

How Does Superstition Become Intangible Cultural Heritage in Postsocialist China?

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China in the past century has seen many counter-intuitive things. So much has happened that we once would have found impossible to believe; so many out-of-the-way things have become common. For example, a hundred years ago, who would have thought that all the temples in the cities and the countryside would be demolished? Only twenty years ago, when we saw in the media that somewhere people had privately restored a temple, we found it a bit quixotic. Now, who would have thought that temples could again become such a common part of the landscape? This article seeks to explore, through the life history of a building of this kind, how in our era this sort of impossible thing could become a reality by adopting two names and two identities.

Chinese society, from the modern era onward, has witnessed the gradual development of many kinds of tensions: tensions between domestic and for-

eign imperatives, between local places and the greater society, between state and society, between the traditional and modern, between popular beliefs and scientific knowledge, and between the common people and elites. For a long time, Chinese society has been troubled by these tensions. People have found many ways of dealing with them: one effective approach that is widely adopted is the cultural tradition and political art of double-identity. This article discusses the way a folk society of the faithful in one village, while legitimating the building of a new temple with double-identification, also in the process built a legitimate cultural logic for their religious beliefs, one that also responded to social obstacles and political tensions. In a certain respect, this discussion aims to reveal a more general cultural logic of how Chinese society works.

Fanzhuang Village in Hebei traditionally worships a Dragon Tablet.¹ Locally, the Dragon Tablet is referred to as Old Man Dragon Tablet, not unlike the widely worshipped Guan Gong who is called “Old Man Guan,” or the stove god known as “Old Man Stove.” The Dragon Tablet is a central deity, considered to be living and efficacious (*ling*). The villagers worship it and make offerings to it to bring good fortune and prevent bad luck. The folk society of the faithful, mentioned above, is called the *Long Pai Hui*, and this is also the term for the temple fair held in homage to the Dragon Tablet on the second day of the second month of the lunar calendar. During the temple fair, villagers also pay homage to the images of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian deities, as well as other figures worshipped in folk religion. The Dragon Tablet beliefs are thus part of a polytheistic folk religion.

I was invited to study the temple fair through participant-observation beginning in 1996; it has been held ten times since then, and I have participated six times. So I can say that I have witnessed its development.

According to the first folklore scholar who observed the temple fair in 1991, Liu Qiyin, the earlier Dragon Tablet was rather small, and villagers had tentatively and anxiously housed it in a cobbled-together temporary shed on the threshing ground. But by the time of the 1996 temple fair, the Dragon Tablet, which had once been small enough for one person to carry, was so large that it could only be moved by a group of men. Rather than being just painted on a board, it was elaborately carved and had been made at a cost of RMB 30,000. By 2003, this impressive tablet had been already

installed in the main hall of a temple, for which the local county government held a ribbon cutting. This temple hall was called Dragon Ancestral Hall, and on either side of its main entrance were these two signs: “Dragon Tablet Association, Fanzhuang, Hebei” and “Dragon Cultural Museum of Zhao Prefecture, China.” Located at a considerable social distance from each other, these signs expressed two names and two identities—for one building.

The birth of this “temple museum” or “museum temple” signifies something of great value in the attempt to understand contemporary Chinese society. In the 2003 ceremony to mark the completion of the building, I was sitting at the head table, watching officials perform some political ceremony on the stage and the villagers perform folk arts in front of the stage. I felt that both groups—government officials and villagers—were happy to have found their proper place. How can officials who claim to be secular and oppose superstition be so in accord with superstition-loving villagers? There could be a number of reasons for this paradox, but I am most interested in the practice and cultural logic of double-identification.

1. Villagers’ Revival of the Long Pai Hui

Fanzhuang is a village with thirteen hundred families and more than fifty-one hundred residents. Their livelihood depends on wheat growing, fruit cultivation, and fruit processing. During the last ten years, not only because the township government is based in the village but also because of the crowds who come to the temple fair, many street-front houses have become profitable shops. So the income level of the village is on the high end for the region.

On one visit to the village, my colleagues and I saw in a storage room three Dragon Tablets that had been used in the past, all of them simple wooden boards in a cheaply painted style. In the middle of each was painted the phrase “Spirit tablet of the true Dragon overlord of the ten directions, the three domains, and heaven and earth.” One of them that had already been in use before Liberation was 0.72 meters tall, the one used around 1958 was 0.84 meters tall, and the one used around the time of Reform and Opening was 1.2 meters tall. The size, materials, and style of these three

older Dragon Tablets clearly show that the temple fair of the past was a very simple affair and could not be compared with the grandeur of the temple fair under way by 1996.

