system with integrative functions. In conflict theory, religious organizations are seen as one of the interest groups within the social system. In compensatory theory, religion emerges as an organization dedicated to general compensation for humanity. These theories share a common feature: they view religion as a cultural entity that has alienated from social relations, thereby analyzing its utility to the overall society. At the same time, they also isolate religion from the broader social context.

If in Durkheim's theory, the focus is on the social origins of religious beliefs, and the construction of faith relationships revolves around "collective consciousness" and "the survival goals of ethnic groups," with religion fundamentally being a faith in group "relationships," where human relationships determine the relationship between humans and deities. In Weber's sociological theory of religion, however, the social origin of religion gives way to the worship of a "transcendent being," while the social order in real life is defined by this "transcendent being." The relationship between humans and deities determines interpersonal relationships. When the sacred aspect becomes a transcendent being, religious studies can only shift to the study of the social forms of religion and the secular "faith-based relationships."

In his book *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Berger divides the study of religion into two parts: one is the system of religion, and the other is historical religion. Berger believes that the core of the religious system is its theocentrism, which provides plausibility structure to order human relationships. He points out in his book: "Religion is an activity that establishes a sacred universe. In other words, religion uses sacred means to establish order[7]." Therefore, behind the sacred order established by religion lies the "Law of Human Being." However, after the social changes of the 20th century, the original order of "Law of Human Being" underwent significant changes, and the original theocentrism lost its explanatory significance. The so-called "The Sacred Canopy" refers to the dissolution of theocentrism brought about by this order transformation. Berger's research on the "secularization" of religion was precisely a method of returning religion to the study of social relations under the historical context of his time. However, this research method was overshadowed by his secular prediction of the "end of religion," leading to many scholars' criticism of the book both theoretically and factually.

From Durkheim to Berger, the essence of belief inherits the essential connotations of social relations. If in "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," the essence of totemic belief is the "relations" of tribes or clans, then in the "secularization" stage, the "The Sacred Canopy" falling signifies the disintegration of the original order and social relations. Here, belief is a "faith in relations," and the research of these two scholars represents two typical paradigms in religious sociology: "constructing religious relations in primitive societies" and "deconstructing religious meanings in modern societies." Based on this research paradigm, what is referred to as religious relations, in this article, is a faith relationship that encompasses both internal and external aspects. This relationship includes the social origins of the object of faith, as well as the positions of faith organizations, rituals, and clergy in social relations. In other words, religious relations encompass both "faith in relations" and "relations in faith." The analysis of the two temples, Hei Long Temple and Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, in this article follows this line of thought.

### 3 RELATIONS IN FAITH: THE HEI LONG TEMPLE

In the traditional Chinese society's relationship between politics and religion, religious beliefs have always been passively placed within the official discourse system of "orthodox worship - heterodox worship" and "orthodoxy - heterodoxy," along with their dual contradictions. Power requires justification for its sanctity while fearing its subversion. Whether temples, deities, faith organizations, and their practices are legitimate hinges on whether they pose a threat to the central authority's legitimacy or challenge the system of such legitimacy (Confucian culture). In this religious relationship, "the state, with an all-encompassing attitude, claims that only it has the right to manage the interactions between humans and deities[8]," while folk beliefs either become assistants in its edification or evolve into "magic" as a force for popular resistance. Over time, folk beliefs have gradually gained legitimate space in national policies and regulations. However, rule-making often lags behind the sequence of events. As a result, the legalization of folk beliefs also presents a process that is dual, diverse, and even continuously adaptive.

