

**China's Ghost City: Popular Religion,
Tourism and Local Development in Fengdu**

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China's Ghost City: Popular Religion, Tourism and Local Development in Fengdu

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本論文旨在調查中國酆都鬼城的重建，以及此地從歷史上重要的民間宗教中心轉變為合法的文化旅游地的過程。本文也將檢驗宗教旅游業的興起帶給當地的影響，並將呈現當地人應對鬼城內寺廟景點商業化的反應。

酆都以其別稱“鬼城”聞名，被古代中國人認為是陰間的所在地。1949年前，此地是區域性的民間宗教圣地，尤其是被認為是統治陰間的陰天子的所在地。從1980年代開始，當地政府支持的廟會活動重新興起，“民間宗教”也被作為旅游業發展和經濟利潤的重要推動力。

所以，這篇論文著力於考慮寺廟景點商業化、以及變化的對當地文化有著不同闡釋的背景下，從當地報告人的角度去理解鬼城的復興。本論文以人類學視角為途徑，討論如下問題：當地政府如何使用“文化”這個詞的特殊涵義使鬼城獲得合法化，從而替代會給鬼城帶來負面印象的“宗教”“迷信”等詞匯。通過使用“文化”，鬼城和廟會獲得合法化，並且得到上級官員的支持。然而，與官方話語并存的是另一種替代性、當地人對於當地文化的闡釋，這也說明官方話語對當地文化的宣傳在當地人群中影響甚微。

在人們的宗教生活里，他們很少去游覽鬼城景區里的寺廟景點，而這些景點

恰好是被官方認為是當地文化的象征，在旅游經濟的沖擊下變得商業化。與此形成對比的是社區廟宇，盡管路途遙遠、裝飾簡陋，有的並沒有獲得合法身份，但在當地人群中頗受歡迎。關於這些現象的分析有助於理解當代中國民間宗教，并呈現出當地官方的和當地人對於該話題的不同視角。

本論文亦討論當地廟宇和當地人如何被三峽工程帶來的移民工程所影響。本文中所研究的廟宇包括搬遷重建的廟宇和廟會，并將呈現出在三峽大壩建成、搬遷工程完畢之后，移民們如何重塑生活。

This thesis investigates the reconstruction of Fengdu's Ghost City in China, and its transformation from a historical center of popular religion to an official legitimated cultural tourist site. It also examines influences brought about by religious tourism and people's reaction to the commercialization of temples in the Ghost City.

Fengdu is famous for its alias as the Ghost City, where the Chinese netherworld is located. Before 1949, it was an important regional pilgrimage site for popular religion, in particular for the temple dedicated to the Emperor of the Netherworld. Since the 1980s, the temples have been gradually reconstructed for religious tourism, and government-sponsored temple festivals have been revived. Popular religion has thus been used as an impetus for tourism-oriented development and economic benefit by the local government.

This thesis seeks to understand the revival of the Ghost City from the local informants' points of view, while also considering the commercialization of temple sites and the changing interpretations of local culture. Taking an anthropological approach, the main arguments in this thesis are: In order to legitimize the Ghost City, the local government used a special concept of *wenhua* (culture), to replace the negative impressions of the terms "religion" and "superstition". By using *wenhua*, the Ghost City and the temple festival gained legitimacy and support from higher officials. Moreover, parallel to this official notion, alternative interpretations of local culture were presented by local people, which showed that the promotion of officially defined culture had very little impacts on them.

In people's religious life, they seldom visited the transformed temple sites in the Ghost City, which were promoted as symbols of local culture and commercialized for

the tourist economy. The communal temples, despite their distant location, simple setting and non-official status, were still preferred by local people. This part of the analysis will help us better understand the picture of popular religion in contemporary China, including the different stances of the local government and the people.

This thesis also discusses how the temples and people were affected by relocation arising from the Three Gorges Dam Project. I studied the relocated communal temples and the temple festival, and also presented the restoration of livelihood in the post-dam period.

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Last but not the least, this thesis is also for the river of Yangtze. My life has been much shaped by countless trips along the river, and this is my record of how it changed and people's life living by the gigantic river.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Controversies over the Ghost City

In 2006, Fengdu's Ghost City (酆都鬼城) attracted national attention due to its appearance on "Topics in Focus" (焦點訪談) on China Central Television-1 (CCTV-1). "Topics in Focus" is one of the most popular programs on CCTV that specializes in investigative reports and leads public opinion. It has reportedly attracted 300 million viewers, including the prime minister and other state-level leaders, and it provides in-depth looks into China's grassroots society, which serves as an important reference for policy making (CCTV.com 2011).

It was not the first time that Fengdu's Ghost City appeared in the mass media and was associated with superstition, but it was indeed the first time that the Ghost City was broadcast on a politically-orientated, influential news program, instead of tourist programs (JDFT 2006). Journalists of CCTV-1 made unannounced visits to the tourist sites in Fengdu, interviewed several tourists, showed them on the screen, and labeled these tourist sites as places of "superstition". This accusation was directed at the display of dummies acting out traditional folktales of the netherworld inside the Divine Palace of the Land of Ghosts (鬼國神宮) in Fengdu, where harsh punishments and cruel methods of torture such as heart extraction, body-sawing, and body-frying, were on show. According to the program's introduction, these different methods of punishment served as moral education and as a warning to tourists: "keep up virtuous behavior in mortal life, or else you will also be punished in the afterlife". The reporters commented that both superstitious beliefs and practices of popular religion were violating the law in

China. From the video clips, local officials claimed that the Ghost City contributed to economic development and the strengthening of spiritual civilization, but their statements were quite vague and hardly convincing.

CCTV-1 is not the first to report on popular religion in Fengdu, but by far the most prominent and influential. The Ghost City in Fengdu has been a popular topic in the press since the 1980s, when the Ghost City was developed for tourism. Triggered by CCTV-1's report, domestic media, such as the influential *Southern Metropolis Daily* (Han 2006), *Nanfengchuang Weekly* (Yin 2006), and the central government's official and largest news agency Xinhua News Agency (Guo 2008), were quick to pick up on the topic of popular religion and instigated a new wave of reports and discussions about the Ghost City and ghosts in Fengdu.

According to the CCTV report, religious beliefs and magic practices in Fengdu have crossed the boundary from orthodox religion to superstition. Moreover, the reporters even censured local government officials for excessively indulging in superstitious and illegal practices, and criticized them for burning incense and spirit money during the ghost month in front of hundreds of local townspeople. As more media reports followed, the Ghost City and Fengdu were also increasingly discussed in public. Yet, due to the immense influence and highly critical nature of the CCTV report, people whose opinions deviated from this official version could hardly make their voice heard publicly, even if they tried to ameliorate the negative portrayal of the Ghost City.

Fengdu

Popular religion has been revitalized in many places in Mainland China. Although atheism as the state ideology still governs the whole country, resplendent

ancestral halls, temples and shrines have sprung up everywhere after 1979, when the economic reforms started. It is an interesting phenomenon that people are willing to embrace popular religion when, at the same time, it is often criticized and discarded as “superstition” in the public media.

Fengdu (original name: 酆都; current name: 丰都) is a prominent example of this contradiction – the construction of temples and of the netherworld has attracted tourists, yet also criticisms; it was most denounced for “advocating superstition” by the influential CCTV. Fengdu is known as the location on earth of the Chinese netherworld, therefore this place is also called the Ghost City (鬼城)¹. People used to believe that the world of ghosts in Fengdu once existed in some sense parallel to the human world. Due to its religious significance in history, Fengdu often appears in Daoist classics, ancient folktales and historical records, such as *Yuli Baochao* (玉歷寶鈔), a Daoist morality classic, *Xiyou Ji* (西遊記, *Journey to the West*), one of the great classic novels in China, and *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (聊齋志異, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), a collection of supernatural tales during the early Qing Dynasty, as well as in various other collections of ancient Chinese popular folk tales.

The Ghost City and Popular Religion

Largely influenced by folktales and fiction from the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chinese people gradually recognized Fengdu as the netherworld, and a belief emerged that everyone would go to Fengdu right after death. Historically, from the Eastern Han Dynasty onwards, Fengdu used to be an important Daoist base. Stories about the Daoists

¹ Fengdu's aliases all indicate Netherworld, with different Chinese expressions, such as 鬼城 (Ghost City), 幽都 (Gloomy Capital), 地府 (Underworld), 冥府 (Netherworld), etc. Among these names, 鬼城 Ghost City is most frequently used today.

Wang Fangping (王方平) and Yin Changsheng (陰長生) practicing Daoism are still told in Fengdu today; for example, the story of how these two Daoists became deities on Mount Pingdu (平都山), also referred to as Mount Ming (名山). As these hermit tales were passed down, people referred to them simply by the surnames of the two Daoists, and slowly two deities named Yin and Wang came into being, which were later combined as Yin Wang (陰王), literally meaning the King of the Netherworld (Li, 1987: 125).

The Ghost City, mainly comprising temples for bureaucratic deities in the religious jurisdiction system, represents the netherworld in ancient Chinese society. The Ghost City is not merely for ghosts, but a place for the deities who hold the power to judge people's lives: people with merit can transmigrate into life again while the evil ones become ghosts. The deity governing the netherworld is referred to as the Emperor of Fengdu (酆都大帝), or the Emperor of Yin² (陰天子).

Popular religious activities and organizations flourished until the establishment of the PRC in 1949, after which all activities related to popular religion went into decline due to the political campaigns starting in the late 1950s. In the *new* society, monks and nuns, and also people engaged in related trades were forced to quit, and anything associated with religion or superstition was eliminated. During the Cultural Revolution, all people in China were to be united under Mao Zedong's thought and China's Communist Party's interpretations of Communism; any challenges to the guiding principles were treated as heterodoxy that was to be animadverted and suppressed. During the Cultural Revolution in Fengdu, religious practices were widely

² There is a shrine for the Emperor called 天子殿. However, usually people call the deity 陰天子 (the Emperor of the Netherworld), or 酆都大帝 (the Emperor of Fengdu) for its Daoist origin. Yamaraja (閻羅王) is less mentioned.

suppressed; in the campaign of Clearing up the Four Olds³ in 1966, deity statues were demolished by Red Guards and temples were converted into re-education camps (FDXZDSJ 1988:39).

In the 1980s, China launched its economic reforms and *de facto* encouraged capitalist methods to boost the market economy. Although people did not immediately enjoy ideological and cultural freedom, cultural resources such as the Mount Ming Scenic Spot created in 1984, that could be used for economic development were readily utilized. In the 1980s, the cluster of temples was soon surrounded by construction hoardings and was restored for the development of tourism. However, since temples inside the scenic spots were transformed into a tourist site with a high entrance fee, local people went to other communal temples such as Yansheng Temple, the only state-sanctioned Buddhist temple in town, for pilgrimage and other religious practices. From 2001 onwards, Yansheng Temple went through a relocation process and many residents started moving to the new town on the southern bank of the Yangtze River, opposite to the original temple site.

