

Diverging from Religious Practices and Embracing Folk Custom: The Festival Customs of Zoroastrianism in Chang'an during the Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract

The spatial and temporal hub status of Chang'an in the Sui and Tang dynasties allowed foreign cultures to enter the core region of the empire and gradually take root, mutate, and even Sinicize, profoundly influencing the lives of the Chinese people at that time and in subsequent generations. Chang'an in the Sui and Tang dynasties was the first stop for Zoroastrianism to enter the core region of the empire, and there must have been demands from various sides. The Zoroastrianism that entered the Chinese mainland was significantly different from that in Central Asia, and in general, it was trending towards secularization, which manifested but was not limited to the tendency of the entertainment in SaiXian, the waning worship of the sacred fire, the localization of the prayer for utilitarianism and the prayer for rain. The shift was facilitated by the time, space, transmitters, audiences, performance context, social structure, and cultural traditions of Chang'an City and the process of Zoroastrianism dissemination.

Keywords

Zoroastrianism, Chang'an, Secularization

1. Introduction

In the study of Chinese history, Chang'an (now Xi'an) of the Sui and Tang Dynasties is not only a spatial concept but also a time concept. The prosperity and openness of the Silk Road and the tolerant and open cultural tolerance of the rulers brought together all kinds of Chinese and foreign cultures. The position of

Changan in the Sui and Tang Dynasties as the hub of time and space allowed for foreign cultures to enter the core area of imperial rule and gradually land, mutate and even become sinicized, profoundly affecting the life of the Chinese people at that time and even later generations. The experience of Zoroastrianism (祆教), a Sogdian folk faith derived from Zoroastrianism in Persia, in Chang'an of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, is one of the clearest evidences of this cultural interaction.

In the study of Zoroastrianism, Western scholars have done much work on the basic teachings, religious practices and customs of Zoroastrianism. They have clarified the basic teachings and customs of Zoroastrianism, which has the foundation significance of religious teaching (Boyce, 1996). In recent years, Chinese scholars have done a great deal of work on the time of Zoroastrianism's introduction into China, the origin of Zoroastrianism, the transmission vector and nature of Zoroastrianism, the process of its introduction into China, and the art and customs of Zoroastrianism (Lin, 2000). This has deepened people's understanding of Zoroastrianism. In China, although some scholars have conducted specific studies on Zoroastrianism in a certain period and area, no dedicated research has been conducted on the Zoroastrian festivals in Chang'an during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

As the first station for Zoroastrianism to enter the core area of imperial rule, there must be demands from many forces. The research on Zoroastrianism in Chang'an in the Sui and Tang Dynasties is very scarce, mainly due to the lack of direct historical materials. Based on existing research, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Zoroastrianism in Chang'an during the Sui and Tang Dynasties by meticulously examining and interpreting historical materials from a spatial-temporal perspective. The objective is to enhance our understanding of the presence of Zoroastrianism in Chang'an during this period and facilitate the regularity of cultural exchanges between Chinese and foreign civilizations.

2. The Origin and Eastern Transmission of Zoroastrianism

The Xian religion (祆教), is the name given to the Zoroastrianism originating from the Persian region in ancient Chinese documents. It is based on the teachings of Zoroaster, who introduced the earliest form of monotheistic belief and after whom it is named. Western scholars estimate that Zoroaster lived between 1400 BC and 1000 BC (Boyce, 1996). Initially originating in eastern Iran, Zoroastrianism gradually spread westward around 600 BC and eventually became the state religion during the Achaemenian Dynasty (550 BC-330 BC) in Persia. However, it suffered significant setbacks during the Macedonian Conquest (334 BC-324 BC) until its revival and widespread development took place during the Sassanid period (AD 224-AD 651), when it was re-established as the state religion. Throughout its various stages of evolution and transformation, Zoroastrianism has maintained its core religious elements: belief in Ahura Mazda as a deity, adherence to dualistic concepts of good and evil, and reverence for sacred fire.