Though worshipping the Dragon Tablet is a very local and popular form of ritual, the organization of the temple fair by the association is meticulous. Traditionally, the Dragon Tablet Association has selected officers, and its structure has included a leading group (*huitou*), a dragon host (*dangjiaren*), and a group of helpers (*banghui*). The host is chosen from among the village's respected men as one who has faithfully and sincerely served Old Man Dragon Tablet; he takes responsibility for everything related to the temple fair. Every year on the sixth day of the lunar new year, he presides at an annual planning meeting, at which the temple fair for the second day of the second month is discussed and the group of helpers to manage the temple fair is established. The host for each year is usually chosen from the leading group, but sometimes the host is not from the leading group. Members of the leading group do, however, rotate the responsibility of housing the Dragon Tablet in their homes. For a long time there have been nineteen families involved.² The leading-group members call themselves servants of the Dragon Tablet; they or their forebears have all received ritual approval from Old Man Dragon Tablet to join this *huitou* group. Once they have become *huitou* members, the status is passed down through their families. The helper group, on the other hand, has long consisted simply of everyone who assists during the temple fair who is not a member of the leading group. Now they are sometimes called a "preparatory committee" or "temple fair council."

Before, the villagers housed the Dragon Tablet both in their homes and in a temporary shed. During most of the year, the tablet was kept in the main room of a *huitou* family's house. The responsibility of this family was to offer incense each morning and night and to host others who came to make offerings; they also looked after the incense fund and the money offerings made after petitions to the god were granted. During the temple fair each year, the Dragon Tablet was set up in a temporary structure on the threshing ground—popularly called the "ritual shed" (*jiaopeng*)—for the convenience of those making offerings. On the first day of the second month, the villagers moved the Dragon Tablet into the ritual shed using a

sedan chair covered in yellow silk; the tablet remained there until noon on the fourth day of the month, when it was briefly returned to its former place in the home of the former year's *huitou* member. On the morning of the sixth day of the month, it was carried to its new site in the home of the next *huitou* member. The obligation of housing the Dragon Tablet thus revolved among *huitou* families, one each year.

Toward the end of the 1950s, the Dragon Tablet Association and Fair were suppressed with the formation of the People's Commune, and during the Cultural Revolution, all related activities disappeared. The Dragon Tablets were stored away by the villagers. In 1979, the villagers reestablished the leading-group system to house the Dragon Tablet, and the tablet itself reemerged from underground into public view. The activities of the temple fair were restarted in 1983. At that time, the *huitou* family taking their turn was that of Lao Liang (1917–97), a Communist Party member. His oldest son, Xiao Suo, explained in our interview:

The last few years [in that period], we only worshipped at home, but the use of the ritual shed really began with my family in 1983. Liu Ying, an Eighth Army veteran, is an elderly single beneficiary (*wubaohu*) in our village,³ and when it all came back he was acting as the dragon host (*dangjiaren*). He and my father had a very good relationship; he discussed it with my father and they decided we should move the tablet to a ritual shed and hold the temple fair. They spoke with the then-party secretary of the village, but he wouldn't support them. They decided to move the tablet anyway. Liu Ying and father agreed, "If anything happens, we'll take our bedding [in case we're arrested] and go to court about it." In those days, everybody was worried, so we posted sentries to watch the roads into the village. If anyone saw the police coming, they would let us know in time.⁴

By 1995, the villagers had gained the confidence to mount a very grand Dragon Tablet fair. They spent RMB 30,000 to make a new Dragon Tablet, which is the one installed there now. The entire height of the present Dragon Tablet is almost 3 meters, its base is 1.5 meters wide, it weighs 300 kilos, and in the middle of the tablet in gold letters on a blue background it still says, "Spirit tablet of the true Dragon overlord of the ten directions, the

three domains, and heaven and earth.” Around these words there are dragons in carved relief. It looks magnificent with its imposing size, quite like the god images in other temples. Also, they have reestablished the helper group, announced in a poster as the Dragon Tablet Fair Preparatory Group (it was later changed to “the Council”). On the council are some members of the *huitou* leading group, and there are others as well, some from other villages. When asked about the standard of selection, the council members replied, “Having enthusiasm, ability, and general support.”⁵ The council head, the vice-head, and the membership can be changed. Under its purview the council has a number of teams, each in charge of outreach (hosting scholars doing research), publicity (posting public announcements, hanging banners, etc.), the ritual shed (assembling and disassembling it), entertainment (contacting performance troupes in nearby villages), opera (commissioning and hosting local opera companies who perform during the fair), science and technology (technical education), cooking (serving guests), and security.

Originally, the ritual shed had been put up on the threshing ground, but in 1996 it was moved outside the village proper to the agricultural market area, a much larger site. The present field is about 300 mu (50 acres), and it can hold about 30,000 standing people. In addition, there’s a new road alongside that can hold about 5,000 people standing.

They say that originally the shed was built with straw and matting and other simple local materials, all provided by the *huitou* members and the helper group. The villagers couldn’t afford to buy more durable building materials at the time. The framework of the ritual shed we saw in 1996, however, was made of steel and wood and covered in canvas; inside, the separate halls were divided by straw matting. The ritual shed opened to the south, and it was divided into three chambers accommodating three altars. The main altar in the front held the Dragon Tablet, and behind that were hung images of Buddha (*fozu*), Confucius (holding a book in his hand labeled “Collected Records on Doing Good”), and Laozi. In the ritual shed, apart from the Dragon Tablet, all the other deities were painted images—gods, immortals, Buddhas, sages, monsters, and demons. Altogether there were 150 painted images.⁶ Outside the shed there were five images hung, including the God of Wealth, the Roads God, the God of Fire,

the King of Ghosts, and the Stove God.⁷ Also outside the front of the ritual shed were donations posters: they listed donors to the temple fair, volunteer drivers (trucks, vans, minibuses), people who gave vegetables to feed guests, and the names of the leading group and the preparatory committee.