From 1997 to 2001, my family used to go on annual pilgrimages to the Yansheng Temple in Fengdu until the relocation began. In 2004, after the new town was established, my family visited the relocated site of Yansheng Temple, but only to find a deserted building – the main hall standing in a barren valley – a sad sight compared to the original temple in the old county seat, which encompassed over 10 ha. From 2000 to 2004, I frequently travelled upstream and downstream along the Yangtze, passing by Fengdu on my way between my high school and home. I

³ Four Olds, 四舊, pertaining to Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas; traditional culture and values were swept away during the anti-Four Olds movement in the Cultural Revolution period.

witnessed the changes happening to the town. I saw how local pilgrimage sites underwent all kinds of transformations and how people's lives were transformed accordingly. Besides this, different news reports, criticisms and advertisements about the Ghost City also aroused my curiosity. I wanted to know: have "superstitious beliefs" really been revived in Fengdu? Is local popular religion promoted by the development of tourism in the Ghost City? And what do local people think about the Ghost City?

During three months of intensive field research in Fengdu from June to August 2009, research data were collected by engaging in religious activities of the communal temples, by serving in the government staged temple festival, and through participant observation on tours to the Ghost City and consultations with spiritual mediums, as well as by interviewing staff in the tourist industry, government officials, Buddhist monastery clergy and local people. My research addresses the following questions: *How is the Ghost City today different from its pre-1949 predecessor? How is the Ghost City re-shaped by the local government? How is the government-staged temple festival organized and how do people participate? How have people reacted to the transformations, and conducted their religious life?*

Although the revival of popular religion seems to be a pervasive phenomenon in China, the Ghost City finds itself in a controversial category: ghosts, as well as the netherworld, are often regarded as unhealthy, negative and non-scientific imaginations. Thus, the local government has made a great effort, since the very beginning of the reconstruction in the 1980s, to label the Ghost City as a symbol of "local culture" (地方文化) in order to counteract any possible criticisms of "superstition". The term "local

culture” implies that it is a piece of folklore, or merely a local practice, and not a belief system or traditional religion. Nevertheless, debates about the Ghost City have remained over the decades. The positive influence of the Ghost City has been exploited to the maximum in the official narrative, while its religious significance has rarely been mentioned. According to the long-term plan for the development of Fengdu, the Ghost City is to be, or perhaps has already been, turned into a theme park. Temples inside the city have been commercialized and alienated from the local pilgrims. Therefore, ironically, the Ghost City, which is supposed to represent “local culture”, is rarely recognized and visited by the majority of local residents and pilgrims.

Local Pilgrimage Sites

Today, pilgrims from Fengdu very rarely visit the temples in the Ghost City. They instead go to communal temples such as Yansheng Temple, a state-sanctioned Buddhist temple situated on the northern river bank, which is also home to a variety of tourist sites, or they visit Wantian Shrine, an illegal site located on the southern bank near the new town of 130,000 residents.

With regard to geographical locations, Yansheng Temple is relocated 14 kilometers away from the new town across the Yangtze; Wantian Temple is a newly constructed temple site for various deities in the suburban area of the new town. The newly popular pilgrimage site, Wantian Shrine, is covered with grey-tiled roofing, and its half open walls were built from recycled bricks. Although these communal temples do not feature any grand halls or gilded Buddha statues, these temples are preferred by Fengdu pilgrims and despite their long distance from town, they are often bustling with pilgrims during religious festivals. Offerings and donations from pilgrims contributed

greatly to the temples' reconstruction and decoration.

The Ghost City Temple Festival

To carry on the legacy of the once popular Fengdu Incense Festival, the government has been organizing the Ghost City Temple Festival ever since 1988. However, the government has not restored the religious festival practices as they existed before 1949, instead the aim has been to invite entrepreneurs and attract investments. Upper level officials from the municipality and the state were invited to Fengdu, and exhibitions of political and economic accomplishments were on show during the temple festivals. As an enclosed town deep in the river valley, the new town has totally lost Fengdu's original features but its modern design does offer more favorable living conditions for the people. Symbols of ghosts are not emphasized in the new town, and the Ghost City is now far across the Yangtze. However, at temple festivals, deities who are supposed to govern the underworld in the Ghost City are still invited to the new town and join the parade. During my fieldwork, people's enthusiasm and expectations revealed their attitude towards the temple festivals, which have already become an important local event, reconciling the memory of past social life in the old county seat with the current life in the imposing new town. In reality, the necessity to build this new town originally derived from nothing but the Three Gorges Reservoir Project.

The Three Gorges Reservoir and the Relocation

On April 3, 1992, the National People's Congress of China approved the construction of the world's largest and most controversial hydroelectric station at the Three Gorges of Yangtze River. This project forced over 1.3 million people from the Yangtze valley to resettle and their homeland was forever submerged. Over 80% of the

resettled population came from Chongqing and (over) 15 out of 40 of Chongqing Municipality county-level subdivisions were affected by this project. My field site, Fengdu County, a subdivision of Chongqing Municipality in the Yangtze valley, had to relocate towns and villages; the population affected by forced resettlement totaled 81 thousand.

From as early as the Han Dynasty until 2002, the county seat of Fengdu, Mingshan Town (名山鎮), was located on the northern bank of the Yangtze River. After 2002, as the reservoir construction progressed, Fengdu's county seat was relocated to the southern bank of the Yangtze River, which had originally been farmland. All government departments of Fengdu County, most schools and communal facilities were relocated to the southern bank. Temple sites above the waterline of 175 meter were preserved on-site on the northern bank, but other tourist spots below the waterline of 175 meter, were moved to a higher place as the waterline rose significantly after the building of the dam.

Almost 10 per cent of Fengdu County's total population, 81 thousand people, has been resettled, and over 69 per cent were relocated to the new county seat (until 2005). The relocation project does not only force people but also enterprises, to resettle. An official census in 1991 indicates that all major enterprises would have been submerged under water (after the construction of the reservoir had been launched); and it also predicts that the relocation will have an enormous impact on industrial enterprises in Fengdu⁴.

Developing Tourism

Since the 1980s, the opening-up reforms have brought about remarkable changes

⁴ "Migrants of Fengdu", see the website of Fengdu County Government, <http://lyj.cqfd.gov.cn/fdkk/ShowInfo.asp?InfoID=119>

to the whole country. For economic development, the Three Gorges Reservoir Area, including Fengdu, opened its doors to tourists in the 1980s and soon became one of the most famous tourist destinations in China. The tourist business peaked in the early 1990s, around the time of the approval of the Three Gorges Dam Project in 1992 and with it emerged a pervading notion that the popular scenic spots would be permanently lost after the building of the dam.

The leaders of Fengdu today highlight local cultural and religious resources from before the 1949 Liberation as prominent artifacts of (today's) pilgrimage sites. Since the 1980s, temples have been gradually restored, and a new work unit, Mount Ming Scenic Spot Management Committee, was founded to manage the Ghost City. In 1982, Mount Ming Scenic Spot (the Ghost City) was among the first sites to be listed as National Tourist Spots by the Ministry of Construction.

Since the 1990s, the tourist industry has waxed and waned due to the construction of the mega-reservoir. In 1997, advertisements for a "Farewell Tour to the Three Gorges", a package tour to the Three Gorges region before the building of the dam, pushed local tourism to a peak of one million tourists during that year, which was, however, followed by a sharp decline in tourism after 1997 (Table 1). The reservoir project has indeed substantially affected scenic spots in the Reservoir Area: some have been relocated, e.g. Zhang Fei Temple (張飛廟) in Yunyang County; some have been partially submerged, e.g. the Ghost City in Fengdu County; some have been excavated and preserved in museums, such as cliffside inscriptions which will be submerged after the dam completion; and some were preserved underwater, such as the White Crane Ridge in the Fuling District. In fact, not only has Fengdu suffered from a decline in

tourism after 1997, the entire Reservoir Area encountered a depression brought about by demolition and resettlement.

“Resettlement with Development”⁵ is a policy imposed upon the Reservoir Area by the state to guarantee sustainable development and as a tentative solution to prevailing problems such as poverty and unemployment. In Fengdu, local leaders highlighted Promoting Tourism for Vitalizing the County’s Economy (興旅富縣) as a pragmatic strategy (FDNJ 2008): since the Ghost City has long been famous and quite influential, it becomes a symbol of local tourism; revitalizing the local tourist industry not only emphasizes the regeneration of the Ghost City, but also develops related businesses such as souvenir production and eco-tourism sites.

Influence of Tourism Development

The flow of tourists has nurtured business opportunities in Fengdu, such as souvenir markets, catering services and tour bus and boat businesses. Before the relocation of the county seat in 2003, over one-fifth of the population directly relied on the tourist industry and related industries to make a living⁶. However, since religious activities were prohibited during the political movements between 1957 and 1977, traditional religious practices and monks did not immediately return with the re-opening of the temples.

As a tour site, the entry fee for the Ghost City is not cheap: in 1997, it was 50 *yuan*; in 2009 it became 80 *yuan*, plus an additional charge of 20 *yuan* for the cable car going up the hill. As a result, most local people cannot afford frequent visits to the

⁵ Resettlement with Development, 開發性移民, is a policy refers to the Government to use funds to develop local resources, and promote economic prosperity in the reservoir area.

⁶ Fengdu County Year Book only showed the gross income of the tourism industry. From an interview with the deputy director of local tourism administration, an estimated number of 10 thousand was given for those who once worked in tourist-related industries before the relocation, one-fifth of then-population in the county seat.

temples. Since the restoration of the Ghost City is entirely self-financed, both entertainment events and religious services are provided in the Ghost City to generate income. On the one hand, the commercialization of the tour sites absorbed local people to earn a share of the thriving tourist industry. On the other hand, the Ghost City was not revived as a monastery despite featuring halls and shrines with deity statues.

Since the whole county seat has been relocated to the opposite (southern) bank of the Yangtze River, and tourist sites of the Ghost City have been kept on the original site (northern bank), the two places are geographically cut off from each other. Due to inconvenient transportation and high traffic costs, gradually, most people gave up their businesses in the tourist industry and moved to the new town to pursue their careers there.

In the Reservoir Area, mass relocation and construction work began during Phase 2 (1998 - 2003) of the Three Gorges Project, which had immense effects upon the tourist industry in this region. Statistics of tourists visiting Fengdu show that before Phase 2, in 1997, the number of tourists peaked at over 1.5 million, but dropped to a low in 1998 due to the dam construction as well as the 1998 flood on the Yangtze River. As we can see from the chart, the tourist flow then suddenly declined again in 2003, this time due to the relocation of the county seat in June 2003. After the peak in 1997, it took 9 years to reach the same level again – only in 2006 did the amount of tourists surpass the high of 1997.

