



A Comparative Study of Folk Charity Activities in the Southern Song Dynasty and the Late Ming Dynasty

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Abstract

The Southern Song Dynasty and the Late Ming Dynasty showed significant differences in civil charitable activities. In the Southern Song Dynasty, local elites such as scholars and gentry were the core, relying on blood and geographic networks to carry out a wide range of relief, including disaster relief, poverty alleviation, medical care, and public welfare, with a diverse range of service recipients and a wide geographic distribution, especially in remote areas to make up for the inadequacy of the official relief, and highlighting the autonomy of the local community and its ability to cope with crises. In the Late Ming, on the other hand, there was a shift towards organization and moralization, represented by the charities led by the scholars, such as the Tongshan Association, which raised funds through a membership fee system, limited their service targets to groups that met ethical standards, and concentrated their activities in the cities of the southern part of the Yangtze River, where they provided both material assistance and the dissemination of rationalistic values. The difference between the two reflects different social development conditions, while the Southern Song relied on local informal power due to weak central control, the Late Ming strengthened the moral order through institutionalized charity, reflecting the moral response of the scholars to social problems under the economic prosperity.

Key words: Folk Charity Activities; Comparative Study; Civil Charitable Activities; Southern Song Dynasty; Late Ming Dynasty; Local Elites / Scholars and Gentry; Moralization and Institutionalization

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In his famous paper, "The Spirit of Chinese Philanthropy," Zhu Youyu states, "Chinese philanthropy is a product of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. It is organically integrated with the life, traditions, and national thought of the Chinese people, and derives from them the vigor, guiding principles, and various characteristics that serve as its foundation." (Zhu, 2016, p.99) The folk philanthropic activities of the Southern Song and the Late Ming embody the achievements of different periods in the history of Chinese philanthropy, and their specific forms are characterized by distinctive epochal features. Qin Hui points out that "folk philanthropy, whether ancient or modern, developed in a certain social context corresponding to certain 'problems'." (Qin, 1999, p.5) The Southern Song and Late Ming periods, however, were characterized by economic development, sharp social divisions, prominent social conflicts, and the failure of official relief agencies to play their role for financial and other reasons. Against this background, civil activities in the Southern Song and the Late Ming were more prosperous. Therefore, a comparative study of civic charitable activities in the Southern Song and the Late Ming can help to enhance our deeper understanding of the periods in which they took place.

2. FORMS OF FOLK CHARITY IN THE SOUTHERN SONG DYNASTY

Southern Song folk charity is extremely diverse, such as participation in the construction of water conservancy and transportation on weekdays, the establishment of voluntary schools to promote the development of local education, when the bad year relief of the poor and so on.

2.1 The main body of folk charity activities in the Southern Song Dynasty

According to Zhang Wen's research, folk charitable activities during the Southern Song period were mainly promoted by four main bodies: scholar-officials, squire-rich farmers, monastic and Taoist groups, and women's groups. On the whole, scholar-officials and squire-rich farmers played the most crucial role in charitable activities. With their high social status, rich resources and extensive social networks, they were able to effectively organize and implement large-scale charitable projects. On the other hand, the monastic and women's groups participated in charitable activities more as supporters.

During the Southern Song period, scholars and officials constituted the core force of folk charity and were widely active in various aspects. By virtue of their high social status and social prestige, the scholars played an important role in public welfare and charitable organizations. Despite their limited economic conditions, they used their social resources to become important organizers and managers of various charitable activities. Due to their high social status and accumulated wealth, officials, especially those who had been retired to their positions, also played a key role in clan charities and relief friend's campaign. They supported their clansmen through the setting up of charity estates and actively participated in assisting their friends and old acquaintances based on the deep old friendships formed by their schoolmates, classmates and colleagues.

The rich, on the other hand, who often have no political status, are directly involved in charitable work through their strong economic power. These charitable activities were wide-ranging and covered a number of important areas, including famine relief, relief of the poor, and the promotion of public welfare. However, there were occasions when officials forced wealthy burghers to open barns for relief, which led to some burghers participating in relief activities passively and not entirely voluntarily.