### 3.1 Hei Long Temple and "Nine Villages in the South"

The Hei Long Temple is located on the banks of the Wuding River in Yulin City, situated in Longwang Gou to the south of Zhenchuan Town. According to local records, the temple was originally built during the Zhengde period of the Ming Dynasty (1506-1521) and underwent several renovations and expansions in the tenth year of Emperor Guangxus reign (1884) and the 21st year of the Republic of China[9]. The main structures include the Black Dragon Shrine, the Dragon Prosperity Hall, and the Compassionate Ferry Hall (built in 2013). To the west of the Black Dragon Shrine, there is a naturally formed oval spring at the cliffs edge. This spring flows continuously throughout the year and is known locally as "Dragon Cave," one of the Eight Scenic Spots of Yulin. Regarding "Dragon Cave," Qing dynasty scholar Tian Wanbao wrote a poem titled "Treasures Hidden in Dragon Cave": The mountain shape resembles a dragon, its color as real as life; In the hollow cave, treasures are hidden in secrecy. The poem inscribes the names of those who prayed for rain on the steep cliffs. In front of the Black Dragon Shrine stands a set of 48 stone steps, with two 6-meter-high stone flagpoles erected on either side. On the pillars, a couplet reads, "Once bestowed high rank by the Qing emperor, no wonder the common people speak of his great fame." Below the stone steps stands a stone archway built in the 21st year of the Republic of China, with the top plaque inscribed with "Imperial Decree: Lingying Marquis." On the two door pillars, a couplet reads, "Leaving the Dragon Palace brings favorable weather and rain; Entering the sea conceals national peace and prosperity." The stone flagpoles and archway were listed as key protected cultural relics by Yulin City in 1984.

The temple is managed by a committee composed of village chiefs, party secretaries, and accountants from nine surrounding villages. These nine villages are located in the southern part of the town, hence they are commonly known as the "Nine Villages in the South." According to local elders, when reconstruction of the temple began in 1980, the leaders were elderly people from Zhujia Village, Taban, Liucun, and Chencun. There was more than one president during the reconstruction period. The management committee mainly consisted of elders from Liucun, Chencun, Taban, Gaoliangpo, Zhujia Village, and Liubay, while Beihexi, Huahexi, and Yangjiagou joined later. Around 1981, President Lao Wang was elected as the sole president due to his youth and competence. During this period, Ren Mou (then cultural commissioner of Zhanchuan Town), Zhu Mouyi (then principal of Zhujia Village Primary School), and Zhu Mouer (accountant of Zhujia Village) all participated in the reconstruction and daily management of the temple as key personnel. It was these nine villages, with their diverse surnames, who worked together, drawing on various social forces, to facilitate the legalization process of Hei Long Temple after the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s.

### 3.2 From Folk Belief Sites to Cultural Relics Repositories

Place management is a fundamental method of religious administration in China. This Space-oriented management model requires that all religious rituals and collective activities be confined to legally designated religious venues, ensuring the legitimacy of these practices[10]. The process of legitimizing the Hei Long Temple is no exception. As national policies have evolved, the temple has gone through different stages from a non-religious site to an institutionalized religious venue, and then to a functional tourist attraction.

The reconstruction of Hei Long Temple began in 1980 after the Cultural Revolution. In its early stages, although the Cultural Revolution had ended, public sentiment remained relatively cautious. The temple fair activities at Hei Long Temple were still considered "feudal activities." According to local elder Ren, if it was a small private ceremony with few participants, it was fine, but "if you want to make it big, it wont work." A turning point came in 1981 with the second national cultural relics survey and the promulgation of the National Cultural Relics Protection Law in 1982. In 1984, through the efforts of President Lao Wang and others like Ren, the "Imperial Decree Archway" and the "Sky-reaching Flagpole" of Hei Long Temple were designated as key protected cultural relics by the city. As a result, Hei Long Temple transformed into the "Hei Long Temple Cultural Relics Management Office," and Lao Wang was appointed as its first director. Strictly speaking, the cultural relics management unit did not have the authority to host folk belief activities. To address this, when the spring breeze of reform and opening-up blew over the Loess Plateau, the temple committee skillfully utilized the temple fair market under the guise of a "Material Exchange Fairs," allowing the temple fair activities to "go public" legally.

During this phase of legalization, the sensitive identity of Hei Long Temple as a faith entity was skillfully placed under the auspices of cultural relics management. The temple fair celebrations were also named as "Material Exchange Fairs," which resonated with contemporary themes. From the perspective of constructing faith relationships, the original folk beliefs were labeled with cultural and economic tags, expanding into legitimate administrative relations. However, it is important to note that the cultural and faith relationship of Hei Long Temple is not one of replacement but rather one of concealment. It is not that culture has replaced faith, but rather that culture has concealed faith. This characteristic of the formation of faith relationships was due to the incomplete management policies at the time. The nationwide "crackdown" in 1983 and the strengthened religious administrative management in Shaanxi Province in 1985 led the temple committee to seek refuge in already established policies and regulations. In this process of obtaining this status, personnel relations within the folk belief organization played a crucial role. Ren Mou, as the only "official" (cultural commissioner) of Hei Long Temple at the time, and Zhu Mouyi (principal of a primary school) were involved throughout the application process for the first legalization procedures of Hei Long Temple.