Based on a study of ancient Sogdian letters in Central Asia, Chinese historian

Rong Xinjiang suggests that Zoroastrianism was introduced into China by the Sogdian trade caravan on the Silk Road in the early 4th century (Rong, 2014). During Tang Dynasty rule, this religion experienced rapid development within China due to factors such as Arab conquest leading to the destruction of the Persian Sassanid dynasty in 7th century and gradual replacement of Zoroastrianism with Islam within that region. Consequently, a large number of Zoroastrians migrated into Central Asia, which further promoted popularity of this faith within Chang'an. Recent breakthroughs made by Chinese scholars have revealed that while influenced by authentic Zoroastrianism upon introduction into China; over time it evolved into a variant tainted with national characteristics (Cai, 1994). The difference between the Central Asian Sogdian Zoroastrianism and the Persian orthodox Zoroastrianism is that the Sogdian Zoroastrianism is polytheistic and accompanied by idolatry, while the Persian Orthodox Zoroastrianism is monotheistic and has no idolatry. From the point of view of burial, the Sogdian Zoroastrianism practiced "urn burial" while the Persian Orthodox Zoroastrianism practiced sky burial (Cai, 2007).

The Zoroastrianism introduced into China differed significantly from the Central Asian Sogdian religion. As there is no record of comprehensive teachings or existing Zoroastrian scriptures in Chinese literature, it can be inferred that Zoroastrianism did not employ a complete religious system to influence society. Research conducted by Chinese scholars has revealed that Zoroastrianism in China was a fusion of traditional Chinese customs, local folk beliefs, Western Hu customs (胡俗), and Buddhist rituals. Therefore, the main influence of Zoroastrianism on China was through Hu customs (Lin, 1999). In recent years, some Chinese scholars have approached the study of the spread of Zoroastrianism in China from a customary perspective, opening up new avenues for research on this topic (Zhao, 2018). Consequently, this article aims to outline various perspectives regarding Zoroastrianism in Chang'an during the Sui and Tang dynasties while considering its unique spatial-temporal dimension.

3. Zoroastrianism Festivals and Customs in Chang'an of the Sui and Tang Dynasties

During the later Zhou period, there were already Zoroastrianism activities in Chang'an with the personal participation of the emperor (Wei, 2009). According to Song records, during the Sui and Tang dynasties, Zoroastrianism had a special place for religious activities "Zoroastrianism Temple" in Chang'an. During the Tang Dynasty, the number of Zoroasters apparently reached six (Zhang, 2010) for which the government also set up a special administrative body "Sabao (萨宝)" and the clergy "Xianzheng (祆正)". With the increasing number of Sogdians in Chang'an, the social influence of Zoroastrianism also expanded, and its religious practices inevitably interacted with local customs. In the process of exchange and integration, Zoroastrianism became increasingly less religious and more secular. This can be seen in the following four aspects.

3.1. A Trend towards Entertainment-Oriented Magic Tricks in Saixian

The term “Saixian” (赛祆) refers to a ceremonial practice dedicated to the Zoroastrian deity, encompassing rituals for prosperity, feasting, musical and dance performances, illusionary acts, and costumed processions. Jiang Boqin characterized it as a form of entertainment that simultaneously pleases the gods and entertains the people within the commercial Han community (Jiang, 1996). The specific dates of SaiXian activities in Chang’an are not explicitly documented in historical records. However, by referencing descriptions of Saiyan activities in Henan Prefecture and Liangzhou region found in Tang dynasty literature such as “Chao Ye Qian Zai” authored by Zhang Zhuo, it can be inferred that SaiXian activities in Chang’an also had specific dates (Zhang, 1979).

During this festival, traditional festivities such as roasting pigs and sheep accompanied by musical performances on instruments like pipa (a four-stringed Chinese musical instrument), drums, flutes and with joyous singing and dancing were observed. One particularly remarkable aspect was magic, where a sword-through-the-body illusion acts but the performer survives without injury. According to records from Shazhou Yizhou Gazetteer:

There was a Zoroastrian leader named Zhai Panduo who visited the capital before Gao Chang was conquered. His physical body is transformed into the incarnation of a divine god. He then invoked his deity and proceeded to use a sharp knife to stab his abdomen. The blade passed through his body, emerging from his belly after which he discarded its remaining portion while tying its handle end at the root of his hair. Holding onto both ends of the blade with hands he twisted it up-and-down while proclaiming that all state affairs were aligned with divine will supported by spiritual assistance without exception being verified..... After vanishing into thin air post-performance, he collapsed unconscious barely breathing only recovering after seven days seemingly unaffected (Tang et al., 1986).