Central to the Dragon Tablet Fair is worship of the Dragon Tablet. Before, the worship had been presided over by a Taoist ritualist, but now it has become very simple: it's just people offering incense, kowtowing, and reciting sutras. These activities can be done by individual believers, or they might be done in groups by the members of self-organized incense societies.

The Dragon Tablet Fair can attract more than 100,000 people, and many who come donate money and goods. People's donations can be in the form of volunteer labor; in addition to that of the leading group and the preparatory committee, hundreds of villagers do temporary volunteer labor. There are also donations of the use of vehicles and other equipment, and food (such as vegetables and fruit) as well as cash are given.⁸

Note that at that time, the Long Pai Hui as an organization was a grass-roots association, and as an event it was a local temple fair. It had not strayed outside the category of a religious phenomenon and a folk faith.

2. A Newly Expanded Public Sphere and Nation-State History

Throughout China, the rise and decline of folk-religion activities such as the Dragon Tablet Fair, as well as its corresponding association, are very closely related to the culture-management policies of the state. In the view of a ruling party with a philosophy founded in materialism and atheism, any kind of religious belief, especially a folk-religion activity that is not yet fully under centralized control, is a "feudal superstition" that must be cleared away from the road of a modernizing nation. The Cultural Revolution was the pinnacle of the "smash feudal superstition" movement. But since the 1980s, this policy has gradually been relaxed, and various folk beliefs have begun to appear in the guise of some kind of "folk culture." Because of the elevated status of "the people" in official ideology, and because of the contemporary rise of nationalism, "folk culture" in the last ten to twenty years has gradually gained the government's tacit acceptance and even encouragement. The Long Pai Hui, from its reemergence in 1983 to its growth and expansion in

the mid- and late 1990s, has been a product of the relaxation of these policies. But it remained the government's basic position to oppose and smash "superstition." The situation that the Long Pai Hui faced was like that of other temple fairs elsewhere in China: such activities could at any time be raided or canceled while being denounced as "superstition" by "superiors." Actually, according to folklorist Liu Qiyin, around 1990, an internal document of the County Public Security Bureau called the Long Pai Hui a social problem and argued that it should be canceled.

The fact that just after the Long Pai Hui reemerged it was still an underground activity vis-à-vis the outside world suggests that it was really meant to be a concern for only Fanzhuang villagers. The organizers knew one thing: the Dragon Tablet was of no importance to outsiders or to their "superiors" in government or cultural elites. When they started holding open activities inside the village, in 1983, they were adopting a stance directly opposed to the ideology and authority of those superiors who had absolute power over them: they knew that temple fairs were labeled as superstition and that superiors had a negative attitude toward their faith activities.

But they differed from other temple associations in that they didn't passively await punishment from above; rather, they actively redefined the Long Pai Hui. If they wanted the temple fair to be safely and legitimately held in the future, they had to try to minimize and even eliminate the negative label of "superstition," by aligning the fair with cultural categories that could be approved by superiors. It is just as a key woman among the believers told me in a 1998 interview: "These last few years, whenever we saw a police hat coming this way, we would all get scared. Only when the Dragon Tablet was really established could we begin to hold our ground. The key was to eradicate superstition [and substitute culture in its place], so the police hats coming from above stopped being so scary."⁹

Their methods included two aspects: (1) to define the temple fair as a public space for scientific and cultural activity, not just a field of superstitious activity; and (2) to define the Long Pai Hui as part of Dragon culture,¹⁰ thus making it a constitutive part of nationalist Chinese history instead of a form that is oppositional to the state.

During the temple fair, then, organizers turned all the space around the ritual shed into a site for large-scale cultural gatherings. Since 1996 I have

watched, for example, the local opera troupes perform in the village. They perform for three consecutive days, on a stage open to the public, attracting mostly older villagers and their relatives. Popular singing and dancing troupes also come to join the village fair, giving shows favored by a younger audience and performing on a stage set up inside a big shed. Folk-art groups from dozens of neighboring villages, such as *yangge* dancing and drumming teams, are also invited to join processions along the local roads, as a way of both worshipping the gods and entertaining the villagers. At the same time, chess and calligraphy competitions provide village elites with an opportunity to demonstrate their cultivation.

Outside the main ritual shed, organizers made a special effort to set up notice boards. In 1996, one of these gave information about agricultural science and technology, mainly on the prevention of pear tree blight, this being a pear-growing area. Another of these provided cultural knowledge of a very broad sort, ranging over areas far beyond village life. These announcements included, for example, shopping guides, “standards for the informed consumer,” a “commonsense digest for life” to guide daily affairs, and moral education “urging filial gratitude.” Some commentaries on lifestyle aimed at urbanites were also reproduced on these bulletin boards. For example, one sign announced the “Four After-Dinner Don’ts” as follows: “Don’t drink tea right away; don’t eat fruit right away; don’t take a walk right away; don’t be in a rush to have a smoke.” Another one announced “The Don’ts of Social Interaction”: “Don’t stand people up for appointments and don’t go where you’re not invited; don’t bother busy people by dropping in for an idle chat; don’t chat too long; don’t leave without saying good-bye.”¹¹

In this way, these government-advocated cultural categories are prominently displayed all around the Dragon Tablet sacrifice; “superstitious” prayerful address to the Dragon Tablet is hedged around with “folk culture,” “science education,” and “modern civility.” So, looked at as a whole, it all becomes a complex cultural public sphere. This process of defining the Dragon Tablet Fair through the efforts of local villagers and outside scholars working together has mainly resulted in what is called wholesome folk culture, even though it does retain a certain flavor of superstition.