Monastic and Taoist groups and women could not fully play their roles in Southern Song civic charitable activities due to the limitations of their social structure and traditional roles, but they were still particularly influential. The monastic community, in particular, was often indispensable in fund-raising activities due to the greater social influence of its philosophy of persuasion. In addition to promoting charitable activities through exhortation, Buddhist teachings also inspired many people

to devote themselves to public service projects such as building bridges and roads and digging righteous wells.

2.2 Objects of folk charity services in the Southern Song Dynasty

The objects of charity in the Southern Song Dynasty are very diverse and can be unfolded at the following levels:

The first is clan charity. Under the guidance of the theory of honouring the clan and accepting the family, many scholars often regarded it as their duty to care for the clan, and it was not only limited to the scholars, but there was also no lack of enthusiastic characters among the general gentry. This kind of charitable behaviour was mainly aimed at members of the clan who were related by blood, emphasising the support and care for the clan members.

The second is the salvation of the old friends. It is mainly the help and care given to friends and old acquaintances on weekdays, as well as the support and assistance given to officials under special circumstances, such as when they are relegated.

The third is community charity. Within community charity, two types can be clearly distinguished: the civic charitable behaviour of urban and rural communities, which differ significantly from each other. A key difference is that philanthropy in urban communities usually takes place among strangers and is characterised by openness; In contrast, charitable activities in rural communities tend to take place among acquaintances, reflecting the characteristics of geography. Particularly in the case of charitable activities in rural communities, when community relief was implemented in some places, it was explicitly limited to local townspeople, while exclusion was given to foreigners or other non-local residents.

2.3 Contents and Forms of Folk Charity in the Southern Song Dynasty

Southern Song folk charity is rich in content, specifically can be divided into famine relief, relieve the poor and give sympathy to the needy, help the weak to solve the problem, public welfare and so on.

For famine relief and poverty alleviation, the Southern Song folk developed a variety of responses, including the establishment of social warehouses, food and clothing grants, medical care and medicines, remission of arrears, and so on.

Specifically, due to factors such as large population, limited land resources and social customs, some regions suffered from frequent famines and unrest. In order to alleviate these problems, intellectuals came up with the idea of establishing warehouses to prepare for famine years, which was put into practice in the Fujian region. The measures taken by the folk to alleviate famine and famine were largely similar in form to those taken by the official government, including corn relief, porridge, credit relief and direct relief. Among them, the use of the

community warehouse for relief grain and porridge are the two main forms of civil relief. In addition to the above two ways of relief, relief loans are also more common.

Giving food and clothing refers to the provision of basic food and clothing needs to the poor without compensation, which is the basic condition for their survival. The giving of food and clothing constitutes the basic form of folk activities to help the poor and the needy. In addition to giving food and clothing, folk activities to help the poor and the needy also include giving money and land. What is more, they not only provide food and clothing for the poor, but also provide them with accommodation.

In addition to providing the necessary food and clothing, folk charity in the Southern Song Dynasty also provided medical assistance. In this period, there were various forms of medical charity activities, mainly including charitable medical institutions and individual medical charity activities. Due to the limited official medical resources, in practice, the folk relied more on temporary charitable activities for the treatment of diseases. Temporary charitable activities are divided into two main categories: first, emergency treatment during epidemics; and second, charitable assistance in the treatment of everyday illnesses. In addition, private citizens not only actively participated in the direct treatment of the sick, but also contributed to preventing the spread of the disease, for example by organising and participating in preventive measures such as the burial of corpses in order to reduce the further spread of the disease. On the other hand, relief efforts were carried out in three main ways: first, by officials who used their personal resources and influence during their tenure of office; second, by folk burghers who provided private assistance by donating goods or participating in treatment themselves; and third, by groups of doctors who provided free or low-cost medical care to help the sick and injured.