Although Zhai Panduo’s illusionary act may not have been specifically tied to any particular Zoroastrian festival, similar illusions are relatively common occurrences noted in writings during both the Tang and Song dynasties periods. Furthermore, the illusions described within Shazhou Yizhou Gazetteer were essentially manifestations representing sacredness coupled with mystical capabilities serving as evidence for divine protection bestowed upon Zoroastrian leaders. This enigmatic power left rulers awestruck, leading them to bestow titles such as “Traveling Captain” upon these performers. Accordingly, based on Rong Xinjiang’s research findings, the magic show held within Chang’an served as political propaganda aimed at garnering support for military campaigns against Khotan province” (Rong, 2003).

But has this kind of magic ritual always been so sacred? Obviously, this is not as evident from the limited literary records on illusions in Chang’an, such as the Shazhou Yizhou Gazetteer. However, by examining accounts of illusions in other regions, we can infer the evolving nature of such practices in Chang’an during the

Tang Dynasty,

“There were Hu temples located in Lide Fang of Henan Province and Xifang of Nanshi City, where merchants would annually seek blessings. After performing rituals to appease the deities, a Hu individual would be appointed as the presiding figure and collect donations from spectators. The Zoroastrian priest held a very sharp knife and stabbed himself in the stomach, with the blade coming out of his back and causing him to agitate his intestines and bleed profusely. Soon, he sprayed water and recited incantations, and he was back to normal. This is probably the magic of the Western Regions” (Zhang, 1979).

This account reveals significant changes in magic shows. Firstly, performers are no longer renowned individuals but rather “recruited Hu” members selected from ordinary people who rely on this profession for livelihoods. Secondly, the act of “collecting money from spectators” indicates a transformation from its original religious significance to an economic activity with monetary transactions and a secular ambiance. Moreover, it suggests that audiences extended beyond just Hu people to include Han people as well. Given that religious temples were situated near Sogdian settlements close to Xishi city within Chang’an’s vicinity, it is reasonable to assume similar activities took place within Chang’an itself involving both Han and Hu participants—highlighting how Zoroastrian ceremonies originally rooted in religious contexts became intertwined with folk customs.

The rulers did not support such activities. During Emperor Gaozong’s reign, the Imperial Decree on the Prohibition of Phantom Plays was issued, stating that it is highly unreasonable for Brahmins, Hu and others to engage in theater performances outside by stabbing their stomachs with swords, cutting their tongues with swords, and confusing the people. They should be immediately repatriated, and border countries should impose strict restrictions on them (Dong, 1983). Any recurrence of such incidents would no longer require them to be brought before the court. The terms “hu,” “magic play,” and “sword piercing the stomach” may encompass Sogdian Zoroastrian illusions of body piercing without causing death. Research has indicated that these illusions were influenced by Central Asian Islam rather than being inherent to original Zoroastrianism. It is speculated that these illusions might have been deliberately packaged by Sogdian Parsees to enhance their mystique and validity. Upon arrival in China, they piqued people’s curiosity and gradually transformed into popular street vaudeville acts through the display of sacred rituals. Chinese Confucianism emphasizes protecting one’s body hair and skin as a filial duty towards parents; therefore, from an ideological management perspective, rulers began prohibiting this type of magic show which indicates Chang’an had already developed a general acceptance towards such performances that eventually evolved into entertainment.

3.2. The Waning Worship of the Sacred Fire

The worship of sacred fire is the most prominent external manifestation of Zoroastrianism, and believers consider it a significant means of communication with