The presentation of the Dragon Tablet Fair as a cultural public sphere by its organizers quickly received the approval of scholars. In 1996, in a sym-

posium held during the Dragon Tablet Fair, many scholarly speakers noted (but dismissed) problems of superstition. A Professor Song,¹² for example, who works in a history museum, said, “This festival is basically wholesome. There is superstition in it, but mostly it’s a kind of entertainment, and it also has an educational function; it also works well to build the market and to develop the economy.” This positioning of the Dragon Tablet Fair allows it to be seen as sound but with shortcomings. Superstition is seen as only one of many attributes of the whole activity, and not the most important. Mr. Dong, a leader in a folk-artists’ society, said, rather paradoxically, “Comrade Jiang Zemin recently pointed out that we should be politically vigilant. [Thus,] the Dragon Tablet Fair has the function of promoting Spiritual Civilization.”

Moreover, the opinions of these expert scholars “visiting from above” were highly valued by villagers. The relevant articles and talks by these experts were photocopied and circulated by the Dragon Tablet Association, and in their publicity, these materials became powerful proofs of the legitimacy of the Long Pai Hui. In the past, the Long Pai Hui had no connection with any literature on official “culture”; even the local gazetteers didn’t mention the Long Pai Hui. Only in 1991, when folklore scholar Liu Qiying published an article based on his research in Fanzhuang (*Fengsu tong* 1 [1991]), did the Long Pai Hui start to appear in the literature. After that, more scholars came to study the Long Pai Hui, and scholarly publication increased. These published accounts became an important basis for the positive image of the Long Pai Hui in the hands of the villagers and organizers when they approached authorities and outsiders. According to a retired middle-school teacher, Grandpa Wu, “The Long Pai Hui is a kind of folk culture that also carries a certain superstitious aura, so what it is, is a slightly superstitious folk cultural phenomenon, that’s what I think. Naturally, if there’s no superstition, there will be no folk, because there will be nothing to draw people and hold them together.”¹³

This kind of rhetoric about “superstition” is in a sense just a façade. The villagers even have a brilliant move that cuts to the heart of the matter: they engage in a kind of knowledge production that places Dragon Tablet beliefs firmly within Dragon culture. In the past, the faithful always asked, “Will the dragon be powerful enough?” It was not necessary for them to answer

the question, “Who is the dragon?” But after scholars started participating, the production of knowledge about “who is the dragon” became part of the villagers’ strategy to actively establish connections with nationalist history.

Around 1990, after the scale of the Long Pai Hui had begun to expand, the cultural experts who participated in the Dragon Tablet Fair (both villagers and intellectuals from outside) gradually began to speak in one voice, saying that offerings to the Dragon Tablet were for the mythical figure Goulong (son of Sage Emperor Gonggong), the dragon invoked in the catchphrase “heirs of the dragon.” When organizers print brochures about the Long Pai Hui, and when they introduce the origins of the Long Pai Hui to visitors, they always narrate this mythology. They also hung a huge banner in the ritual space: “All descendants of the sage emperors are heirs of the dragon.” In 1998 and 1999, we did a survey of Fanzhuang villagers and outside visitors to the temple fair (107 interviewees in 1998, 100 in 1999) and found that 72 percent of Fanzhuang villagers and 50 percent of outside villagers thought that Old Man Dragon Tablet was an ancestor of the Chinese people. “The heirs of the Dragon” is a slogan meant to enhance the cohesiveness of Chinese people, and especially in recent years it has conveyed a deep political significance of patriotism. The organizers of the Long Pai Hui, through their reproduction of the Tablet’s identity and significance (a process of reinterpreting and then publicizing), transformed their belief activities from something that could never be accepted by the outside world into something that was inarguably politically correct.

Actually, there’s a vast difference between the state’s formulation of the dragon totem and the villagers’ concept of Old Man Dragon Tablet. The contemporary phrasing of the “heirs of the dragon” means that we are all descendants of forebears who took the dragon as their totem. Those forebears might have actually believed that the dragon was their ancestor, but we know that this expression is just a myth. Villagers, on the other hand, take the dragon on the Dragon Tablet to *be* the spirit of *their* ancestor—Old Man Dragon Tablet existed in the past and remains efficacious.¹⁴ So, although the dragon totem and Old Man Dragon Tablet are basically different in their meanings, still, through narrative and interpretation, Dragon Tablet beliefs have transformed from a local belief into a “living fossil” of a certain period in Chinese history, bearing witness to the ancient myth of Goulong and

thereby gaining the status of a museum object. The function of museums is to bear witness to history with actual examples. So the Dragon Tablet now had the capacity to connect to the museum function.