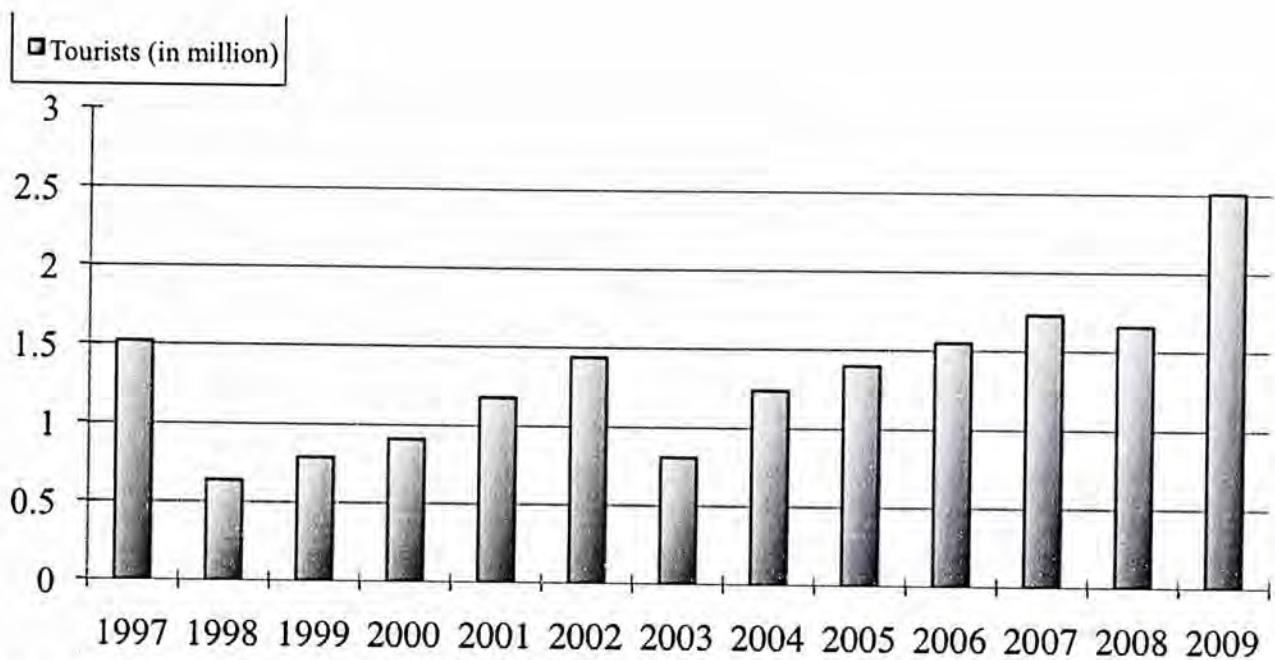


Table 1: Statistics of Tourists to Fengdu (1997 - 2009)⁷

During the relocation, tourists were much fewer in number and local tourist businesses could barely survive. There are no official statistics available for the time after the relocation process.

Popular Religion in China

Revival of Popular Religion

In the mass media, the Ghost City is mainly criticized as a place of “superstition”. Popular appraisals seem to have drawn a distinction between “religion” and “superstition”. According to the categories provided by the state, in China, only the five officially recognized institutional religions can be referred to as “religion”, namely Buddhism, Taoism (Daoism), Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Others are regarded as unofficial, illegal and unhealthy “superstitions”. However, in reality, the differences between religion and superstition are ambiguous (Yang 2008:17). Although the temples

⁷ All statistic figures are from Fengdu Annual Books.

and shrines in the Ghost City could theoretically be affiliated to officially recognized religions, for example, either Buddhism or Daoism would be possible, the name “Ghost City” still represents a negative image of beliefs in gods and ghosts (鬼神), and is therefore associated with “superstition”.

Historians have shown that the categories of “religion” and “superstition” came to China from the West via Japan in the late 19th century (Duara 2001; Goossaert 2005, 2006). Emerging during the modernization process, religion (宗教) and superstition (迷信) have been used in the Chinese context by reform activists ever since.

After the economic reforms of 1978, a common tactic for encouraging tourism was to restore temples and shrines; this was often actively fostered by local governments to attract tourists and enhance business opportunities. Many academic works have focused on the dynamics between the local and the state in the context of local religious practices and the revival of religion (Ashiwa and Wank 2006; Jing 1996; Weller 1987). Clearly, government officials from different levels hold different expectations toward the resurgence of popular religion. In the case of Bailin Chan Temple in Hebei, a large number of state-level visitors take the temple as an example of religious freedom in China; the local officials, however, are more interested in developing nearby commercial centers to stimulate business (Yang and Wei 2005). Moreover, the resurgence of temples not only reflects the blossoming of popular religion, but also functions as a channel for social memories. When communities endured temple demolition during political campaigns or involuntary resettlement such as for the Three Gorges Dam project, the reconstruction of temples often serves as a means to commemorate collective traumatic experience and as social memories (Jing 1996; Le Mentec 2006).

Legitimatization of Popular Religion

Generally, temples or shrines must both register with the Religious Affairs Administration of the local government and with quasi-official religious associations, such as the Buddhist Association or the Daoist Association (JBZC 1982). According to *Regulation on Religious Affairs* (2004), to establish a site for religious activities, a religious body should apply to the Religious Affairs Department of the People's Government at the county level and the application will be reviewed by the people's government at the city level; With the application approved, qualified religious personnel and necessary funds for establishing a site for religious activities must be guaranteed.

However, many religious activities, especially activities of popular religion, have long been labeled as anti-scientific and superstitious as well as going against the state ideology of materialism during political movements between 1949 and 1978, at which time many religious entities and personnel were dismissed. Therefore, it was difficult to legally restore temples and monasteries, especially sites of popular religion, which were small and mainly locally run organizations. However, there existed a variety of pragmatic strategies, such as registering as a branch or a member of one of the five official recognized religions in China (Buddhism, Daoism, Islamism, Catholicism and Protestantism); some also simply used a different name, such as a "cultural heritage site", or "museum" instead of "temple" to refer to a site of religious activities. In the case of the Heilong Dawang Shrine in Shaanbei, it was finally registered with the local government as a Daoist shrine, which ensured its official recognition (Chau 2006). On the other hand, once a temple fails in the registration/legitimizing process, it will be

labeled as a place advocating superstition and will be demolished and its advocates punished (Flower 2004). In other cases, religious associations and “museum of folk culture” (民间文化博物馆) are used to avoid making a direct reference to religious activities.

In the case of the Dragon Worship Association of Hebei, Gao (2005) argues that local people successfully used the tactic of naming their temple as an “association” or a “museum” to skillfully avoid being labeled as a place of “superstition”. In this way, they could publically practice their worship rituals in the name of promoting local culture. Chau notes that temples assuming other titles can serve as an indicator of having wider social networks and a higher social status, and also shows credibility (Chau 2006). In the case of Fengdu, names are carefully used to avoid any religious reference, although some are hardly accepted by people. For instance, “the Folk Culture Festival” (民俗文化節) is used instead of “the Ghost City Temple Festival” (鬼城廟會), and “the Hometown of China’s Divine Comedy” (神曲之鄉) is utilized to disguise the Ghost City.

Many scholarly works on institutionalized temples, especially on the power structure within the temple management, and the promotion of temples for more pilgrims, are valuable references for studying the Ghost City from a wider perspective. As the Ghost City has been restored by the local government, insights can be gained from examining the interactions and negotiations between advocates of the project found in the local government and some higher-level political forces, which deny its value. These controversies, including conflicts and different evaluations of the Ghost City, all suggest a contestation over the legitimization of popular religion in Fengdu. As related

studies illustrate, tensions may break out within the temple management over financial issues or over development plans put forward by different parties, such as the abbot, the religious practitioners and the deputy of state agencies (Ashiwa and Wank 2006; Chau 2006; Fisher 2008). In some cases, local administrative authorities directly initiated the reconstruction of temples to promote tourism (Fisher 2008; Le Mentec 2006), yet some ended up in failure. Ashiwa and Wank's (2006: 353) work about Nanputuo temple illustrates the dynamics of this negotiation process and the conflict between the abbot, practitioners of China Buddhist Association and officials from the Religious Affairs Bureau and provides a comprehensive picture of the power structure in an institutionalized temple. In the case of Longwang Shrine, the locally influential Lao Wang successfully built a temple, negotiated with different administrative forces, and finally managed to have it registered as an official shrine as a branch of Daoism (Chau 2006).

Organization of the thesis

Aside from this introduction, this thesis comprises five chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces Fengdu's county seat, the religious landscape and the Ghost City – the Mount Ming Scenic Spot. The influence of Three Gorges Dam project is discussed as background information on the local tourist industry and the development of the Ghost City. The religious landscape before 1949 is introduced in order to draw comparisons with the current revived temple buildings and temple festivals. Moreover, an introduction to temples in the Ghost City, which have been restored and developed as tourist sites, illustrates how the netherworld is reconstructed and what tourists could experience on a tour.

Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the orthodox cultural discourse, which has been developed for the Ghost City by local officials. They view the Ghost City as a commodity with which to foster economic development; income from tourism is the ultimate goal that they have been seeking since its revival. Although local officials have never intended to revive the ideology of ghosts or popular religion, controversies revolving around these issues have accompanied the reconstruction since the 1980s. To respond to criticisms and enhance its legitimacy, the Ghost City has been re-defined by local officials in public promotion campaigns. In this chapter, their strategies of interpreting the Ghost City as a “cultural symbol” are discussed in detail.

Chapter 4 describes the 2009 Temple Festival and looks at local participants. Records and data on the pre-Liberation Fengdu Incense Festival in 1935 are provided to examine whether the current festival is a revival of the religious festivals or fundamentally different. Although the new temple festivals have no affiliation with any temple or religious associations, religious figures and items, such as statues of deities and ghosts still appear. Religious tales, such as local deities’ wedding celebration have become the main theme of the new temple festivals.

While the Ghost City has been successfully promoted as a tourist site, it has experienced a decline in local pilgrimage. Chapter 5 examines people’s reaction to the commercialization of the tourist site, the changes in the relationship between the Ghost City and local people, and how local people retain their religious life. The analysis is based on interviews with local pilgrims. Furthermore, based on participant observation, the two communal temples near Fengdu’s new county seat are introduced in detail.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion and reviews my main arguments. Although the Ghost

City is criticized as a place of superstition, the local government still takes risks by utilizing religious resources for economic development, labeling it as authorized culture to gain legitimacy. However, contrary to the CCTV report, the Ghost City and other ghost-related tourist spots have had little effects on local people's religious life as these sites are mainly for tourists and non-local pilgrims. In the local context, people conduct their own religious practices in communal temples rather than at religious tour sites, which implies that the influence of religious tourism on local people's belief is very minor. At least, the accusations brought forward in the CCTV report and the public concerns of the advocates of orthodox ideology do not match local informants' views and practices.

Chapter 2: The Landscape of Fengdu

Landscape of Fengdu County

The Reservoir Area in Chongqing

Fengdu is situated in what was originally known as Eastern Sichuan Region (川东地区), a region along the Yangtze valley between the west of Chongqing city and the east of Hubei Province. People in this area shared a common dialect and regional culture; in 1997, it became a major part of the newly founded Chongqing Municipality. Moreover, since the Three Gorges Reservoir massively affected this area, it is now referred to as the Reservoir Area, encompassing subdivisions of Chongqing Municipality and Hubei Province.