God. In Du You's "Tongdian," he stated, "During the fourth year of Wude (621AD), the administration established a temple and government office where a group of Sogdian get together, lighting fires and making curses" (Du, 1988). According to Dong Yu's "Guang Chuan Hua Ba" from the Song Dynasty, "at the beginning of the Sui Dynasty, their rituals began in Chang'an City. Government established temples in the Banzhengfang (颁政坊), where Hu people often served and gathered fire to make curses. There were magical transformations such as swallowing fire with their bellies." From this evidence, we can observe that during the Sui Dynasty and early Tang Dynasty in Chang'an City, although there were magic performances involved in temple worship activities, undoubtedly, the main core activity was "fire wishing a curse." However, when recording Zoroastrian activities in Henan and Liangzhou during the Tang Dynasty period, both texts focused on magic as a central element while neglecting Zoroastrianism's most sacred practice—sacred fire worship. Perhaps Zoroastrianism left such a profound impression on these authors that they also recorded instances like "After libation ceremony concluded, a Sogdian was recruited as a magician, receiving money from spectators who complied with it." Based on references cited above from Shazhou Yizhou Gazetteer, even for political campaigns against Gaochang Kingdoms (Turkic Khaganate), Zhaipantuo gained trust from rulers by performing illusions like "piercing his stomach with sharp swords," while concealing their most sacred act—gathering fire for blessings or cursing.

After arriving in Chang'an, Zoroastrianism gradually lost its original religious sanctity. The solemnity of religious sacrifices diminished during important festivals and occasions, giving way to more vibrant and captivating magic performances. Although Zoroastrianism did not spread among the Chinese population after coming to China, the audience for magic shows in Chang'an and even Luoyang extended beyond the Sogdian people to include a vast majority of residents, including the Chinese. This can also be observed from the aforementioned quote by Gao Zong in which he issued the "Forbidden Drama," stating that "Each time they perform, they simulate self-harm by piercing themselves with a sword and symbolically severing their tongue with a knife, misleading the general public and engaging in highly irrational behavior" These depictions, along with the diminishing significance of the Zoroastrianism temple flame and emphasis on illusion, reflect how Zoroastrianism gradually shifted towards secularization upon its arrival in Chang'an. It transformed into a form of entertainment for the general public and became one of the recreational activities popular among street dwellers in Chang'an.

3.3. The Increasingly Utilitarian Worship at Fire Temples

The waning of the sacred fire in Zoroastrian temples is accompanied by the gradual emergence and strengthening of the functional attribute of seeking blessings in Zoroastrian activities within Chang'an. Although direct records of blessing-seeking activities at Zoroastrian temples in Chang'an are lacking, inference can be

drawn from similar types of Zoroastrian activities in the surrounding regions, as documented in *Chao Ye Qian Zai*. The text describes how merchants from the West pray for blessings annually, offering sacrifices and engaging in music and dance at Zoroastrian temples located in Li De Fang and South City West Fang within Henan Prefecture. Additionally, it mentions a ritual where a Zoroastrian deity is affixed with an iron nail on a designated day at a temple in Liangzhou. Expressions such as “praying for blessings by merchants” and “the day of prayer” suggest that these temples serve a societal function related to seeking blessings. This practice involves praying for divine protection and bestowing good fortune upon supplicants. In terms of its nature, this activity at Zoroastrian temples reflects an inclination towards utilitarianism within religious beliefs.

The Shazhou Yizhou Gazetteer still reflects a similar nature and function: “*There was a Zoroastrian leader named Zhai Panduo who visited the capital before Gao Chang was conquered. his physical body is transformed into the incarnation of a divine god*”, “*He said that everything in the state is governed by heavenly will and aided by God, Very effective..... The relevant authorities submitted a report, and the emperor conferred the title of Captain of the Frontier on him.*” This material holds significant value for analysis.

First, why did Zhaipantuo “visit the capital”? The text “before Gao Chang was conquered” suggests that it was in preparation for an attack from Gaochang. Second, what did he say upon arriving in Chang’an? He expressed that all actions undertaken by the country are aligned with divine will and supported by God without exception. This implies that the nation’s strategies and measures are divinely ordained and will undoubtedly be validated. Clearly, this is a customary expression of benediction. Third, who brought him to the capital? It should have been the ruler of Tang Dynasty. It is difficult to fathom a Parsi traveling all the way from Liangzhou to Beijing without reason solely for performing religious duties for the ruler. Perhaps this Zoroastrian figure was highly renowned, and it is plausible that the ruler hoped his prayers and rituals would generate momentum towards successfully conquering the Gaochang Kingdom, thereby aligning with God’s will. Consequently, when illusions were performed, lectures were given while military officers were instructed on guerrilla warfare tactics. Undoubtedly, this exemplifies Zoroastrianism’s inherent function of bestowing blessings.