Both the superstition and the humanistic history of the Long Pai Hui are thought of as belonging to a past era. In the official model, the former is “dross,” but the latter may be “essence.” If “preserving the essence and discarding the dross” is taken as a solution to all contradictions, the dross (of superstition) ought to be abolished, and only the essence (of the people’s culture) should be salvaged and be allowed to exist today. Of course, this essence could not continue to exist in the temples, which are nests of superstition, but it can be displayed in a truly modern museum context. This is the stance of China’s organic intellectuals. But the problem is that the agents are the villagers, and their actions, which recuperate and redefine the Long Pai Hui, oppose the solution embodied in this neat standard formula. The Long Pai Hui (i.e., the temple association) not only expanded the meaning of the officially recognized “essence,” it also retained the officially disapproved “dross” that they themselves appreciated. This combinatory art reached its greatest creativity with the building doubly named the “Dragon Culture Museum” and the “Dragon Ancestral Hall.”

3. Names and Things: The Birth of a New Temple

Any newborn thing or person must occupy space. In China, everyone is used to the idea that even before you get pregnant you have to get a birth quota permit from the government, and before you build a house you need a building permit. This is because the state has established very strict control over space. Any new entity, before it takes up space, must exist first in government documents. That is to say, it must first have a “name” before it can become a “thing.” Otherwise, if the entity were to come into being first, its existence would be in danger of being denied at any time. Regarding the birth of the new temple we want to introduce here, it was able to come into existence because it had not only one name but two. Anything envisioned should first have two names in two different symbol systems, and then the reality can happen in both the government monitoring system and in concrete physical space.

Before Liberation, there were more than ten temples in Fanzhuang, among them three Jade Emperor Halls, three War God Temples, two temples of the Five Ways, one temple of the Three Lords, one Old Mother Daoist Temple, and one Fertility temple. All these were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Although there are a few ruins of these temples that have not been converted to other uses, in the past quarter century none of them have been rebuilt. Villagers worshipped the Dragon Tablet, but there was never before a temple for it.

To build a temple, approval from the County Religion Bureau is needed, followed by a site permit from the Land Management Bureau. Then the design must be approved by the Building Design Commission. According to the normal procedure, it would be simply impossible to build a Dragon Tablet temple legally. In the official classification of religious beliefs, the Long Pai Hui is classified as folk belief, and it is not legally a religion, so the Religion Bureau refused to consider the application to build a temple.

But it did get built. When we went to the Dragon Tablet Fair in 2003, we saw a proper deity temple, the “Dragon Ancestral Hall.” Later we heard that it cost RMB 260,000 (US\$35,000). A member of the leading committee showed it to us with pride, saying, “We built it on the model of the Bai Lin Temple.”¹⁵ Bai Lin Temple is a famous Buddhist site and renowned pilgrim destination.

The development of the Long Pai Hui from a temporary shed to a permanent temple reflects a very complex process. Every year, when the villagers put together the shed, they were in fact building a temple, it’s just that it was temporary and had to be taken down afterward; they could not claim the site permanently. Nor could they get a permit to build a temple. But when they heard the language of “museums” from scholars, they came up with a solution to their desire to have a permanent building. When Beijing scholars in 1996 studied the Long Pai Hui, they held a symposium in Fanzhuang. According to my notes at the time, historical museum curator Professor Song said, “This place has a rich Chinese agricultural civilization, could we build a folklore museum on this basis?”

Organizers of the Long Pai Hui also attended this symposium and were very happy to hear the scholars’ suggestions that there should be a building. The leading group began to seriously consider this possibility, and among

them, Shi Zhenzhu was the most enthusiastic. By 1998, they had decided to build, and when Shi was elected as head of the leading group in 2000, he aggressively started to launch the construction project. His initiative is to refer to the building in language from different discourses. On one hand, he talked with government agencies about founding a museum; on the other, in order to raise money, he talked with villagers about building an Old Man Dragon Tablet temple.

In applying to build a museum, he avoided mentioning “folk belief,” and in this way he bypassed the Religion Bureau and their regulations; rather, he defined the Long Pai Hui as a cultural organization. As noted above, in the process the relevant writings of scholars became an important basis for the application. By this time, the leaders of the Zhao County government had agreed that the Long Pai Hui had historical cultural content as dragon culture, so they accepted Shi’s rationale for building a dragon culture museum. The county government then took the lead in organizing the relevant agencies to plan a tourism-development project. They lumped the Dragon Culture Museum together with the Zhaozhou Bridge and the Bai Lin Temple as officially recommended tourist destinations. Then, the County Planning Committee put the Dragon Culture Museum on their list, and the Land Management Board and the Building Design Commission all approved the project.

