

The Wutong Cult in Modern and Contemporary Suzhou Area

(Abstract)

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This article explores the living Wutong cult in the Suzhou area. In continuation with its long history, this spirit-possession cult still has fortune-bringing and exorcistic dimensions. The authors combine historical and ethnographic approaches to the Wutong beliefs with a focus on the pilgrimage to cult's centre at Shangfangshan (a sacred site in Suzhou) and the domestic worship of the Wutong in the Changshu area. This provides us with a perspective on this cult as built by ritual specialists and common believers. In both forms of worship, the *baojuan* storytelling is actively employed, and the *Baojuan of the Grand Dowager* (transmitted as manuscripts) thus appears as a key scripture of local beliefs. With the analysis of textual and ethnographic evidence, we move beyond the established argument about these infamous deities, which consists of questioning whether the Wutong are essentially immoral, and to what extent the attempts at taming and standardizing them have succeeded. We uncover the ambiguity of the Wutong, who are presented as dangerous and kind at the same time in the local sources. The scriptures of the cult, notably the *Baojuan of the Grand Dowager*, acknowledge this ambiguity, which underpins the gods' power, and develop ritual means to deal with it.

Keywords: Wutong Suzhou baojuan (precious scrolls) illicit cults
folklore folk beliefs

現當代蘇州地區五通信仰

(提要)

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本文分析近現代蘇州地區五通神信仰。這種古老的巫術活動在當地至今具有祈財與驅邪的功能。兩位作者結合歷史與民俗學角度來研究五通神信仰，以蘇州上方山朝聖，即古代五通神信仰中心，以及常熟地區私宅崇拜為主。這樣我們能結合研究神祇和普通信眾的看法。這兩種崇拜場合都出現寶卷講唱儀式，因此《太姆寶卷》抄本成為了當地民間信仰的經書。我們不沿襲傳統有關五通神研究的論點，即不討論五通是否邪神以及五通是否已被人馴服或標準化。我們致力解釋五通神信仰的歧義：他們在當地材料經常被刻畫為既危險卻又善良的地方神。在民間的五通經書特別是《太姆寶卷》，這種歧義並不罕見，它一方面強調神靈的法力，另一方面提供對付該神的儀式方法。

關鍵詞： 五通神 蘇州 寶卷 淫祀 民俗 民間信仰