The blessing function of Zoroastrianism appeared to persist, as even the Song people resorted to praying in the Zoroastrian temple when they fell ill: “In July of the eighth year of the Yuanxiu, Chang yanfu caught a cold in the Manjusri Bodhisattva Hall of Kaibao Temple and became deeply concerned. However, after praying at the Zoroaster temple that night, he miraculously recovered by the next day and offered sacrifices to honor God’s grace” (Dong, 2016). This demonstrates that from significant state events to common ailments suffered by individuals, blessings from ancestral temples were sought for divine intervention and testing. Originally reserved for sacred temple worship, its efficacy gradually transformed it into one of many idols through which ordinary Tang and Song people sought blessings

from gods, eventually becoming increasingly utilitarian.

3.4. The Increasingly Folkloric Zoroaster Temple Praying for Rain

In an agricultural era, favorable weather conditions are of utmost importance for the survival of individuals, the national economy, and social stability. Consequently, the early worship of gods by ancient Chinese people to prevent droughts and invoke rainfall assumed significant significance. It is noteworthy that during the Sui and Tang dynasties, numerous folk shrines gradually assimilated into the national ceremonial system and acquired official recognition (Lei, 2009). As Zoroastrianism merged with Chinese rituals and musical civilization, the practice of praying for rain evolved from a folklore tradition to being embraced within the official pantheon during the Song Dynasty.

The Tianshui City Museum unearthed a sarcophagus bed from the Sui Dynasty in 1982, consisting of 17 square stone statues and eight plain stone strips. Among them, Stone Statue No.9, one of the screens on the sarcophagus bed, can be described as follows: an artificial cow head with wine flowing out like a rope through its mouth, creating a continuous stream day and night while evoking reverence from those who witness it (Zhang, 1992). After Jiang Boqin's interpretation, this scene is believed to depict the ritual sacrifice of the Zoroastrian rain God Tir by the Hu people, such as Sogdians, in honor of wine (Jiang, 2003). This statement has received widespread recognition among Chinese scholars. The successful interpretation of the sarcophagus screen can provide evidence that during the Sui Dynasty, the active Sogdian community in Tianshui had knowledge of religious beliefs. However, there is no direct literary record regarding whether this rain prayer ceremony took place in Chang'an city. But according to one of the Twenty Dunhuang Verses, roughly written in the mid-9th century (Hu & Wang, 1999):

When the city of On was founded, the temple arose. The government of the region prayed to the gods, and all classes of people received auspicious signs. Many people worshipped the Zoroastrian gods, who were very effective. Especially when praying for rain, the wine offered to the gods flowed unbroken, like a string.

The practice of rain prayer was likely a prevalent phenomenon during the Sui and Tang dynasties, particularly with the increasing influx of the Hu people into China. Given that Tianshui is situated less than 400 kilometers away from Chang'an, it is highly probable that similar rain prayer activities took place in Chang'an as well. It should be noted that according to the poem, "The government of the region prayed to the gods," there was official participation in the rain prayer ceremony of Zoroastrianism in Dunhuang as early as the early 9th century. According to "and all classes of people received auspicious signs", the participating people are not only Sogdian nationality, but have expanded to many nationalities or groups in Dunhuang area, including the Han. It can be seen that the Sogdian ceremony has been deeply integrated with the life of local people in Dunhuang area.

In addition, according to Dunhuang document P. 2005 “Shazhou Governor House Map” recorded: “*land God. Right in the south one mile, there is a temple, painting God..... Wind Bo God. Right in the northwest fifty steps, there is a temple, painting God..... The rain master God. Right in the state east two, there is a temple, painting God..... Zoroastrian gods. Right one mile east of the state. There are temples, paintings of God..*” (Tang et al., 1986). From this account, it can be seen that the Zoroastrian gods had become an important object of worship in local shrines, alongside the gods of wind and rain. Since the god of wind and rain were all gods associated with rain in Chinese shrines, the fact that Zoroaster can be associated with this shows that his function of seeking rain is comparable to theirs. And from the poem quoted above, “there are many people offering sacrifices to the Zoroastrian gods, and the gods are very effective”, it can be seen that they are welcomed by the people because of their effectiveness. It can be concluded that from the sarcophagus of the Sui Dynasty to the Ancheng Parsee and then to the coexistence of the Zoroastrian god with the god of wind and rain, Zoroastrianism gradually broke through ethnic and regional restrictions. Through constant ethnic integration, Zoroastrianism became an effective god in arid and semi-arid areas for people to pray for the rain to moisten all things, and gradually integrated into the folk beliefs of the Tang people. It became a custom in some places.