### 3.3 From Taoist Activity Sites to Tourist Attractions

The main deity enshrined in the Hei Long Temple, the Black Dragon King, is not the dragon king from Buddhism or Taoism, but one of the five dragons (blue, red, yellow, white, and black) in the local legend "Zheng Gave Birth to Five Dragons." Similar dragon temples are commonly found in many villages on the Loess Plateau. Taking Hengshan County as an example, there are 364 dragon temples distributed across about 353 administrative villages in the county [11-12].

Similar to many folk temples in northern Shaanxi, the main religious rituals within the temple include incense burning, divination, carrying the tower, passing through the checkpoint, praying for rain, and welcoming offerings. There are no full-time religious clergy in the temple; only a few elders hired by the management committee serve as hall attendants and fortune tellers. In 1994, the Chinese State Council issued the "Regulations on Religious Activity Sites," after which many Chinese folk temples registered as legal religious activity sites by affiliating with Buddhist or Taoist organizations, and Hei Long Temple was one of them. In 1996, Hei Long Temple was approved by the Yulin Civil Affairs Bureau as a Taoist activity site, thus officially obtaining the status of a legal religious activity site under administrative regulations. Consequently, Hei Long Temple underwent a series of "Taoistization" changes starting from a local folk belief. In 1998, with the approval of the Yulin Religious Affairs Bureau, Hei Long Temple established a Taoist Management Committee. Subsequently, the temple fairs offering ceremony was hosted by Daoist Master Zhang Minggui from Baiyun Mountain Taoist Temple in Jiaxian County. In 2009, at the request of the provincial and municipal religious affairs bureaus, the management committee appointed Vice President Fu Xingsheng of the Shaanxi Taoist Association as the abbot of Hei Long Temple. At the appointment ceremony, Daoist Master Fu proposed establishing health culture (Tai Chi), health studies, fasting, sword practice, and other Taoist cultural activities at Hei Long Temple. Thus, Hei Long Temple truly met the basic conditions for a legal religious activity site.

However, the expansion of the Hei Long Temple faith has not been halted by institutional legalization. In 2011, after approval from the Shaanxi Provincial Tourism Administration, Hei Long Temple applied to become a national 3A-level scenic area, and in 2018, it was approved as a 4A-level scenic area. As a result, Hei Long Temple acquired its third legal status: "Hei Long Temple Scenic Area." Following the approval of the scenic area, Hei Long Temple promptly embarked on a new phase of development, including: expanding the mountain forest garden at Hei Long Temple, constructing a "Food Street," and building a new Taoist temple called "Cihang Hall" and reconstructing the "The Hall of the Medicine Buddha" located on the eastern cliff of Tawan Village.

In 2010, the "Detailed Plan for the Development and Construction of Yulin Hei Long Temple Scenic Area (2011-2020)," designed by Shaanxi Good Scenery Tourism Planning and Design Co., Ltd., passed the review of the Yulin Religious Affairs Bureau and Xian University of Architecture and Technology. The plan proposes to invest 200 million RMB over the next 10 years to develop a large-scale cultural tourism site at Hei Long Temple. From this planning project, it is evident that the development of the Hei Long Temple scenic area will feature internal enrichment and external expansion. Internally, in addition to the existing folk deity Black Dragon King and his brothers and mother, the temple has added Cihang Zhenren as a Taoist deity. Additionally, the scenic area will incorporate the "The Hall of the Medicine Buddha" in Tawan and the "Three Emperors Temple" in Chencun, forming a scenic layout encompassing three temples in Liucun, Chencun, and Tawan. After acquiring legal status as both a religious site and a tourist attraction, Hei Long Temple has begun to transcend the original scope of folk beliefs, establishing a bottom-up relational structure centered around the faith in Black Dragon King.

## 4 FAITH IN RELATIONS: THE XUAN TIAN ANCIENT TEMPLE

Similar to the situation in Northern Shaanxi where "every village has a temple, and every temple has a festival," folk temples in the Chaoshan region of eastern Guangdong are also widely distributed. Unlike the folk beliefs in Northern Shaanxi, which revolve around deities, the folk beliefs in the Chaoshan region center on clans and village communities, leading to a trend of diverse integration in the constructed belief space. According to The Temples of Chaoshan, there are as many as 467 folk temples (excluding Buddhist temples, Taoist monasteries, and charitable halls) in this area. In the Chaoshan region, "worshipping the Lord" (a general term for the worship of various traditional deities, with "Lord" referring to all kinds of gods, including sages, scholars, generals, and natural deities) has become an important part of local peoples daily lives, and Xiadi Village in Guanbu Town, Chaoyang District, Shantou City, is no exception. However, at different times, as the largest-scale ritual activities of folk beliefs, such beliefs have more often served as footnotes to clan power or institutional religion[13].