Map 1: Fengdu County in Chongqing Municipality, China

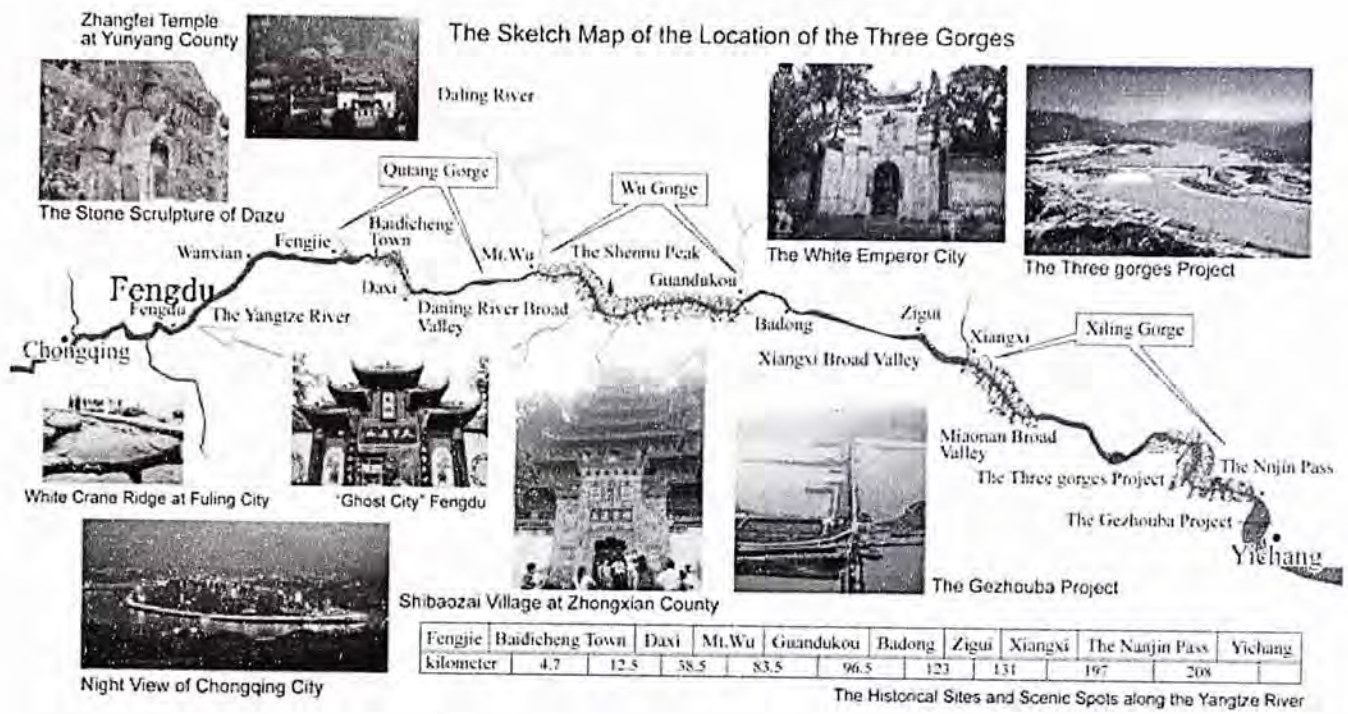
Geographically, the Reservoir Area is situated in river valleys and is surrounded by mountains that are too steep for farming. Before the dam project was launched,

transportation was highly underdeveloped and cities and towns were hidden in mountain valleys, connected to the outside world only by waterways; the expressway was not constructed in this area until the 2000s. Except for a few urban sectors, most counties in this area do not have any industrial base. Local economy mainly relies on agriculture and labor exportation, while poverty is the main concern for the state (Liu 2010).

Official statistics show that by 2009, the total number of migrants coming to Chongqing to work on the dam were 1.13 million (CMIA 2010), and the Reservoir Area in Chongqing has had to shoulder most of the burden of relocation and reconstruction caused by the dam project. Fengdu is noted as the only case in which the entire county seat had to be relocated and reconstructed, because no available higher land could be developed. For other cities or towns, if their lower lands were to be submerged, where topographic condition permitted, higher land was to be developed.

As one of the first tour sites opening to international tourism in the 1980s, the Reservoir Area is famous for the natural beauty of the gorge valleys and its historical architecture. In fact, heritage preservation instigated a controversy in the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, which would have threatened most sites due to the rising water level and hence, different measures such as relocation (Zhang Fei Temple in Yunyang County), on-site preservation (White Crane Ridge in Fuling District) etc., were taken to protect the heritage sites.

Cultural relics and tangible heritage in Fengdu also has been affected. In the Ghost City, a cluster of temples and ancient relics of the Gateway to the Ghost City would be under the highest watermark of 175 meters, so these sites were reconstructed in 2006.



Map 2. Three Gorges Tour Map

The old county seat held over 50 thousand residents in a tiny area of 1.2 square kilometers: commercial sites, governmental buildings, public institutions and residential buildings were densely located along three narrow streets and tiny alleys. Labyrinthine grimy steps stretched from the dock area up into the town center on the hillside; cargoes had to be disembarked manually by porters. Along these steps, food vendors and teahouses sheltered by tiled roofs took up roadside space, and waited for guests who stopped by when waiting for ferries or ships. Shabby souvenir stalls occupied the best locations, selling fans and caps for cooling during hot summer months, fake antiques such as Chairman Mao's Quotations, handicrafts of inferior patchwork, embroidery saying "Souvenir of the Ghost City", as well as souvenirs featuring ghosts, ghost masks, books about ghost tales etc. When the water level dropped in winter, people had to walk from the riverside up to the town; when the flood season came in summer, water even flooded into the streets. As a river town, boat horns echoed in every corner whenever

boats arrived or were about to leave.

Population

The new city of Fengdu has been in use since 2003, towering high above the Yangtze River on the south bank. With a population of 820 thousand of which more than 4/5 are rural households, the major industry of Fengdu County is agriculture. Its current per capita annual income is 9,441 *yuan* in urban households (the national average is 13,786 *yuan*), while rural residents' per capita income is merely 3,028 *yuan*, less than the national average of 4,014 *yuan* (FDNJ, 2008:221).

The geographical landscape in Fengdu County is mountainous, often too steep for farming, and thus the mechanization of agriculture is hard to develop for geographic as well as financial reasons. Most residents in the county are registered as rural households and are living on agriculture. As Fengdu was not an industrial base, nor had any labor-intensive industry, surplus labor usually moved to the coastal regions as migrant workers. According to a census, the number of migrant workers leaving the area was nearly 1/4 of total population, reaching 192 thousand in 2007 (FDNJ 2008:30). During the 2008 Financial Crisis, about 100 thousand Fengdu migrant workers returned home due to unemployment (FDXW 2009). Among the whole urban population of 150 thousand, 130 thousand people live in the new county seat. My informants were all residents residing in the new county seat and belonging to the category of urban population.

Fengdu's county seat, Mingshan Town, is a small town. While a considerable number of rural residents choose to go out as migrant workers to Chongqing City and the coastal regions, urban residents still try to make a living in the county despite the fact

that the local per capita income was only 2/3 of the national average and the municipality average (FDNJ 2008). I stayed with three families in Fengdu and did a part time internship in the local People's Congress. Both home and work settings gave me access to local people's life. In Fengdu, people in government offices and public institutions such as public schools, hospitals, state-owned monopolistic enterprises were much better off than others; with an average monthly income of around 2,000 *yuan* (including monthly pay, welfare and bonuses) and reimbursements, occupations in the governmental systems were considered the "iron rice bowl"⁸ and appreciated by most people.

However, as the population of the county has doubled after relocation to the new county seat, the original social structure has also changed during the process. According to the results of a census in 1992, Fengdu County Seat had 33,905 residents out of 56,511 who belonged to the category of "relocated with *danwei*"⁹ (單位搬遷). In 2009, the total population of the new county seat is over 130,000; most new residents are from the rural area and did not have affiliations with *danwei* (YMGZ 2005).

The spatial design of the new town draws a distinct line between residents in the category of "relocated with *danwei*" and the other. Most *danwei*, such as government departments, state-run enterprises and public institutions, have their own communities, which are situated in more favorable locations and have better communal facilities, such as gardens and gym equipment. In other communities, public services were comparatively inferior, which were often remote blocks with weak security. For instance,

⁸ Iron rice bowl: 鐵飯碗, refers to an occupation with guaranteed job security, as well as steady income and benefits. Iron rice bowls include military personnel, members of the civil service, as well as employees of various state run enterprises

⁹ Danwei, 單位, refers to work units in China, properly means state-owned enterprises, government administrations and departments, and public intuitions, which provide not only employment, but also housing and other welfares.

these communities were located in the outskirts and upper sections of the hilltops where public transportation was inconvenient. Minibuses seldom made their way there; and neither did street lamps exist nor did any estate managements work there. Usually, public space was full of trash and dirt while empty shops along the roadsides suggested stagnant business. However, as the most representative communal public space for social and entertainment activities, such as business deals or private discussions, teahouses lined the many streets and were found along riverbanks and inside residential communities.

The construction of the new town began in the 1990s; most migrant residents got their compensation in the form of money or apartments in the new town long before the real estate bubble started affecting urban China. For instance, one of my host families was temporarily out of job due to economic disputes between partners in the night snack shop business; yet, they had another source of income from renting out a shop, which they bought in 2003, when the whole town was under construction and the price was low. The rent brought them a monthly income of 700 *yuan*, which was sufficient to cover basic living expenses of the whole family in a small town like Fengdu.

Influence of the Dam

Influence on the Local People

The Three Gorges Dam has drawn public attention from at home and abroad. From 1992 statistics it is revealed that 90 out of 254 industrial enterprises in Fengdu would have been submerged upon completion of the dam project, which would have massively affected all important industrial enterprises in the area. Therefore, local industrial enterprises were hit particularly hard by the relocation process.

While most other cities in the Reservoir Area turned higher land (originally forests or farming land) into new urban sections, the old county seat had no available space to reclaim nearby. Behind the old city, a national forest park and the Ghost City were located, and both were protected zones. Until 2005, about 81,307 people were moved out from their original homes, among them, 56,511 residents were from the old county seat, and all registered as urban households (YMGZ 2005). My informants are all among those 56 thousand and are registered as “urban” in the household registration system.

Unlike environmentalists and scholars who once fiercely argued against the dam project in the 1990s, people in Fengdu were entertaining their own expectations and some were eagerly looking forward to this project. Between 1992 and 2001, while other parts of China were engaging in an incommensurable leap in development, Fengdu’s former county seat had stopped any new construction. According to government propaganda, a modern and well-designed county seat would be provided as people’s new homeland. Therefore, people embraced these expected changes and opportunities without any questions as they seemed to lead to a better future. However, during relocation, cases of corruption and diversion of compensation payments occurred in many regions when local officials unevenly distributed huge amounts of money obtained from the Central Government, which was a cause of tension in this area.

On the whole, younger generations enjoyed the new life more than the older generations; they appreciated the convenient living environment of the new county seat, which was home to better facilities compared to the old town: there was more public space, many gardens, grand squares, and the buildings looked more impressive and

modern; better decorated chain stores and supermarkets were opened in the new city, contributing to a broader variety of consumer goods being available. The new county seat became a symbol of pride and represented an opportunity for a new beginning after the relocation process. Also, many visitors expressed their surprise at seeing the new Fengdu as it appeared during construction, since it was indeed very different from the old and tiny one.

But not everyone felt satisfied with the relocation. Some people would not miss a chance to voice their anger during the relocation process; protests and petitions asking for more compensation constantly occurred on large and small scales. In fact, the director of the local construction committee in Fengdu shocked the whole country when it turned out that he was involved in the embezzlement of over 15 million *yuan* of resettlement allowance in 2003; this led to a deterioration of the already sensitive conflict between local bureaucrats and migrants. During and after the relocation period, people's anger was ignited when they found out that the new life was tough, especially when poverty and unemployment heavily hit the newly-constructed town.