After the Anshi Rebellion, there was a significant expulsion of the Hu ethnic group from the core area of the Tang Dynasty, which also had implications for Zoroastrianism. Furthermore, during the reign of Huichang (840AD-846AD) in the later Tang Dynasty, Zoroastrianism faced further attacks as Buddhism was eradicated. The directive is to instruct over 3,000 Zoroastrian missionaries to transition back into secular life and refrain from causing any disruption in the Chinese society (Liu et al., 1975). By this time, however, Sogdian Zoroastrianism had gradually diverged from its original form and assimilated into the folk customs of the Tang Dynasty. It appears that the rain prayer ritual has become a significant component of local temple festivals in the Dunhuang area. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether this “morning and evening wine such as rope” rain prayer activity is genuinely aimed at beseeching divine intervention for rainfall or merely intended to offer fragrant wine to pilgrims. As Mr. Bi Bo suggests, In addition to expressing gratitude towards deities for past blessings and praying for future peace and prosperity, could there be an element of attracting visitors through exotic traditions? (Bi, 2004). The professional characteristics of Sogdian individuals, who excel in business, make it plausible. During the Northern Song Dynasty, Zoroastrianism gained support from the ruling elite and became revered in the Chinese Pantheon as a prominent deity alongside the “Five Dragons,” traditional rain gods, and on par with the city god (Tuo et al., 1977). It can be seen that the Zoroastrian God spread from the Sogdian people at the beginning, and then integrated into the folk beliefs of the Han Dynasty, until the “Zoroastrian temple into the sacrificial rites” and was integrated by the national ritual system, it can be seen that its folk attribute has been recognized by the state. The Sui and Tang dynasties

of Chang'an were the time and space hub of Zoroastrianism, which moved away from religion and became folklore.

4. An Analysis of the Reasons for the Secularization of Zoroastrianism

As mentioned above, Zoroastrianism mainly influenced China in the form of Hu customs (胡俗). The Hu custom here refers to the customs of the Sogdian people. Generally speaking, folklore is the folk custom, which refers to the life culture created, enjoyed and inherited by the people in a country or nation (Zhong, 2010). From this definition, first of all, the social structure of folklore should be located in the middle and lower classes of people, as opposed to the official, that is, the material and spiritual culture created and enjoyed by the general public. Secondly, it is a living culture, that is, it is born in the daily life of the people. In addition, in the process of spreading folklore, compared with religion, folklore has no unified doctrine or dogma, so it is not passed on through scriptures and teachings but is passed on from mouth to mouth in daily life and social interaction, so it is often a social habit formed by spontaneous organization, which results in the variability of folklore. From the above criteria, it can be observed that after Zoroastrianism arrived in Chang'an, there were initially temples, clergy, and worship of the sacred fire as religious forms. However, as time passed and its influence spread wider, the religious aspect of Zoroastrianism gradually diminished while folk customs became more prominent. Specific manifestations include the tendency of the entertainment in SaiXian, the waning worship of the sacred fire, the localization of the prayer for utilitarianism and the prayer for rain. Then why did Zoroastrianism develop into such a practice during the transmission of Zoroastrianism?

First of all, as mentioned above, Sogdian Zoroastrianism is no longer the authentic Zoroastrian religion. It belongs to the Central Asian folk belief dominated by Sogdians, and there is no strict and complete religious system, which determines that it is impossible to spread and inherit in the way of writing and doctrine. Therefore, it uses perceptual methods to expand its influence, so as to serve the folk needs of Sogdians. The merchant nature of the Sogdians determined that they put profit first. With the prosperity of the Silk Road, people came to the prosperous Sui and Tang empires for business. In order to better communicate with Chinese and Turkish residents, localization and secularization were imperative. Because only by finding ways to integrate into the local society and meet the spiritual and cultural needs of the locals can we better interact with the locals and open up markets for themselves.