But this approved project was not supposed to receive state investment, and actually the government was not to pay even a penny toward it; it was to be a project independently brought into being by the Long Pai Hui temple association. Thus, the money needed for the building process had to be raised from the villagers. In August 2003 we were told by the head of the leading group, Shi Zhenzhu, that since he had taken charge three years before, the Long Pai Hui leading-group members had contributed RMB 36,000, over RMB 50,000 had been raised from villagers, and they had been granted RMB 20,000 by the township and county governments. Most of the families of the current leading group donated money, ranging from RMB 20 to RMB 1,000. Ordinary villagers donated amounts ranging from RMB 1 or 2 to RMB 2,000. The money they raised was much less than what was actually spent on the building. But thanks to the creditability of the Long

Pai Hui, the incense fees over the years were expected to be used to pay back the building cost.

Since they had applied to build a museum, since a museum was approved, and since the township and county governments had partly funded a museum, of course a museum had to be built. Since they had raised funds from villagers to build a temple, of course a temple had to be built. Under the name of “museum” there was approval, but there was no land or money to run it; under the name of “temple,” land use was approved by the villagers, and lots of donations and credit were extended, but there was no legal status. There was only one building, and it had to be both museum and temple at once.

Through the sustained efforts of the Long Pai Hui organizers, the plan to combine museum and temple received the support, understanding, and tacit approval of all parties. The most remarkable events were two ceremonies held during the temple fair in Fanzhuang in 2001 and 2003; one was the “Ground breaking for Dragon Cultural Museum of Zhao Prefecture, China” and the other marked “The Completion of the Dragon Ancestral Hall and the Unveiling of the Nameplates of the Dragon Cultural Museum.”

By the end of February 2001, construction of the building had been started on the site in Fanzhuang. During February 22–25 (around the second day of the second lunar month), the Zhao County Committee, the county government, and the Hebei Provincial Folklore Society convened the “First Hebei Provincial Dragon Culture Expo and Colloquium.” The meeting was held in the capital of the county. On the second day of the second lunar month, the county leaders and a number of scholars, 140 altogether, went to observe the ritual procession of the Dragon Tablet, and they officiated at the ground breaking. In the following two years, the families of the leading group, with the support of the village committee and township government, but short of money, worked very hard to build a proper temple. In the completion ceremony, also attended by representatives of the county government and scholars, the building that had had only one name at the ground breaking, that of “museum,” now had two names, having added that of Dragon Ancestral Hall. Now, the exact names of the building were “Dragon Tablet Association, Fanzhuang, Hebei” and “Dragon Cultural Museum of Zhao Prefec-

ture, China”: one building with two nameplates and two proper names. The formation of this relationship between names and things, one in two or two in one, was key to the very existence of the building. This provides a perspective on how we understand the cultural logic of contemporary Chinese society.

4. Double Identity: From Cultural Tradition to Political Art

Because the state’s regulation of space and belief is so thorough and systematic, it is not even easy for the faithful of a state-recognized religion to build a temple; for a group of ordinary people to build an efficacious folk-belief temple from scratch is even more difficult. But however difficult, our survey has shown that temples built by ordinary people can be seen everywhere. Even after being built, most temples still face the “to be or not to be” issue because their status is illegal, that is, not approved by religion and land-management bureaus, so they are in danger of being demolished at any time. On television and in Communist Party newspapers there have been frequent reports in the past few years about how, somewhere or other, some unenlightened people built temples without official recognition; these temples were then cleared away by the local party committee in a thorough process of building spiritual civilization—that sort of thing. The demolishing of temples, meant to eradicate superstition and maintain public security, happened again and again in areas that neighbored on our field site. In the past twenty years, for example, the Iron Buddha Temple in a neighboring township went through several rounds of being built and demolished, rebuilt and redemolished. In 1999, the county government once again tore down this temple, which had been built by the local faithful themselves.

On the other hand, the “Dragon Ancestral Hall” claims its legitimacy in both physical and ideological space as a project of the government. As we have seen, the most important thing is that, even before its birth, this building had occupied a place in academic, political, and government discourses and symbolic structures.

In modern times, Chinese academic and political discourses have labeled folk-belief activities such as the Dragon Tablet Temple Fair as “superstitious” and “backward.” These labels put scholars, officials, and villagers into

relation with each other by way of a hierarchy of good and bad, and high and low, confining them to their own ideological systems and social spaces: government is in cities, while villagers are in the countryside. Now things have changed, however. What is refreshing is that the “Dragon Ancestral Hall” in Fanzhuang Village of Hebei Province manifests a new social fact: there are ways to reunite what was once separated. At this time, villagers don’t necessarily have to give up their “superstition,” while scholars and officials still hold onto the “cultural.” In my eyes, the very reason for this kind of social fact has to do with a deeper cultural tradition of double identification, which is here being tacitly appropriated as an art of politics.

The Dragon Ancestral Hall owes its birth to the idea of the museum. The acceptance of this creative idea by all parties rests upon the scheme of one thing with two names, and the acceptance of the scheme benefits from Chinese traditions of naming. Traditionally, China is a society where one person can have multiple names: nickname and official name, infant name and school name, formal name (*zi*) and courtesy name (*hao*), living name and posthumous name. This tradition of multiple names can be simplified into double naming: one lowbrow, one highbrow; one internal, one external; one for youth, one for old age; one inward and intimate, and one outward and social. Different names cover different periods of one’s life that involve social connections at different levels, and they are a mode of representation that crosses time and space in different ways. This is not a matter of endowing one life with one name, as if one were planting a tree in one fixed point. Rather, double naming makes us aware of how things and people are positioned in a complex society, with two standpoints, allowing them to be more adaptive. This is an effective scheme to solve problems of change through time and spatial differentiation. To adopt double and multiple identities in a complex society and culture, one can become accustomed to identifying with several different names: the infant name is me, and the courtesy name is me, too; something called Dragon Ancestral Hall is that building, and the one called Dragon Culture Museum is the same building. Although people usually only choose to call it by one of its names, everyone is clear that it actually has two names and someone else might call it by the other name. This is a cultural tradition that people have been accustomed to from a young age.