### 4.1 "Bai Lao Gong" and "Bai Lao Ye" in Xiadi Village

Xiadi Village, located in Guanbu Town, Chaoyang District, Shantou City, is an ancient village with a history of over 700 years, predominantly inhabited by the Huang family. According to the "Chaozhou County Annals" from the Qing Guangxu period, the first ancestor of the Huang family in Xiadi, Huang Jingde: "His courtesy name was Tengmao, and he was from Putian. During the Song Dynasty, he served as a local magistrate in Chengxiang County. He was kind and benevolent, known for his good governance. Later, he was transferred to Chaozhou County but resigned due to illness before taking office, settling his family in Xialin, Zhipei[14]." The Huang family in Xialin later branched into three branches (Tanghou, Pusang, and Xiadi), with Xiadi Village being established by Huang Dongchun, the fourth son of

Huang Jingde.

The so-called "Bai Lao Gong" refers to the sacrificial traditions formed around clan blood relations. In Xiadi Village, these can be roughly divided into three categories: the first is the family worship of close relatives within a single household; the second is the ancestral worship of each branch by their respective houses; and the third is the collective worship of distant ancestors by the entire Xiadi village and even the Xialin Huang clan. The scale of family-based worship is the smallest, while the scale of house-specific worship is larger, mainly involving the third branch worshipping their seventh-generation ancestor, Huang Wuwei, on the eleventh day of the second lunar month each year, and the fourth branch worshipping their fourteenth-generation ancestor, Huang Tingyu, on the ninth day of the second lunar month each year. The largest scale is the worship of distant ancestors, organized by the Xiadi Village Elderly Association, with the objects of worship being the founding ancestor, the first-generation ancestor, the second-generation ancestor, and the sixth-generation ancestor of the Huang clan.

In Xadi Village, the "Bai Lao Gong" for ancestral worship is presided over by the village elders association, and the same applies to the "Bai Lao Ye" for deities. These rituals were originally religious ceremonies, but as institutionalized religion declined in the historical process of Chaoshan society, these rituals became more collective activities in local villages. Huang Ting believes that in the sacrificial rituals of local villages, community sacrifices and temple sacrifices gradually merged, forming the tradition of "Bai Lao Ye," which "began to enhance neighborhood unity and strengthen rural governance[15]."

The main places of worship in Xiadi Village include the Buddhist Jingxin Hermitage, the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, and Shuangzhong Ancient Temple. The villagers hold over ten sacrificial activities centered around these folk beliefs, including those for Xuan Tian God, Shuangzhong Gong, Huagongma, Zhusheng Niangniang, Boye, Guan Gong, Wugu Mu, and Longwei Ye. Among these activities, the "Xuan Tian Ancient Temple" (commonly known as "Lao Ye Gong") is at the core. Xuan Tian God, also known as Zhenwu Emperor, is considered the "Great Lord" or "Buddha" of Xiadi Village. According to the inscription on the "Brief History of Xadi Temples," the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple was initially built during the Jingtai period of the Ming Dynasty (1456), initiated by Huang Yingjin, the sixth-generation ancestor of the Huang family in Xiadi, after he served as the magistrate of Taihe County, Jiangxi Province. The main hall of Lao Ye Gong enshrines Xuan Tian God, with Compassionate Mother on the left and Huagongma on the right. On the small pavilion table, Prince Ye serves as the guardian deity for the alleys safety.

#### **4.2 Celebration for Gods across the Border and the Buddha Light**

As mentioned above, the construction of sacred relationship described by Berger is based on the deduction of "The Law of Human Being", which is reflected in the ambiguous boundary of folk belief and the cross-border phenomenon of multiple beliefs in local society.