Secondly, the spatial hub status of Chang'an City of Tang Dynasty and its existence as the center of state power made anyone and any religion who entered the core area of the empire need the support of the ruler. In order to win the support of the emperor, on the one hand, it is necessary to meet the needs of the imperial power and not endanger the imperial power and social stability; on the other hand, it must not violate the official ideology based on Confucianism. Only in this way

can we gain the support of the emperor and thus enter the broader Central region to open up the market of faith. Otherwise, it would be a devastating blow to imperial power. For example, Nestorianism, which was also known as the Sanyi religion (三夷教) with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, although it was supported by the imperial power for some time, only followed the upper line and was not localized enough, and eventually declined. Manichaeism, on the one hand, was determined not to be true in order to maintain its own characteristics; on the other hand, its doctrine of denying reality and advocating struggle provided a basis for civil secret society to incite rebellion and threaten the imperial power, which led to its destruction when Huichang destroyed the Buddha in the Tang Dynasty. Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, did not write or preach to other peoples, but only acted as a common spiritual bond between the Sogda and Shang Hu. Even in the process of destroying Buddhas in Huichang, Zoroastrianism was implicated, but only the upper classes of Zoroastrianism were returned to secular life, and the majority of believers were not greatly affected. In addition to the merchant nature of Sogdian, the illusion and prayer activities in its belief gradually became a means of making a living or attracting customers, which was integrated into the daily life of the people in the Central region until the Song Dynasty and the city God this folk belief stood side by side, becoming the object of official sacrifice.

Thirdly, the folklorization of Zoroastrianism was also related to the cultural traditions of the Chinese people. Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has been a people of multi-god belief. Except for Buddha and Dao, most of the god beliefs do not have complete doctrines and lack strict religious organizations. Chinese people's attitude toward faith is essentially a utilitarian existence, so most of the beliefs are essentially folk customs. When Zoroastrianism gained public recognition for its effectiveness, it became a member of the temple of gods, no different from other folk faiths. The Zoroastrian clergy may not have intended this to be the case, but in the course of the eastern inheritance it was an established fact. In this way, Zoroastrianism, originally derived from Zoroastrianism in Persia, passed through Central Asia to Eastern Soil, Chang'an to Luoyang, and then to the vast inland areas. Although it did not become a manifest religion in the medieval society like Buddhism, it did not suffer a devastating blow like Nestorianism and Manichaeism, but penetrated into the cultural blood of the Chinese nation in a folkway.

5. Conclusion

The history of the Tang Dynasty assimilated the cultural essence of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties, ushering in a new era of Song civilization (Xiang, 2010). Regarding the development of Zoroastrianism, its beliefs remained prevalent during the Song Dynasty, with traces found in Bianjing and Zhenjiang as well as documented references in Song History and various folk records. However, Zoroastrianism underwent significant changes from its pre-Tang form when it reached the Song Dynasty. As some scholars have pointed out, prior to the Sui Dynasty,

Zoroastrianism still retained many characteristics influenced by Central Asian multiculturalism; however, after the Sui Dynasty, it gradually embraced Sinicization and even developed a distinct “Chinese version” (Ge, 2009). This Chinese adaptation of Zoroastrianism was evident through practices such as entertainment-oriented deity worship, dilution of sacred fire rituals, utilitarian-focused worship practices, and localized rain prayers. The Chinese academic community generally believes that one of the social changes between the Tang and Song dynasties was secularization. Schiller’s Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research suggests that rationalism and utilitarianism are manifestations of religious secularization becoming increasingly important within society—wherein economic rationality or utilitarian values replace religious sanctity or mystery. (Shiner & Larry, 1967) From this perspective, the divergence from religious practices to embrace folk customs observed within Zoroastrianism during the Sui and Tang dynasties aligns well with this conclusion. This transformation was closely linked to factors such as time, space, inheritance, audience composition, different performance contexts, social structures, and cultural traditions.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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