During my fieldwork, petitioners still protested by occupying the doorway of the local government building, sitting there every single day: some were trying to appeal to officials in person but were stopped by guards; some just quietly sat on the steps, holding banners while repeatedly spitting on the ground to show their dissatisfaction; others used a loudspeaker, automatically repeating their appeals in a loud voice so that they would be heard by county leaders inside the building, etc. People entertained complex feelings towards their new lives in the post-dam period as promises of benefits from the dam project were not kept, and the accomplishments brought about by the dam

construction and other development projects rarely directly benefitted migrants; they realized that life was not as good as before.

Therefore, in many ways, the people in Fengdu felt nostalgic for the old county seat. For instance, shops and restaurants still retained their old addresses on advertisements to maintain the patronage of old guests from the original county seat, thereby trying to eliminate the loss caused by relocation. Also, residential communities still unofficially kept the street names where they had previously lived in the old county seat. For example, I stayed in a community whose residents were originally from Yaque Street in the old Fengdu; now, even though the official name of their street was Sanhuan Street, people still preferred referring to the new community as Yaque Street. When I just moved into the community, I tried to find “Yaque Street” on road signs and local maps, but failed; later I realized that “Yaque Street” only exists in migrated residents’ memories, as a place in the sunken county seat.

Influence on the Local Industries

The well known and largely controversial reservoir project has not only led to the involuntary relocation of many people in Fengdu’s county seat, it also has had devastating effects on local businesses and enterprises. According to an assessment in 1992, 90 out of 254 enterprises in Fengdu would have been submerged as a result of the dam building, including nearly all key-industry enterprises (YMGZ 2005).

Years of relocation invariably affected all industries. According to Tan Qiwei, the deputy mayor of Chongqing in charge of the reservoir region, problems of environment degradation and migration in the region were serious. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate in key reservoir regions (in Chongqing), including Fuling District and areas

downstream (i.e. Fengdu County, Zhongxian County, Wanzhou District, Yunyang County, Fengjie County and Wushan County), reached an unmatched 8.95%¹⁰, and the per capita GDP in these regions was only half of the national average (Liu 2010). As a result, nearly 200,000 migrant workers out of the total population of 817, 000 left the area to seek employment in other provinces (FDNJ 2008). On the whole, even today, people in the reservoir regions have a long way to go to establish a “well-off society”. Not only social issues such as the hollowing out of local industries, high unemployment and low income are severe problems, environmental threats such as landslides are also obstacles on the path to development.

Despite all these statistical figures that indicate the backwardness and underdevelopment of this region, a new city of Fengdu has already been constructed. Every morning when I went out, I noticed townspeople sitting on benches in public parks, some were looking at recruitment notices nearby, and others just sat there, hanging around day in, day out.

Local authorities have spared no effort to build a modern city and make a well-off society. After 2003, when the second-phase of the large-scale migration was completed and the new city was in use, economic development was encouraged in the new Fengdu, the temple festival was launched in the new town, and investment fairs were held to attract financial investment.

Since Fengdu is home to plenty of tourism resources, “Promoting Tourism for Vitalizing the County’s Economy” has been used as an important developmental strategy but local industrial enterprises have not been able to recover from the relocation.

¹⁰ According to Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of People’s Republic of China, the registered unemployment of urban population is 4.3% to the end of 2009. The report of the press conference is available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-10/23/content_12305919.htm.

Tourism has been regarded as a mainstay industry in Fengdu since the 1980s, when the restoration of the Ghost City began. Since the year 2000, other tour sites have been developed such as Karst caves with jade-colored stalactites and man-made lakes, but the Ghost City is still regarded as the core of local tourism, and even the flagship of Fengdu. In the heyday of the Ghost City, the tourist industry and related businesses provided over ten thousand jobs, which brought considerable income to local people. Obviously, with the upgrading project and more investments, the local government is eager to carry on this glorious past.

Fengdu Religious Landscape

Returning to my research question pertaining to the utilization of religious resources in Fengdu's Ghost City, it is important to review the local history of Fengdu as a religious center throughout ancient time and modern society. Historical literature regards Fengdu as a significant regional religious base whose charm still attracted tourists and pilgrims in the 1980s. Religious resources, in various forms such as ghosts and gods' tales, temples, religious festivals, are the core ingredients used to revive the economy and start off the local tourist industry. In other words, religious sites are an indispensable factor and the primary impetus in the establishment of Fengdu's tourist industry. Historical records and traditions add value to temple sites, even after they were transformed into tour sites.

Influence of Daoism

When Daoism first spread during the early Eastern Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) in ancient Sichuan, it exerted great social influence over this area, including Fengdu. According to folktales, the Daoists Yin Changsheng (陰長生) and Wang Fangping (王方

平) attained immortality on Mount Pingdu (current Mount Ming) in Fengdu. Gradually, people started calling them by their last names Yin and Wang, eventually they became hermits of Yin Wang (陰王), literally meaning the King of the Netherworld. Fengdu slowly became the center for practicing Daoism and over the course of many dynasties, temples were constructed on Mount Pingdu. When emperors of the Tang Dynasty promoted Daoism as the national religion, Daoist temples in Fengdu also got rehabilitated as the records of Xiandu Temple (仙都觀), meaning “temple in the city of hermits”, show.

According to Daoist cosmology, the ultimate goal of practicing Daoism is to transform into immortals and achieve immortality. Daoists usually practice on mountains of serenity and natural beauty, and hermits and immortals practiced Daoism and got enlightened in these mountains. Therefore, when people climbed Mount Pingdu (Mount Ming), wandering around jungles and temples, they symbolically were transited from the profane world to a sacred mountain. Today, place names after *xian* (仙), immortal, are still in use in Fengdu as traditional relics.

Most temples were destroyed in wars during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties; the Manchurian Qing Court started to formally rule Fengdu from 1660 but various rebellions still occurred afterwards until 1680 (FDXZ 1991: 8). After the Manchus finally controlled the whole country, Daoism as the religion of the Han Chinese people was less favored by the Manchu-led Qing Court and the official rank of the Daoist Master was demoted.

According to contemporary statistics, there existed 28 Daoist priests in 7 Daoist temples on Mount Ming in 1941. Then the figure dropped to zero according to a 1958

census and no Daoist temple was licensed after that (Liu 1987).

Influence of Buddhism

In China, it is believed that *Lunhui* (輪迴), or samsara was a profound exotic concept that was imported along with Buddhism. According to Buddhist ideology, *Lunhui* interpreted people's life as a cycle encompassing birth, decay and death. Owing to the development of printing techniques, folktales and novels from the Ming and Qing dynasties were effectively spread, many of which were tales about ghosts and gods. In these novels, Fengdu was largely portrayed as the netherworld and the place for *lunhui*. One such example is one of China's great classic novels, *Journey to the West* (西遊記), which was retold and first published as a folktale novel in the 16th century. In this novel, both the Monkey King and Emperor Taizong of Tang went to Fengdu, met the King of the Netherworld, and lengthened their lives (Wu 2008). This novel provides precise descriptions of the settings of the netherworld and the tortures, which subsequently widely influenced people's imaginations of the netherworld for centuries.

During World War II, when southwestern China was the main base for fighting against Japanese invaders, temple sites in Fengdu were often taken up by Nationalist troops and used as military camps. After the Communists won the civil war, the People's Liberation Army took over Fengdu in December 1949. Then Buddhists were expelled and resumed secular lives, while temples collapsed or were taken up for other usage such as warehouses or training camps for political campaigns. Among these temple sites, Yansheng Temple was recognized by Sichuan Provincial Government in 1958 as a key temple deserving preservation; but it was not until 1988 that Buddhists returned to practice rituals and the temple was finally revived (GCFD 2009).

In Fengdu, the restoration of temples is often arbitrarily carried out according to the imagined setting of the netherworld and tours through the Ghost City often stress its resemblance with *lunhui*. Based on this concept, touring Mount Ming is about experiencing the cycle from life to death by passing different courses and tests in the netherworld. As the Ghost City is considered the location of the netherworld, temples there are regarded as courts where deities in the netherworld will do moral justice after people's death. In that way, after the journey through the Ghost City, people will have completed the tour in the netherworld and can re-enter the living world.

The Ghost City after the 1980s

As for the Ghost City, the major purpose of its restoration was to generate income from tourism and boost the local economy. However, a full restoration required over 10 million *yuan*, a sum that far exceeded the grant from the government. Director Liu was the first chairperson to manage the restoration from 1980 to 1995, and he witnessed how a renewed Ghost City came into being. In 1979, he was appointed by the government to lead the restoration project as an administrative official from Fengdu County Construction Committee.

According to his explanation, the initial amount invested in the project was 35 thousand *yuan*, highly insufficient to meet the total need. Later on, the Ghost City was gradually restored by using funds obtained from ticket income, donations and entrainment services.



Photograph 2.1. The Landscape of Mount Ming

Mount Ming is situated to the right of the picture above, while temples, altars and halls are sheltered by forests. Along the riverside, tourist cruise ships moor to docks just below Mount Ming. Usually, tourists are let off at these docks, and then directly led to the Ghost City on Mount Ming.

However, regardless of whether people travel to Fengdu by bus or by ship, they cannot miss the mountain to the left of the photo above, which looks definitely more attractive than Mount Ming, for its white architectures look like a statue of a man with a high royal crown. This construction project was the Holy Place for Jade Emperor (玉皇圣地) but was never completed; the hilltop was too steep leading to reoccurring landslides and the killing of construction workers. Later on, investors withdrew and the construction was left uncompleted. The unfinished construction became a frequent topic among local people and tourists. Rumors of unfavorable fengshui and frequent accidents were often brought up in people's discussion.



Map 3. The distance between the Fengdu New City and the Ghost City is 14 kilometers

According to Fengdu Tourist Administration, in recent years, about 70% of tourists went to Fengdu by cruise ships as part of a package tour. Usually, tourist groups spent 1.5 hours on the journey around Mountain Ming, which was not enough to visit all temples. To save time, tourist agencies arranged tourists to take cable cars directly to the cluster of temples on the mountainside.



Map 4. Tourists' Map of the Ghost City

As shown on the map of above, the tour in the Ghost City starts from the foot of the mountain and then leads around ancient-style buildings (see Map 4.); some of these sites are ancient relics, such as Naihe Bridge, Liaoyang Temple and Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld; other temple buildings in the current Ghost City were not restored until the 1980s.

When historical relics and heritage are taken as precious resources that can be exploited for tourism, everything related to the past – remnants of ancient buildings, ancient tablets, literary works written by ancient scholars as well as folktales – has been restored or highlighted as perfect selling points in the local tourist industry. Hence, I will now introduce the current major tour sites found in the Ghost City; I will look at their historical and religious values and evaluate their current functions, and I will also consider some other related scenic spots, which have been important field sites in my research project.

The Gateway to the Ghost City

The Gateway to the Ghost City (鬼城牌坊) used to symbolize the entrance to the netherworld. Before the relocation, it stood at the foot of the mountain; today, however, it would unfortunately be submerged under 175 meters deep water. In 2006, the Gateway was relocated to an area higher up in front of the Ghost City.



Photograph 2.2. the Gateway to the Ghost City

Calligraphic characters of “the Ghost City” (鬼城) in white are found in the upper top center, reading from top to bottom, while “the World Famous Mountain” (天下名山) is found just below in yellow characters on blue background, reading from right to left. According to historical records, Mount Ming, literally meaning the famous mountain, was originally called Mount Pingdu (平都山), it is believed that the name gradually changed to Mount Ming because of Su Shi (蘇軾), one of the greatest litterateurs in the Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127). The great poet passed through Fengdu in 1059, left a few poems about Fengdu, and described the beauty of Mount Pingdu by glorifying it: “Mount Pingdu has been nationwide famous since ancient time” (平都天下古名山), which was accepted as its formal name later on.