The grandest folk belief ceremony in Xiadi Village is the "Ying Lao Ye"(the Deities Parade) event held at the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple every few years, organized by the Xiadi Village Elderly Association. In 2017, the "Ying Lao Ye" procession started from the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple on the fifth day of the first lunar month, circling the village and passing through important public places such as the Xiadi Village Market, Xiadi Village Primary School, and the Jinhuangfu Generals Mansion, ending at the "Ancestral Shrine." On the seventh day of the first lunar month, the "Ying Lao Ye" procession set off again from the "Ancestral Shrine," traveling to the large ancestral hall (Chichang Hall) in Pusang Village (which enshrines the first ancestor of the Xiaodi Huang clan), before finally returning to the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple. The "Ying Lao Ye" connects the ancestral halls and temples, while the "Shang Deng" ceremony links families with deities. In January, Xiadi Village holds a "Shang Deng" ceremony, which means adding lights to the deities. Every evening from the fifth to the seventh day of the first lunar month, villagers from Xiadi Village gather in their families, carrying lanterns and incense, to burn incense at the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple. They then take the lanterns home and light them in their family altars. Generally, each household with several males brings a few lanterns, and the origin of "Shang Deng" is closely tied to patriarchal society, where adding lights actually means adding offspring.

The traditional clan relationships in the Chaoshan region are highly enforced, with a strong cultural atmosphere. This dominant cultural tradition (essentially social order) has enabled "Ying Lao Ye" to transcend the boundaries of religious venues, connecting ancestors and deities. The Law of Human Being influences divine relations, even institutionalized religion cannot escape this influence. Buddhism was introduced to the Chaoshan region during the Daming period of the Liu Song dynasty (457-465), leading to numerous Buddhist temples in the area[16]. Although Xiadi Village does not have a Buddhist temple, it boasts a Buddhist laymen society called "Jingxin Hermitage." Founded in the 1960s, it is the first place for free study and practice established by a laymans group in the four nearby towns (Guanbu Town, Jin Yu Town, Zao Pu Town, and Xilu Town), founded by layman Huang Hongjin from Xiadi. Today's building was completed in 1995 and is listed as a cultural heritage site in Guanbu Town, officially named "Chaoyang District Buddhist Laymans Forest of Shantou City." The Jingxin Hermitage faces south and covers more than 4,000 square meters, featuring a main hall, lecture hall, scripture repository, reclining Buddha hall, dining hall, monks quarters, and a release pond among other facilities.

In Xiadi Village, villagers who participate in Buddhist activities also follow the custom of "Bai Lao Ye" and join the villages celebration events of folk beliefs. Moreover, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, and the first day of the second lunar month, which are days for disaster relief, Buddhist believers from the Jingxin Hermitage are invited to recite scriptures at the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple. Additionally, the Jingxin

Hermitage preserves the "Ancient Tree Goddess Temple," whose history predates that of the Jingxin Hermitage. However, when the Jingxin Hermitage was constructed, the natural deity beliefs of the villagers were respected, and the ancient tree lady was not excluded. The peaceful coexistence between Buddhism and the worship of folk beliefs is evident. Furthermore, during the reconstruction of the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple in 1992, the four characters "Buddhas Light Forever Shines" were embedded behind the main gate. In 2017, the couplet was added: "Buddhist virtue always blesses the family, ancestors thoughts forever benefit the peoples well-being," with the horizontal inscription "Buddhas Light Illuminates All."

### 4.3 Mix Incense Offerings and Support Each Other

In Xiadi Village, the "Ying Lao Ye" route of Xuan Tian Ancient Temple connects the temple with ancestral halls, and every household visits the ancient temple during the first lunar month to add lights. Xuan Tian God is commonly referred to as "Buddha," and Jingxin Hermitage preserves the Ancient Tree Goddess Temple. Buddhist believers participate in the "Ying Lao Ye" activities, among other phenomena. These distinct beliefs, which are clearly divided into Buddhist, folk, and clan-based practices, are managed by the same organization, the "Xiadi Village Elderly Association." This phenomenon of mutual acceptance between institutional religion and folk beliefs, while also being governed by clan organizations, is particularly evident in the collection and distribution of incense money in Xiadi Village.

