

The Reproduction and Changes of a Temple Fair (1930-2010): Case Study of a Chinese Village

LI Xiaofei

Department of Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Nanjing University of Science and Technology

This paper is focus on the community development and folk authority in a Chinese village based on the discussion about the reproduction and changes of Lu Village's Temple Fair. In Lu Village, an ordinary village in Henan Province, a kind of Temple Fair ("Wheat-cargo Fair" called by the local people) has been organized and held annually by the villagers since 1930s, and hardly been interrupted. In a sense, the Temple Fair has constructed a public space and public stage in Lu Village. So, some questions are raised in this paper: in the different historical era and political surroundings from 1930s to the present, how was the Temple Fair held by local people, what changes did happen in the historical practice of the Temple Fair, what kind of people the organizers were, why the villagers insisted on organizing the Temple Fair annually and continuously? And what's the relevance of these discussions about the Temple Fair to the community development?

Around these questions above, and based on the 2-years-fieldwork data in Lu Village, the topic is analyzed step by step as follows, which are separate but interrelated. Firstly, "content and location", that is, the paper discusses how Lu Village's Temple Fair was held specifically and the change of the location of the Fair in three different historical era, including pre-1949, Mao's era and post-collectivist era. The paper notices and interprets the fact that with the change of the state and local society, the location of the Temple Fair has changed in different era: in the front of the village Temple before 1949, close to the office yard of the village's communist party committee in Mao's era, on the rural market of the village during post-collectivist era. And this fact illustrates excellently that the micro production and change of public space in a rural community under the macro-change of the outer political settings.

Secondly, "people", i.e., the organizers of the Temple Fair in the different period are discussed in the paper. Although the specific organizers are different people from 1930s to the present, such as gangsters in pre-1949, communist cadres of Mao's era, and ordinary old-male-villagers in post-collectivism, all of organizers have a common point: they are folk authority in Lu Village in their own era. By discussing the life history of these organizers, the construction process of the organizers' authority and its role in holding the Temple Fair will be explored. Then, the paper argues it is because of these organizers' folk authority in the village that the Temple Fair can be held successfully, on the other hand, these organizers' folk authority got strengthened by organizing the Fair. And it will be related to the third question: "the reason", i.e., the reason why the Temple Fair

has been held annually and continuously in the village. Taking the concept “cultural schema” as theoretical viewpoint, the paper argues that local people’s notion of having folk authority makes the villagers participate and organizes the practice of the Temple Fair, and is the driving force of the Temple Fair.

What’s more important, these organizers’ folk authority itself has gone through the changing process from 1930s to the present. In conclusion part, comparing with the concept of “Charisma Authority” of Max Weber, the paper analyzes the process of the folk authority’s construction, production, consolidation, decline and disappearance during the reproduction and changes of the Temple Fair in Lu village. At last, the important role of rebuilding the folk authority of the Chinese village nowadays in rural community development is pointed.

Key Words:

Temple Fair, folk authority, reproduction, change, community development