The Couplet found on the gate “下笑世上士”，“沉魂北鄂都”is also of historical value as it is supposed to have been composed by the great poet Li Bai (李白) (701 - 762) when he passed through Fengdu. The content of the couplet describes Fengdu as a place where the souls come to rest. Even though there is no evidence to prove its authenticity, folk tales like this are now regarded as a part of local history and are being told to tourists by tour guides.

Medical Gods Temple and Fortune Gods Temple

The Medical Gods Temple (藥王廟) is dedicated to two famous doctors of Chinese medicine, Sun Simiao (孫思邈) and Pi Tong (邳彤). In ancient China, famous doctors were usually referred to as Medical Gods to remember their great deeds of saving others. Sun Simiao (581 – 682), a famous doctor and botanist, made great contributions to Chinese medicine for editing books and sharing his prescriptions. Pi Tong (? – 30) was a general who contributed to the establishment of the Eastern Han Dynasty, and was later respected as a Medical God.

The Fortune Gods Temple (財神殿) is dedicated to Bi Gan (比干) and Zhao Gongming (趙公明). Both of them were appointed as gods in *Chinese God Story* (封神演義), a famous Chinese epic fantasy novel written in the Ming Dynasty. Bi Gan was a loyal minister and an uncle of the Zhou King (紂王) of the Shang Dynasty. He was ordered to take his heart out to prove his loyalty, for which he died. It was believed that he was appointed Fortune God by the Jade Emperor for his loyalty and selfless behavior.

Naihe Bridge and Liaoyang Temple



Photograph 2.3. The Naihe Bridge

Naihe (奈河), Naraka in Sanskrit, refers to the underworld. It used to be the first pass on the way to the final court of the netherworld. Naihe Bridge (奈河橋) in Fengdu included three stone bridges built during the Yongle Period (1403 – 1424) in the Ming Dynasty.

On a regular tour, tourists are instructed to walk over the middle of three bridges, only using steps of odd numbers on their way to the netherworld, and to go back through either one of the side bridges. Couples are encouraged to walk through together with the man on the left and the woman on the right side.

In Chinese folk beliefs, a soul (people's being after death) was verified as good and had the prospect of transmigrating only after it successfully passed all the tests, and the Naihe Bridge was the first test. Torturers such as Ox-Head and Horse-Face were patrolling along the sides, ready to drag evil souls from the bridge into the river of blood. Once pulled down, evil souls would suffer in the bloody water and never go back to life again.

The Liaoyang Temple (寥陽殿) was also built in the Yongle Period. According to historical records, this shrine used to be an ancestral hall for descendents of the royal clan of the Ming Dynasty, the Zhu (朱) family in Sichuan. It was turned into a Buddhist temple during the Qing Dynasty and now a golden statue of Sakyamuni is found in its front hall and Veda Buddha is featured at the back in the back hall. In the rear hall, the Buddha of the Past, Present and Future is surrounded by Eighteen Buddhas.

Temple for A Hundred Sons

The Thirty Three Heavens (三十三重天) are stone steps going up to the final court of the netherworld, and represent a passage from Naihe Bridge to later tests. By climbing up these steps, tourists/pilgrims reach different levels of heaven to achieve enlightenment and longevity. On a regular tour, tourists are often reminded to never look back when walking up or else their efforts would be in vain.



Photograph 2.4. The Thirty Three Heavens

The Temple for A Hundred Sons (百子殿) features Avalokiteśvara (Bodhisattva Guanyin), Manjusri (Bodhisattva Wenshu) and Samantabhadra (Bodhisattva Puxian)

According to historical records, people prayed to the Buddhas and expected to have sons.



Photograph 2.5. Mr. Lei's shop selling paintings of ghost faces

Souvenir shops in the Ghost City sell products related to ghosts. However, most products are not in the traditional Chinese style. For example, ghost masks are popular in many souvenir shops, but all are looked like for a Halloween party..There is a shop run by the Lei family, the only shop selling souvenirs that are inspired by the Ghost City and show some originality. Lei's shop features paintings of ghosts on wood, and both the older and the current boss, younger Mr. Lei, are folk artisans. In the photo above (Photograph 2.5.), wooden ladles of different sizes are hanging on the wall. The older Mr. Lei, a painter, was inspired by folktales of the Ghost City and developed his own wood paintings. Most of their art works show different kinds of ghosts with different facial expressions.

The Ghost Pass



Photograph 2.6. the Ghost Pass

The Ghost Pass (鬼門關) was another test in the Ghost City. On this path, small sculptures of ghosts were designed to sustain the wooden board embellished with Chinese characters and as the punishment for sins. Crossing the Ghost Pass had many taboos. For instance, a soul should never mistakenly read the name of the Ghost City in a reversed way, such as “the ghost who closes the gate” (關門鬼); if so, unlucky souls would become one of these ghosts carrying the burden.

The Huangquan Road

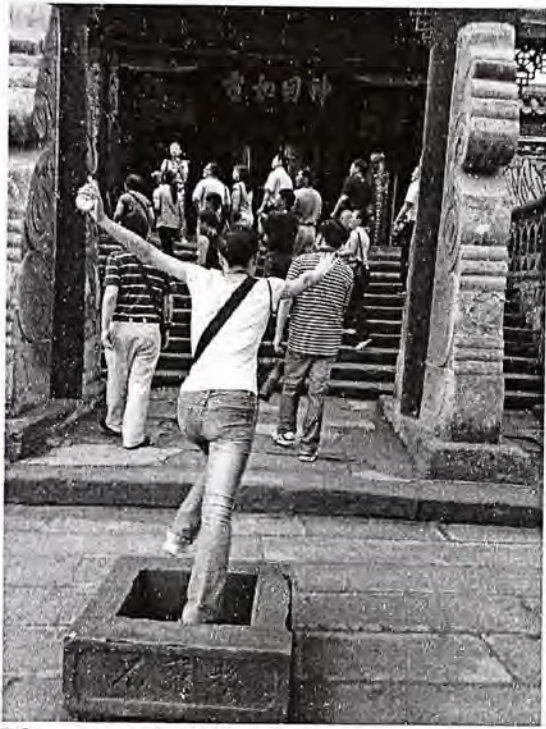
Huangquan (黃泉), literally the “yellow spring”, referred to the netherworld in Chinese. Huangquan Road was represented another test for spirits. According to tour guides, in folktale descriptions, wandering ghosts who had already lost chances for transmigration would often trap spirits who were on the way to the final court by calling their names. The spirit would be abducted by ghosts and could never continue its journey once it responded to the calls.

The Farewell Tower and the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld



Photograph 2.7. The Farewell Tower, Stone for Testing Sins and the gateway of Temple for Emperor of the Netherworld

The Farewell Tower (望鄉臺) used to serve as a place for spirits to take a last glance at their families. The final destination of the journey to the netherworld, the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld (天子殿) is nearby. However, before entering this temple, spirits would have to pass the Stone for Testing Sins (拷罪石). It is a spherical-shaped stone with a slippery surface; tourists were asked to stand on the stone on just one leg and take a straight look into the interior of the court, or rather, look straight into the eyes of the Emperor of the Netherworld. According to the folktales, guilty spirits would never succeed for they would be proven evil through the eye contact. If a spirit/tourist could remain standing on it, he got the chance for final judgment.



Photograph 2.8. A tourist standing on the Stone for Testing Sins

The netherworld court used to be the place where spirits received judgment according to their deeds in the living world. The Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld resembles an ancient court in China, *yamen* (衙門). In the court, statues of guards, torturers and judges were lined up on two sides while in center stood the Emperor of the Netherworld. The hall featured tablets from the Qing Dynasty and a copper mirror. As described in folktales, by looking into the mirror, people could see their future and their next life; however, the magic was lost when it was tainted with dirty water and human waste by an angry county mayor in the Qing dynasty who was dissatisfied with his future of being a pig. The mirror hanging in the hall today is a duplicate and it is said that the original one has been preserved in a museum.



Photograph 2.9. Statues in the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld

The Records of Life and Death held in the hands of Judge Cui (崔判官) show the records of people's life span and deeds. There were four judges among whom Judge Cui was the most famous one. In *Journey to the West*, the Monkey King (孫悟空) rushed into the netherworld, grabbed this record and deleted all records of monkeys and people with the surname Sun (孫), so that they all enjoyed longevity. In the same novel, there is a chapter about the netherworld in Fengdu. Emperor Taizong of Tang (唐太宗) died and embarked upon a journey to the netherworld but then returned to life again because his prime minister Wei Zheng (魏徵) entertained good connections with Judge Cui. Thereupon Taizong's life was extended by Judge Cui. After Taizong went back to life, he showed his gratitude by sending a pumpkin to the netherworld to thank Judge Cui (Wu 2008).

The statues are three meters high, making tourists inside feel relatively small. Tour guides often encourage tourists to buy incenses, to worship the Emperor of the

Netherworld for deceased or living family members. According to historical records, incense gatherings were once prosperous in Fengdu and usually lasted for over a month; pilgrims who wished to get blessings for their living family members were dressed differently from pilgrims who wanted to get their deceased family members blessed (Wei 1935). Therefore, temples in Fengdu provide different blessed papers for different purposes. Fengdu Travel Permit (豐都路引) used to be a “passport to the netherworld” and had the seals of the Fengdu County Mayor, the Fengdu City God, and the Emperor of the Netherworld. In folk beliefs, people thought that only by burning this paper for the deceased could the latter’s spirits find the way to Fengdu and get transmigrated. Blessed Paper for Longevity (福壽文書) was for senior family members.



Photograph 2.10. The Statue of the Emperor of the Netherworld

In today’s Ghost City, Fengdu Travel Permits and Blessed Papers are still on sale (Photograph 2.10.). In folktales, the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld used to be the court where souls got the final judgment, and it is the last temple site of the

current trip in the Ghost City. As shown on the photo above, there are two kinds of papers sold, and a staff is holding a piece high above his head, offering these papers to tourists who have finally arrived at the last site.

In folktales, the Empress of the Netherworld was originally an ordinary girl from a rich family in Sichuan. She met the Emperor of the Netherworld when her family went to Fengdu for a religious festival. She saw the Emperor sitting in the hall with pilgrims who went to Fengdu to offer to deities. The Emperor fell in love with her and then proposed to her in her dream. After she agreed, her spirit went to Fengdu and became the Empress of the Netherworld. Different versions of the folktale indicate different birthplaces of the young lady, but all agree that she was born in eastern Sichuan, and these stories of the Emperor of the Netherworld. Although the wedding is only one of numerous pieces of folktales about the Emperor of the Netherworld being told in Fengdu, it was later specifically highlighted as an important celebration in the revived temple festivals staged by the government since the 1980s.

Tortures in the netherworld were exhibited in two chambers, located on both sides of the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld. Mini sculptures of folktale plots about the Ghost City, many of which are famous folktales in ancient Chinese works – for instance, *Mulian Rescues His Mother*, a Buddhist tale believed to be the origin of Universal Salvation¹¹; *Taizong Emperor of Tang's Journey to the Netherworld*, from *Journey to the West* as mentioned earlier in this chapter; historical figures such as *Qin Hui in the Netherworld*, a treacherous official who fabricated charges against the loyal General Yue Fei and executed him in Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), and who was

¹¹ Universal Salvation is on July 15th in lunar calendar. It is often called as the Ghost Festival to fete ghosts in the nether world. In Chinese popular religion, it coincides the Buddhism festival, *pudu* 普度 and Daoism festival *zhongyuan* 中元節.

then regarded as a notorious traitor of the Han Chinese nationality.