In Zhao County, for example, it is common for people to use double identities. Once a baby is born it will be casually given a nickname, either according to its size, dark or pale skin tone, or weight. For example, the list of organizers of the Dragon Tablet Temple Fair in 1996 included the name *Heidan* (black egg), which suggested a boy born with dark skin; while the name of *Shuanzao* (tied to the stove) or *Shuanniu* (tied to the ox) revealed the hopes of the boy's family who didn't want to lose him to death in early childhood. Later when it is more convenient, people will ask a village cultural expert to give their child an "official name," or they might wait until their child is school age to ask their teachers to choose a school name, such as *Wenxiang* (cultural auspiciousness) or *Wenquan* (cultural fulfillment). The nickname is usually more down-to-earth, while the school name is naturally more elegant, consistent with Confucian culture or expressing hopes for settling the future of the family. Even though most people have two names, villagers pick one name for greetings or writing. Most men are called by their "big name," but sometimes the big name or school name isn't very well known to others, so we still found some small names on the public name list, even for adults. According to an old tradition, women go by a small name in their own family, but after they marry they tend to be addressed in kinship terms. In the families of officials, a married woman is often called by the combination of her husband's and her own family names, but younger women might still be called by their nickname in their own parents' home.

In the area where the county is located, after men have established a family, they might be addressed with a "joint name": one of their short names would be selected and *lao* (old) added to it to express respect. To mark and publicize this change, the family might invite an opera troupe to the village to perform; this is called "putting on a joint-name show," as a way of publishing the new form of address. Several villagers might mount this performance together, over several days, one name per day being published like this. Examples are Luo Laogong, the father of one leading-group head, and Luo Laoliang, who was once a leading-group head and pushed the revival of the Dragon Tablet Fair. Both these names gained popularity after the joint-name show.

In short, "small names" are used within families and settings that are familiar, while "big names," school names, and honorifics are for use in ori-

enting to a larger space of social activity. People say, “small name [for] small circles, big name [for] big society.” Therefore, these two names, one popular and one refined, are used in different life stages and social spaces.

The Chinese usually take it for granted that a person will have more than one name. Before or after a person enters a new social circle, people tend to give them a new name in accord with the style that is more acceptable in the new arena. This custom of naming also appears in our case, which is not only a continuation of cultural tradition but also an effective art of politics. For the Dragon Tablet Temple Fair, its well-recognized local character and the government discourses with their own symbolic structures are basically poles apart. But the organizers, by borrowing a traditional naming custom, have overcome political barriers and achieved a new collaboration. After all, this is also a symbolic structure that has been successful in different systems one way or another and has acquired its own legitimacy.

Most Chinese now tend to use only one name because of the universal implementation of the population-control policy, including family planning, household registries, and marriage-licensing systems. However, the tradition of one person with multiple names is still often seen in today’s Chinese society, and the custom of multiple identities continues to be familiar to us in various ways. For example, the Confucius Temple in Beijing had also been the Capital Museum before 2005, when the museum was moved into a separate building designed for it; the previous Forbidden City is now called the Old Palace Museum. We have also seen an ancestral hall in Jiangxi Province and a temple of the Dragon King in suburban Beijing displaying the sign “Center for Senior Citizens.” For a long time now, we have been accustomed to the Chinese calendar that uses both the Gregorian and the lunar system. Whenever one passes the gate of a work unit, moreover, one can hardly miss the fact that more than two signs hang there, sometimes referred to as “one staff with two identities.” Isn’t this multiplicity quite common? In a constantly and rapidly changing society, an extremely heterogeneous society, whether it is a person, an institution, or a building, all are charged full of differences and tension with past, present, and future temporalities. Located between multiple spaces, “here” and “there” have always coexisted, and neither “this” nor “that other” sense of belonging can be abandoned. The deployment of multiple identities is a cultural mechanism that connects

past and present, there and here. Without a doubt, its use is often endowed with political significance.

In instrumental terms, multiple identities can help a person or an institution achieve success one way or another. In terms of identifications, this is a way to cope with rapid social change: what I am today (the new name) not only follows what I was yesterday but also coexists with what went before (the old name). Double identities enable the subject to move freely within various kinds of double structures: the “I” that was on this side can now also be on the (previously impossible) other side. Maybe we should say that it is actually a unitary reality (or being) that is expressed by two contrasting juxtaposed signs. Double identities concern both the self in the vertical dimension of history and the self in the horizontal dimension of social connections (which are constantly expanding), so double identifications are mutually supportive: self and nonself can transform into the old self and the new self, a temporalization that demands to be understood as double identification. These selves do not replace each other but coexist and complete each other. The old self is the self in the historical dimension, while the new self is the self in pursuit of spatial expansion. This case study can help us to understand a kind of formula that the Chinese, in modern times, have adopted to overcome the tensions between history and the contemporary, tradition and modernity, and the small-circle and big-society forms of belonging.

