

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study will analyze data collected through field-based observations, primary ritual texts, and locally conducted interviews of the yin-yang practitioners in the three small villages of Fanmagou, Qijiazhuang, and Wangdazhuang in northwestern China. The practice referred to as yin-yang in this region is part of an archaic folk religious system that can be traced back to at least the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Despite its deep cultural roots, it is becoming endangered due to the impact of national policies (governing religion and culture) and the general adaptation to modernity in China. Due to the localized nature of this cultural system, the main research method used will be qualitative ethnographic description, with a Geertzian “thick description” approach to interpretive analysis. The collected data is roughly divided into three categories: (1) transcriptions of interviews with yin-yang practitioners and other local villagers; (2) video tapes, photographs, and field notes of local religious rituals, specifically memorial and burial rites that are led by the yin-yang practitioners, and (3) my own translations of yin-yang scriptural texts that are used in leading the rituals themselves, as well as for the teaching and training of young yin-yang apprentices. The interpretive ethnography that is produced from these rich primary sources will also be considered for its curriculum applications in two primary higher education contexts: 1) As a rich primary source for courses in Chinese culture and language – conducted in either Chinese or English language context, and 2) As a source of engaging and culturally relevant texts for courses in content-based ESOL for Chinese students (in China presumably).