Xiaodi Village has set up an Tian You Xiang (a collection box for donations) in the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, managed by the Xiaodi Village Elderly Association, which is used for organizing ancestral worship and deity veneration, as well as supporting educational and cultural development in the village. From March 2017 to March 2018, the Xiaodi Village Elderly Association raised over 290,000 yuan through donations for "Buddhas Birthday," "Ying Lao Ye," and other fundraising activities, along with funds from the Tian You Xiang. In addition, the associations accumulated savings over the years amounted to approximately 715,000 yuan, with 386,800 yuan designated as seed money for the reconstruction of the Ancestral Hall. Expenditures mainly include three categories: "Clan," "Temple," and "Education." The "Clan" category includes organizing and preparing various ancestral worship activities, interactions between clan members, management of the ancestral hall, and consolation funds; the "Deity" category includes organizing and preparing various deity worship activities and managing the temple; the "Education and Culture" category includes funding the Huang Wuxian Memorial Hall and teacher consolation funds, among other cultural development expenses. In 2017, about 22% of the Elderly Associations expenditures were allocated to support education and cultural development (Mr. Huang Zhenhe, the president of the Elderly Association, was once the principal of Xiaodi Primary School and continues to be deeply concerned about the villages cultural and educational endeavors after retirement). Additionally, deity worship (42.6%) and clan activities (35.4%) are also significant components of the expenditure.

## 5 LEGALIZATION AND LEGITIMACY: TWO PATHS OF THE GENERATION OF FAITH RELATIONSHIP

The transformation of the Hei Long Temple in Northern Shaanxi from a folk temple to a cultural relic repository, and then to a tourist attraction, is the result of multiple efforts by village representatives (who were once local elites such as gentry and merchants, but now have become political, economic, and cultural elites) representing various villages. The numerous attempts ultimately led to the temple being labeled with so many tags, driven by concerns over the distinction between "proper worship" and "licentious temples" in the relationship between religion and government. The process of legitimizing these labels essentially involves obtaining administrative legitimacy. By participating in the market economy, cultural relic protection, the inheritance of Taoist culture, and the development of tourist attractions, the Hei Long Temple has "welcomed" its legitimacy, which is also the process of legitimizing it from above.

Unlike the Hei Long Temple in the public community "Nine Villages in the South," the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple in eastern Guangdong is dedicated to the Huang clan village of Xiadi, with its management organization being the Elderly Association of Xiadi Village. The "Ying Lao Ye" activities in Xiadi Village connect the temple and ancestral hall, while the "Shang Deng" ceremony links deities to families. Even when Jingxin Hermitage were established, they actively participated in clan and folk religious rituals. In their book *A General History of Chinese Religion* (Volume I), Mou Zhongjian and Zhang Jian mention that "ancient Chinese religion centered on the worship of deities and ancestors, with natural objects such as the state, sun, moon, and mountains serving as wings, and other ghostly deities as supplements. This formed relatively fixed suburban shrines, ancestral halls, and other sacrificial systems, which became the fundamental force maintaining social order and the patriarchal family system[17]." This perspective remains applicable to the case of Xiadi Village, where the integration of Jingxin Hermitage, the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, and clan ancestral halls reflects the influence of social order and the "The Law of Human Being." The appearance of Buddhas light at the Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, along with the couplets praying for the family's future and well-being, highlights the diverse faith relationships formed around the Huang clan. Various beliefs have found their appropriate places within the clan society, thus establishing a legitimate position in the lower strata of society.

From the religious practices of Hei Long Temple and Xuan Tian Ancient Temple, we can clearly identify the organizational structures of these two temples, trace their processes of legitimization, and summarize the two distinct forms of faith expression. The core of these two beliefs seems to be inspired by Durkheim's discussion on "totemic origins," which suggests that folk beliefs, especially those in China, always have elements of rationality (often unjustly

labeled as "collective utilitarianism") and a need for legitimacy. This rationality stems from "sociality" and the need for social integration. This need is not about "supernatural worship," nor does it arise from "fear of the unknown," but rather from a practical, utilitarian, and essential requirement for human survival and reproduction. The former revolves around building diverse social relationships (relations in faith), while the latter revolves around constructing diverse beliefs within a single social group (faith in relations).

In summary, the legalization of folk beliefs is a continuation of the classic issue of church-state relations. From the perspective of the formation of faith relationship, it involves the administrative legalization process that folk beliefs need to undergo within the social relationship where the state and religion are "state-led and religion-subordinate." The issue of the legitimacy of folk beliefs is situated within the relationship between belief and local society. In a local society centered on patriarchal order, deities must assume the utilitarian social functions of local society and achieve social legitimacy, which is also the process of social legitimacy, building faith based on relationships.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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