Helping with marriages and funerals was also an important aspect of folk charity in the Southern Song Dynasty. The Song people attached great importance to marriages and funerals, which cost a great deal of money and were difficult for the average family to bear. Therefore, in the historical records of the two Song dynasties, there are many instances of helping with marriages and funerals. In addition, considering the historical background of frequent wars and disasters at that time, it was not uncommon for a large number of unclaimed corpses to be exposed and left unclaimed and unburied. Under such circumstances, some benevolent folk burghers voluntarily funded the collection of these remains.

In addition, the remission of arrears also plays a role in alleviating poverty. The term 'remission' refers to the act of cancelling a borrower's debt, which is a form of poverty alleviation. Debt relief, on the other hand, refers to the practice of repaying debts or paying

money owed by the poor in their place, and is likewise regarded as a means of alleviating poverty and helping the poor. However, the so-called remission and payment of arrears are often done as a 'favour' out of social etiquette or to preserve relationships. Therefore, while these practices do help some of the poor, they should be viewed more as extensions and complementary forms of traditional poverty alleviation measures than as core relief mechanisms.

In order to help the weak and the needy, the Song Dynasty folk charity can be divided into the following measures in accordance with the object of assistance and the actual situation: care for the elderly and nurture the young, compassion for widows and release of the maidservant, help the students and the scholars, and so on.

The so-called "care for the elderly" refers to the behaviour of supporting the elderly. People who support the orphaned elderly usually have a certain relationship with the person responsible for the elderly, such as distant relatives, in-laws or old friends and so on. However, in instances where distant relatives, in-laws or old friends are not available, there are also many folk burghers who voluntarily assume the responsibility of caring for the orphaned elderly, motivated by compassion and the traditional virtue of respecting the elderly and honouring the wise. Government-led elderly care organisations also receive substantial funding and support from the folk. 'nurture the young' refers to the act of adoption and upbringing of orphans and abandoned children. Orphans are usually children who lack support after the death of both parents or the father. In the case of orphans, the responsibility for their upbringing lies primarily with their relatives. For those who have been abandoned and have no one to turn to, the so-called 'abandoned children' are also adopted by folk burghers out of a sense of charity. In addition to taking orphans and abandoned children into their families, there is another form of social assistance: compassionate individuals or groups choose to support families or institutions that have adopted orphans or abandoned children.

Normally, the maintenance and support of widows is mainly provided by their relatives. If a widow has no close relatives to rely on, her ex-husband's associates or old friends often take on the responsibility of providing help. For those widows who have no relatives and no social network of their ex-husbands to support them, the folk burghers will also provide assistance and support. In addition to direct assistance to widows, many acts of folk charity also extend to other disadvantaged groups. For example, for women who are forced to sell their bodies as maidservants because of poverty, folk burghers will provide relief through ransom and repatriation and other means.

For the poor scholars, there are folk who have the knowledge to provide financial support to help students with financial difficulties to complete their studies. The

'help for scholars' programme focuses on helping those who already have the status of scholars to overcome the difficulties of life brought about by family changes or poor career paths, especially for relegated scholars, folk burghers often lend a helping hand.

The public welfare of the Southern Song Dynasty folk charity is reflected in three aspects, building bridges and roads, repairing the reservoirs and building embankments and the establishment of voluntary schools.

In the Southern Song Dynasty, the folk made great efforts to build and finance public transport facilities such as bridges and roads, especially in the construction of bridges. Public works dedicated to transport and water conservancy were quite common during the Song period. Due to the high cost of building roads, such projects were usually less often done by individuals alone and more often done by communities working together collectively. In addition to independently initiated bridge and road building projects, there were also a large number of official-led construction projects that were actively funded and supported by private citizens.

Yi shu, also known as yi xue, was a form of folk schooling in the Song dynasty. Although some of these schools may be known by different names, such as shu she, shu tang or shu yuan, they are clearly differentiated from private schools for profit and family schools for family members only by their free enrolment system, by the fact that they do not restrict outsiders from attending the school, and by the fact that they provide students with all or part of their learning tools and even living assistance. Therefore, the yi xue and the yi shu have a significant social welfare nature. In addition to the voluntary schools run entirely by the folk independently, there are also a number of government-run schools that are supported and participated in by the civil power.