The Divine Palace: A Modern Amusement Park

In 1993, the local tourism management committee, using devices of modern technology, constructed the netherworld to the west of the Ghost City, calling it the Divine Palace, 鬼國神宮¹². This park was completed in 1991, exhibited a world of the netherworld using visual and sound effects, aiming to present to visitors a vivid portrait of the netherworld.



Photograph 2.11. The Divine Passage, Fengdu Emperor and the entrance of the Divine Palace

The Divine Palace consists of a cluster of constructions exhibiting justice and punishments in the netherworld. Unlike the Ghost City whose temples were mostly restored according to historical resources found in official records, the Divine Palace was newly constructed and entirely financed by investors. Tourists have to pay an extra entrance fee if they want to visit it. It is more like a Disneyesque amusement park than a religious site, though it has some similarities with the Ghost City since both place

¹² Although the official title is the Nether World and Divine Palace 鬼國神宮, local people refer it as the Divine Palace for short, 神宮.

require entrance tickets.

The popularity of the Divine Palace peaked in the 1990s when the new construction attracted novelty seeking tourists. People experienced the scary underworld through acoustic and visual effects, which made it even more popular than the Ghost City. All punishments and tortures were portrayed according to descriptions found in ancient tales. Models of Judges, Ghost Guards with scary facial expressions and various tortures of bodies were on show. The scenes have been instigating a controversy, often easily branded as “superstition” by news reporters since ghosts and bloody tortures obviously deviated from the mainstream state ideology of atheism (JDFT 2006).



Photograph 2.12. Robots in the Divine Palace

The above picture shows an exhibition in the Divine Palace: the body of an evil spirit is ground to pieces by ghost guards. The body is inserted into the stone grinder, which has already been tainted with red color by “blood”. In the background, a judge is inspecting the punishment. As visitors walk by, infrared detection devices are triggered so that ghost guards start “walking” and the spirits start “screaming” as they suffer physical pain. This place was new to tourists in the early 1990s but soon became

technologically outdated. Robots have very primitive and simple motions, and many now malfunction. Now, though it is still open, the Divine Palace is largely forgotten and is viewed as a case of failure in local tourism investment. Models and stage props found inside are dusty and in need of maintenance. Even during the high tourist season in summer, only a few tourists visit the Divine Palace.

The entity running the site is independent from the Ghost City. Working staff there still charge fees and promote entertainment services even though there are few tourists around. “Monks”¹³ inside the temple are trying to persuade tourists to buy incense and burn them before the Buddha. There are also souvenir shops selling Chinese fortune calendars, and fortune-tellers/shopkeepers are eagerly waiting for customers.

With this introduction to Fengdu, we are ready to examine the controversies over the “superstitious” nature of its temples.

¹³ Temples in the Divine Palace are not registered with the government, but constructed as a tour site. Therefore, people wearing Buddhist robes to look like Buddhist monks are most likely not registered as real Buddhist monks.

Chapter 3: Legitimizing the Ghost City

The Ghost City in Dispute

Although the Ghost City has already developed into a brand name for Fengdu and contributed significantly to the local tourist industry, debates and criticism have never ceased. Since magical practices in the Ghost City were exposed on the “Topics in Focus” (焦點訪談) program on China Central Television (CCTV) in 2006, controversies have dominated the public debate about the Ghost City. To a certain extent, the reporters in the program were advocates for the orthodox ideology. According to the documentary, religious beliefs and magic practices in Fengdu were crossing the boundary between orthodoxy and superstition. The program’s comments were very critical of practices in Fengdu’s Ghost City, containing frequent denunciations of superstition. Moreover, representing the state power, reporters even censured local government for excessive indulgence in superstitious and illegal practices (JDFT 2006):

Not only are superstitious beliefs and practices such as fortune-telling and physiognomy openly engaged in Fengdu, illegal publications¹⁴ such as superstitious ghost tales and scary, harmful ghost toys are sold to all tourists, including children[...]

Apart from promoting ghosts and gods, is there no other way to preserve traditional culture?

We can see that Fengdu County has not fully grasped the essence of our traditional culture when promoting local tourism. The uncivilized practices in some tour sites have not only affected Fengdu’s image, but also misrepresented the heritage of our excellent traditional culture.

¹⁴ Illegal publications refer to those without ISBN code and not approved by the State Administration of Press and Publication.

As CCTV represents the most orthodox and the most conservative values, and largely serves as the mouthpiece of the state power, it is considered to enjoy indisputable credibility and authority; as a result, the above report has triggered many follow-up reports and comments about the Ghost City. Discussions and regularly updated news about the Ghost City and Fengdu continuously appear in public. Due to the immense influence and highly critical nature of the CCTV report, people whose opinions deviate from this official version can hardly retort against the negative portrayal of the Ghost City.

As introduced in Chapter 1, in the context of China, “religion” only refers to the five institutional religions recognized by the government with any others being regarded as mere “superstitions” (Chapter 1, page 3-4). “Feudal superstition” and “magical belief” are negative terms, which, in the context of China, are described as a belief system going against science and materialism as advocated by the ruling authority (Anagnost 1987: 42). As Anagnost (ibid) notes, “superstition” in China’s official use is categorized into “religious superstition” and “feudal superstition”. The former refers to the five religions officially recognized by the state: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism; despite their legitimacy, party members and cadres are still discouraged from participating in any of them. The latter, “feudal superstition”, refers to the category of folk religions, including “temple cults, magical healing, exorcism, divination, geomancy and the like” (ibid, 43). In this sense, practices such as physiognomy in Fengdu fit the category of “feudal superstition”.

The Ambiguous Use of Wenhua

“Culture”, in a modern anthropological sense, means something shared that can be

acquired and learned and which materializes in forms of symbols (Perry 2003:60). However, the common Chinese translation of “culture” – *wenhua* (文化) – has a broader meaning than its western counterpart. The term of *wenhua* is much more ambiguous: it can mean literate, educated and refers to cultural beings; it also stands for customs, arts, etiquette, religions, and ethnic culture.

In China’s political and administrative system, *wenhua* has an important function. *Wenhua Bu*, the Ministry of Culture, serves as a department under the State Council responsible for cultural policies and activities in the country; this includes managing national museums and monuments, promoting and protecting the arts (visual, folk, theatrical, musical, dance, architectural, literary, cinematographic, and television) at home and abroad, and managing the national archives and regional culture centers.

Obviously, although from an anthropological perspective, culture, religion and ethnicity often overlap, China’s political discourse has nurtured a different understanding and application of these terms. Forms of *wenhua* (culture), *zongjiao* (religion) and *minzu* (ethnicity) often overlap with each other. Except for the just-mentioned Ministry of Culture, the State Council of China also features the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, responsible for the policies and affairs of ethnic minorities, and the State Administration for Religious Affairs, which oversees and regulates any religious affairs and activities.

Therefore, the function-oriented application of *wenhua*, especially in the political discourse, has exercised a broad influence. For example, *wenhua* stands for habits or customs that accord with state ideology and values that are approved of by the authorities. In official discourse, labeling a phenomenon as *wenhua* legitimizes it as a

tool that helps to build Socialist Spiritual Civilization, the socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics¹⁵.

The political usage of *wenhua* has a clear administrative function. Therefore, when people discuss “culture” in Fengdu, especially *wenhua* as talked about by local officials, they refer to its narrow political application – it stresses that a particular culture is legitimate, orthodox, “healthy” and authorized by the state. Therefore, “the culture of the Ghost City”, as created by officials in Fengdu, encompasses the Ghost City and the artifacts found within it in its entirety, including historical relics, religious elements, temple buildings, tourist industry, temple festivals, folk tales, deities and ghosts.

“The Culture of the Ghost City”

As already mentioned above, in China’s administrative discourse, *wenhua* and *zongjiao* perform different functions. *Guicheng Wenhua* (鬼城文化), literally meaning “the culture of the Ghost City”, is a term frequently used by local officials today. Surprisingly, this concept never appeared when the restoration began in 1980.

Mr. Liu is the chair person who oversaw the reconstruction of the Ghost City from 1980 to 1995. He was a former official in Fengdu County Government, and was appointed to manage the reconstruction and promotion of the Ghost City. He is a key figure who has witnessed the development of the tourist industry.

According to Mr. Liu, the restoration of the Ghost City has transformed ancient temple remnants into profitable tourist sites, but the religious significance and cultural values received very little attention when restoration just began shortly after the Reforms

¹⁵ In this part, I have concentrated on the use of *wenhua* in the official discourse, in which circumstance it represents orthodoxy and legitimacy. But *wenhua* is widely used in other contexts outside the political realm and the specific meaning may change in different contexts.

had been launched. At that time, although economic development had already emerged as the central theme in China, the legacy of the Cultural Revolution could still be felt, resulting in topics about culture rarely being seen. The same was true for religion; as a category easily associated with superstition and feudal vestiges, it is equally undesired.

Although *wenhua* was not used as a concept during the initial Ghost City restoration, it has over the years gradually been integrated into the branding of the Ghost City. In 2003, Fengdu County Tourism Administration was established as a part of the county government, working on developmental plans for tour sites.

Mr. Kang, the contemporary acting director of Fengdu County Tourism Administration, participated in many discussions and decision-making processes in the local tourist industry. As a key figure in the local tourist industry, Mr. Kang's name frequently appears in news reports on Fengdu Ghost City. He often uses *wenhua* to respond to any challenges directed at the Ghost City, and always trying to clarify the legitimacy of the Ghost City and retort any criticism.

I became acquainted with him when I served in the 2009 temple festival. Unlike his predecessors who worked on the Ghost City and were only concerned about economic development, current officials came up with a new and different term, "the culture of the Ghost City," to legitimize the site.

Mr. Kang is in his 40's and looked like many men in the region, short but tough. As I sat in front of his desk, I could see the reflection of the large bookshelf facing him in his glasses. According to other informants, Mr. Kang was considered successful and happy: he had a good position, an admirable social status, and a happy family – his wife was also working in the local government and their daughter was just about to enter

college. Coincidentally, his daughter, Miss Kang, was my colleague in the temple festival.

Grassroots officials in China are often accused of being arrogant and lawless and beyond control of the central government, a state of affairs, which is quite accurately described in a Chinese idiom “Heaven is high and the Emperor is far away (天高皇帝遠)”. Thus, I am very careful when dealing with grassroots officials. However, Mr. Kang has experience in dealing with news reporters, so he is very patient during the interview and provided lot of information about the Ghost City.

“Promoting Righteousness”

According to Mr. Kang, “The Culture of Ghosts” originated from *wu* (巫), shamanism. However, he was reluctant to talk about shamanism and cautious about the term “ghost”. He sophisticatedly avoided religious terms and clarified “the culture of the Ghost City” as historical relics found on Mount Ming. Therefore, promoting “the culture of the Ghost City” is about preserving local history and culture, something that should receive the unconditional support of the government.