Notes

1. Tao Lifan, “The Revival of Folklore Consciousness” (“Minsu yishi de huigui”), *Folklore Studies (Minsu yanjiu)*, no. 4 (1996): 34–43. Gao Bingzhong, “The Rise of Associations in China and the Question of Their Legitimacy,” *Social Sciences in China* 22, no. 1 (2001): 73–87. Yue Yongyi, “The Production of the Temple Fair: Fieldwork in the Pear Area of Zhaoxian County, Hebei” (“Miaohui de shengchan: Dangdai Hebei Zhaoxian liqu miaohui de tianye kaocha”), PhD diss., Beijing Normal University, 2004.
2. Later there were twenty-one families, two being added in 1997 when they received the blessings of Old Man Dragon Tablet while making incense offerings, but now in fact there are only seventeen, four families having quit.
3. The *wubaohu* program supports elderly villagers who lack family with food, housing, medicine, and so forth at public expense.
4. Author interview with Mr. Xiao Suo in Fanzhuang, March 20, 1996.

5. Author interview with the head of the council, Mr. Zhengqi, in Fanzhuang, February 28, 1998.
6. Thirty-six of these 150 images were on the front altar. Most of the images were Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist entities, along with the Eight Immortals and old female deities such as “Fertility Grandma.” On the middle altar were thirty-five painted images, the main one being the Jade Emperor and his entourage, as well as Guan Yin and Guan Di. On the back altar were eleven images, the important ones being the Three Emperors and Five Lords series (i.e., Fu Xi, Nü Wa, and Shen Nong). On the east side were thirty images, the main ones being the Dragon Kings of the four seas and historical medical sages such as Pian Que, Hua Tuo, Ge Hong, Sun Simiao, and Li Shizhen; also there was the “auspicious” series of the twenty-eight celestial houses. On the west side there were thirty-four images, including mainly the judges of the ten courts of hell and the “inauspicious” series of the twenty-eight celestial houses.
7. Hung on the front of the ritual shed were nine dragon banners. To the right of the dragon banners was a banner embroidered with “*Shenwei jing tiandi* 神威惊天地” (“The holy powers awe heaven and earth”), and on the left side was one announcing “*Shengling zhen qiankun* 圣灵镇乾坤” (“Sagely efficacy calms sky and land”). On either side of these two banners were huge yellow banners, embroidered respectively with “You reap what you sow” and “The shadow always follows its form.” Beneath the dragon banner was a horizontal yellow banner with “The flourishing Dragon Tablet Fair passes through the ages, the eternal great name thunders through all corners” written on it. Paired with it were vertical banners, “The Buddhas of three worlds gather in this Hall, the spiritual force of all nine regions saves the people.” Inside the ritual shed, on the left of the entrance, was hanging a large tablet, on it written “Helping all the world flourish,” and above that was written “Enhance Dragon culture, Bring beneficence to all mankind.” This tablet was signed, “the faithful of the great temple.” There was another embroidered offering that read “All descendants of the sage emperors are heirs of the dragon.”
8. In our interviews, we were told that cash donations in 1992, 1993, and 1994 were relatively high, each year reaching RMB 80,000. From 1995 to 1997, cash donations lessened, each year being around RMB 40,000. In 1998, the total of money donations was RMB 40,900, and it may have never increased much after that. As for expenditures, in 1998, RMB 57,000 was spent: food provision accounted for about RMB 10,000, commissioned opera troupes about RMB 7,000, outreach and hosting about RMB 6,000, fireworks about RMB 3,000, and publicity about RMB 2,000.
9. Author interview with Ms. Xingcai in Fanzhuang, February 28, 1998.
10. Liu Qiyin, “The Live Fossil of Dragon Worship” (“Longchongbai de huohuashi”), *Folklore Studies (Minsu yanjiu)*, no. 1 (1997): 87–91.
11. What these rules prohibit is exactly the customary and polite behavior of villagers. Since the beginning of the modern era, the “culture” that intellectuals have propagated to villagers

has had an uncomfortable relationship with the habitual culture and the everyday routines of local communities.

12. All the personal names and place names in this article are the actual names; I have not assigned pseudonyms. When I cite factual description I use actual names, and when I cite opinions I avoid the use of full names. In this way, I hope to provide persuasive evidence without bringing any untoward attention to my sources. Also, the quotes I use have not been checked by informants; if there are errors, I take full responsibility.
13. Cited from Zhang Shaozeng and Ma Qiang's interview with Grandpa Wu in Fanzhuang on August 23, 2003.
14. According to our 1999 questionnaire in Fanzhuang, 91 percent of villagers believed that the Dragon Tablet, or Old Man Dragon Tablet, was still efficacious. Accordingly, during the temple fair, 97 percent of villagers made donations and 94 percent went to the venue to worship.
15. Author interview with Mr. Shi Zhenzhu in Fanzhuang, March 4, 2003.