3. NEW FORMS OF CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES OF THE LATE MING CIVIL SOCIETY

The charitable activities of the Southern Song dynasty laid a solid foundation for the subsequent form of charitable activities for the Ming dynasty onwards, (Fuma, 2005, p 44) The late Ming folk charity developed new forms such as the same as the Goodwill Society and the Life Release Society, etc. This paper focuses on these newly emerged folk charitable activities.

3.1 New types of philanthropic activity in late Ming folklore

The new type of folk charity in the late Ming was clearly characterised by the dominance of scholars, such as the Tongshan Association, whose leading members were members of the Donglin Party or those closely associated with it. The core of the activities of these associations was

the regular 'lectures' that were held on a regular basis. The person responsible for organising these lectures is called the 'zhu hui'. Any person of good character and management ability, whether he or she was an official or not, who was recommended by the members, could serve as a zhu hui and take turns to be in charge of the management of the association. This shows that although the main body of folk charity was not fixed, its core participants were still mainly scholar-officials and squires and rich peasant.

3.2 Objects served by the new type of charitable activities of late Ming folklore

The targets of the new type of folk charity in the late Ming were mainly poor and unsupported filial sons and dutiful daughters, as well as the old and infirm who were admitted to the foster homes and had no ability to beg. For the common poor, the 'zhu hui' provided them with a small amount of alms based on their personal judgement after the end of the sermon. Individuals who disregard ethics and morals, such as those who are 'ungrateful, unfaithful, gamblers, drunkards, and those who are young and powerful but idle and lead to poverty,' are not regarded as objects of relief. It is important to note that these charitable recipients need to be recommended by a member before they can receive relief.

3.3 Contents and Forms of New Types of Folk Charity Activities in the Late Ming Dynasty

Compared with the folk charity activities of the Southern Song Dynasty, the new folk charity activities of the Late Ming Dynasty were more organised and had a clear constitution as well as the idea of relief. For example, the charitable activities of the Tongshan Association covered a wide range of aspects, including, but not limited to, the building of roads and bridges, the financing of weddings and funerals, the relief of the poor and the sick, the provision of medical services and medicines, as well as the honour of filial piety and righteousness, among other behaviours. All these charitable programmes are funded by the membership fees paid by members. In providing relief, the Tongshan Association is not only concerned with material assistance, but also attaches importance to the moral upbringing of its members and has set clear ethical standards. Only those members who meet the ethical standards can receive relief, while those who fail to meet the standards are not entitled to such support.

Then there is the Life Release Association. Their charitable activities focus on two main areas: firstly, the propagation of teachings and moral education, and secondly, the provision of relief to the needy. Their activities take a variety of forms, including exhortation speeches and rituals such as chanting sutras for animals (especially fish), emphasising respect for and protection of life. In contrast, the Tongshan Association focuses more on human beings as direct objects of relief, while

the Life Release Association uniquely turns its attention to animals.

In addition, there are also the Bunker Association, which specialises in the collection and proper burial of unclaimed skeletons. During the late Ming period, this charity took the form of organising members to search for and bury bones. In addition to this core task, the Bunker Association expanded its range of charitable activities to include the provision of medication for the sick and the donation of coffins for the needy dead.

4. COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FOLK CHARITY ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTHERN SONG DYNASTY AND THE LATE MING DYNASTY

The main body of charitable activities, service recipients, as well as the content and form were introduced above, followed by a comparison of the characteristics of the two.

First of all, from the point of view of the service object, the Southern Song dynasty folk charity activities service object is very wide, in the form of blood, karma and even geography gradually spread. On the other hand, the new type of folk charitable activities in the late Ming Dynasty placed great emphasis on moral standards, and its service targets were more the extension of the group that initiated the charitable activities, and the threshold for becoming its service targets was higher.

Secondly, in terms of the content and form of charitable activities, folk charity activities in the Southern Song Dynasty, especially relief activities, were characterised by the fact that they were set up as and when they were set up, so it can be said that they were carried out with a considerable degree of practicality, whereas long-term facilities such as social warehouses could be regarded as existing for a long period of time because of the unpredictable nature of natural disasters. Only the *yi zhuang*, which is a clan organisation, is fairly organised. The folk charity activities of the late Ming Dynasty were well organised, with a complete system of relief criteria, and their activities were carried out more regularly, with clearer targets for relief, and could be said to be quite stable.

Thirdly, from the point of view of geographical distribution, folk charity activities in the Southern Song Dynasty were extremely widely distributed, especially in remote areas, where official-led charitable activities were often difficult to implement effectively due to the government's relatively weak control and ability to allocate resources. However, this also provided precisely the space for local elites to perform, enabling them to actively promote the development of philanthropy in these

regions. Through the efforts of the scholars and squires, charitable activities were able to spread over a wider geographical area. In contrast, the occurrence of new types of folk charity in the late Ming was concentrated in the economically developed cities of Jiangnan. Cities at the county level and above became important strongholds for these gatherings, reflecting the tendency of local leaders such as burghers and scholars to gather frequently in cities at that time.

Fourthly, in terms of expected results, folk charity activities in the Southern Song dynasty would play an important role in local stability. Compared with official measures, folk charity activities in the Southern Song Dynasty were often more meticulous, paying special attention to some areas that were difficult to be covered by official relief, such as the adoption of abandoned babies, medical assistance, burial of corpses, and even special care for women in labour. It can be said that folk charity activities made up for the inadequacy of official relief and effectively maintained local stability. The new type of folk charity activities in the late Ming embodied the role of indoctrination. Due to its high moral standard and the mode of recommendation by members, it was destined to alleviate the poverty of the folk to a limited extent, but this way played a certain role in the dissemination of the values of the late Ming science.

5. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CIVIL CHARITY ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTHERN SONG DYNASTY AND THE LATE MING DYNASTY

The different characteristics of folk charitable activities in the Southern Song Dynasty and the Late Ming Dynasty suggest that the study of ancient Chinese charitable activities needs to go beyond the traditional perspective of the history of charity and focus on the more profound historical motives behind charitable behaviours. On the whole, folk charity in the Southern Song Dynasty was more like an informal power structure that was different from the official one and served the local society - the main core of which was the local power constituted by the township clergymen and the rich people, and the service groups were spreading from the bloodline to the geographic area, and from the relatives to the townships in turn. The rich and detailed charitable activities of the Southern Song civil society precisely illustrate the absence of the role of the local government and the weakness of its administrative capacity - a situation caused by the inability of the local government to provide timely and effective public goods and alleviate social conflicts. In other words, the rise of charitable activities in the Southern Song dynasty stems from the insufficiency of the government's grass-roots governance capacity, and

it is precisely because of this insufficiency that it provided the space and possibility for the local rich people's groups to run the localities and master the local discourse.

The folk charity activities of the late Ming were concentrated in economically developed areas, which was closely related to the culture of literati associations. As mentioned before, the division between the rich and the poor brought about by economic development would cause certain social problems. In the late Ming, these social problems were given moral significance by the scholars, and when they gave relief, they often gave aid only to those who met their moral standards. This in fact reflects the attempt of the scholar-gentry groups in the economically developed areas of the late Ming to grasp the right to speak on moral concepts and to carry out social discipline.

6. CONCLUSION

For the history of philanthropy in China, the folk charity activities of the Southern Song Dynasty and the Late Ming Dynasty demonstrated the evolutionary pattern of Chinese charity activities and its own characteristics - from the mastery of local power to the construction of moral concepts, and from simple public service to complex social discipline. As history entered the Qing

Dynasty, the Tongshan Association, Yi zhuang, and other civil charitable activities continued to play an important role, and became a significant force in influencing China's history.

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