Admittedly, the Ghost City does have certain relations with “ghosts” originating from *wu*, shamans. According to Mr. Kang, most criticism misinterpreted the historical value and meaning of the Ghost City. In fact, he tried to emphasize that there were many ancient pieces of architecture and cultural relics preserved on Mount Ming, then showing evidence to prove its value:

The Ghost City is not only being criticized. You see in this magazine, Fengdu is ranked sixth in the top ten most beautiful ancient cities. You’re from Hong Kong, right? There are people from Hong Kong who give support, too. A TV channel in Hong Kong has made a program about the Ghost City, which explains its meaning and value and calls for its preservation.

Mr. Kang further explained:

We cannot talk about the culture of ghosts, (because) it has its origin in *wu* (巫), shamanism.

As for the Culture of the Ghost City, it is about Mount Ming and the netherworld. But what does this mean to us? The Ghost City was built according to people's imagination of the netherworld over thousands of years, and it has grown and been enriched a great deal over time.

In my opinion, the Culture of the Ghost City is showing the juridical and official systems in the netherworld, which are all similar to the juridical systems of our world. You see, in the Ghost City, there is a Land Deity who governs the land, Fortune Gods who govern money, and Medical Gods who care for people's health. Moreover, in the Ghost City, there are guards and judges with magical powers who maintain security and justice in the netherworld. All the structures and systems in netherworld are exactly the same as what we see in our world.

So, what is the essence of tortures and punishments in the Ghost City? –Promoting righteousness. If people deviate from moral values, or commit sins, they are going to be tortured in the netherworld. In ancient tales, deities who governed the netherworld, kept the record of all behaviors in people's life, then gave different judgments based on different deeds. Following this logic, people get *lunhui*, transmigration: evil people are punished in the netherworld; only those with good merits could pass all tests in the Ghost City, and then get the chance for the next life as human being.

Therefore, in the current Ghost City, visitors are taught in traditional disciplines and moral values, as they see from ancient tales that people who once did evil and immoral deeds were tortured in the 18-levels of the netherworld, and tourists will be reminded of the fact that justice will be done in another world.

According to Mr. Kang, criticism usually misinterpreted the Ghost City as a place governed by superstition and ghosts. I continued to ask why people still criticized the Ghost City both in media and online discussions. Not allowing me to finish the question, Mr. Kang began to answer:

Most netizens are lacking *suzhi* (素質)¹⁶. They don't know what is going on in Fengdu. Of course, I believe most of them have never even been here or taken a look themselves. From the complaints we have received, tourists are concerned more about the service. To tell the truth, we haven't received any complaints about the Culture of the Ghost City.

¹⁶ *Suzhi* (素質) is usually glossed as “quality”, and has become central to PRC dynamics of governance. Reference to *suzhi* justifies social and political hierarchies of all sorts, with those of “high” quality gaining more income, power and status than the “low”. In this context, lacking *suzhi* equals to lacking education and cultivation.

Right after this, he stressed that Fengdu Ghost City has been visited by many state leaders who gave supportive comments. In Mr. Kang's opinion, comments by state leaders are much more substantial than those by people without official identity. So he used Wei Jianxing, the former secretary of CCP Central Disciplinary Committee, to add credit to the Ghost City. According to Mr. Kang, Wei Jianxing regarded the culture of the Ghost City as an educational base "for constructing a clean and honest administration".

Giving further explanation, Mr. Kang continued to shape his narrative of "the culture of the Ghost City" based on moral values; he claimed that even the bloody scenes of punishments being shown served as a warning sign to remind people to obey moral rules:

In the Ghost City, tourists can experience different punishments for different crimes in the 18-level Netherworld. If you cheat in business or if you are not filial to your parents, you will be severely punished in the netherworld. You see Qin Hui 秦檜 is in the Torture Chamber because he betrayed our national hero Yue Fei 岳飛. Only when you commit this immoral behavior, will you get punished. The Ghost City tells people, only good people can transmigrate after death; for others, there will be the Fire Ocean and Sword Mountain waiting for them.

Then Mr. Kang became a little bit emotional:

The Ghost City has been passed down from our predecessors to our generation; it is our legacy. If we really demolish it or change its name, we will be criminals. The Ghost City is a part of the folk culture of our country, it is our responsibility to protect and promote it, especially as the awareness about culture increases and more and more people are concerned about it. Frankly speaking, we cannot be held responsible for history and our ancestors: the history and the Culture of the Ghost City should be preserved. How can we abandon or forget it?

Do you remember that the Dragon-Boat Festival (端午節) has been registered as intangible cultural heritage with UNESCO by South Korea? But we all know Qu Yuan (屈原) is Chinese!

Mr. Kang spoke so fast and with such a clear mind that he gave me the feeling that he

might have experienced responding to questions like that many times before. After South Korea officially registered the Gangneung Danoje Festival with UNESCO as a masterpiece of human tradition and intangible cultural heritage in 2005, many Chinese were furious because they thought the festival had Chinese origins and existed to commemorate the poet Qu Yuan (340 BCE - 278 BCE). Both the Gangneung Danoje Festival in South Korea and the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival are held on the same date, on May 5th of the lunar calendar. This event provoked a nationwide discussion about cultural preservation in China. In 2006, the Ministry of Culture announced a project named “national intangible culture heritage” through a nationwide selection of masterpieces; later on, all administrations started to work on the collection and protection of cultural heritage with the support of the central government.

Under such circumstances, Fengdu Temple Festival was listed as “Folk Customs” and inscribed on the provincial intangible cultural heritage list by Chongqing Municipal Government (2007[80]). Since then on, officials in Fengdu have started to work on the promotion of the temple festival; but the religious essence of the temple festival is largely neglected in official representations. Introducing local cultural tourism, different wordings often reflect different opinions. Officials prefer to use “culture” or “cultural heritage” to showcase the Ghost City and the temple festival as “culture” legitimized their existence, which means that they are recognized in the political discourse. However, regardless of these efforts, the image of Fengdu in public media is still closely connected with popular religion: criticism often focused on artifacts found in the Ghost City that is related to “feudal superstitious” (Han Fudong, 2006), and appears as “uncivilized” (JDFT 2006).

In the official categorization, altars and practices relate to ghosts or shamans never belonged to the function-oriented category of “culture”. Therefore, the pragmatic solution to avoid criticisms is to use *wenhua* to replace terms such as “ghosts”.

In ancient China, tortures and punishments to souls (people after death) were also about regulating moral values and behavior in the living world. Practices of *baoying* (報應), an integral part of traditional Chinese values, were believed to be performed after death. Nowadays in Fengdu, performances of traditional values have been widely used as part of a modern discourse of culture, also with the aim of moral education. Therefore, the promotion of the official terminology of “culture” managed to realize its legitimacy while simultaneously completely ignoring its religious origin.

New Symbols of Fengdu: from Ghost to Divinity

By defining “the culture of the Ghost City”, Fengdu officials created a cultural narrative to make the Ghost City concord with the orthodox ideology. Apart from the theoretical efforts, practical measures were also taken to dissociate “the culture of the Ghost City” with the negative image of ghosts.

Since the Ghost City was the alias of Fengdu city for a long time, the city was mainly known to many people by being associated with Fengdu’s many places and features related to ghosts. To avoid the negative image of ghosts, a new brand of Fengdu was introduced in 2001 with a new title for the temple festival, “the Hometown of China’s Divine Comedy” (中國神曲之鄉). Ironically, tourists and local people could not figure out what the *Divine Comedy* stood for because only few people had heard the name Dante. Although *Divine Comedy*’s content fit the journey to the netherworld in Fengdu, not many people could fully grasp the allusion.

Not only was Fengdu's name changed to make the city appear in a more positive light, the city symbol of Fengdu was also changed to a pottery bird, replacing the original Ghost Head.



Photograph 3.1. The Ghost Head standing in Fengdu before 2003



Photograph 3.2. The Fairy Bird of Ba

Before the relocation, the city symbol was a ghost head towering on a smoke-stack-like tower high above the dock, welcoming guests and tourists to the Ghost

City. However, the ghost head was not relocated to the new city, but abandoned. Instead, current county officials took a historical relic— a pottery bird of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 AD – 220 AD) as the new symbol. The pottery bird was excavated in Fengdu in 2001 during the salvage excavation of the Reservoir Region. It caught public attention soon after its excavation for its special posture and unique charm.



Photograph 3.3. A screenshot taken from CCTV.com; the presenter was introducing the pottery bird to audiences at a concert at the 2009 Temple Festival

Although its official name was “Bird Shaped Pottery of Eastern Han Dynasty”¹⁷, it was better known as “Fairy Bird of Ba” (巴渝神鳥), given by Bao Xuding, Mayor of Chongqing Municipality (1999 – 2002), which was exhibited in the Three Gorges Museum (Chongqing) as the best-known relic from antiquity. Through its name, its importance was emphasized as a symbol of ancient Ba culture and of the new municipality of Chongqing, which was founded in 1997. It was named after Ba (巴) and Yu (渝), both abbreviations of Chongqing Municipality, and also considered the most precious piece in the museum’s collection. The Pottery Bird was not only a symbol of Fengdu, but also used for representing Chongqing Municipality. Miniature reproductions

¹⁷ The official introduction refers to its webpage, <http://www.3gmuseum.cn/info/89-1.htm> (available till May 2010).

were often sold as gifts in formal occasions, representing Chongqing.

However, quiet changes did not forestall questions about the city symbol. No hearings or announcements were made about the city symbol before and after the relocation process. After all residents had been moved to the new city, people gradually noticed many modern sculptures on the streets, but the Ghost Head was never seen. Questions about the city symbol and requests about reinstalling it were raised in government meetings. For Fengdu people, if there was something that could truly symbolize the Ghost City, it would be the Ghost Head. However, suggestions were all ignored. As a delegate in the local people's congress, Mr. Kang has been involved in many discussions about city planning. In response to why the Ghost Head was abandoned in the new city of Fengdu, he said, "It might not have fitted the new city image. Our new city is a model city for migrants, for the living people." His words and many other decision makers' explanations all have hidden meanings: the Ghost Head was for the Ghost City, for the netherworld and for the imagined world of the dead, it no longer suited the newly-constructed city for the modern living people.

Promoting the Ghost City

Since "the culture of the Ghost City" was created for tourism and as a tool for legitimizing the temples' existence, the temple festival, the most important local event, served as a golden chance to further promote local tourism. Previous temple festivals featured singing and dance performances; even pop singers would be invited to Fengdu to give a performance. In 2009, this local event embraced other activities and festivals, which were supposed to be an important regional or national event, so abundant financial support from sponsors – the Chongqing Municipal Government and National

Tourism Administration – was generated.

A team from CCTV-3 was hired to prepare the opening ceremony. The entire show, including a national-level opening performance, cost over 2 million *yuan* and ignited a controversy because it was regarded as an unreasonable investment for a poverty-stricken county such as Fengdu. Famous celebrities from the entertainment industry were invited to attend and perform and the whole event was broadcast on CCTV, which was a strategically clever move: more tourists and people were attracted to the event since many famous national pop singers performed; and also, since the performance was shown on CCTV-3, audiences across the whole country had the chance to learn more about Fengdu and its tourist sites.

Pop stars certainly contributed to the popularity of the temple festival. People in their teens and twenties, were attracted to the performance. My host family and informants all invited friends and relatives from nearby regions for the temple festival, and for the concert especially. It not only promoted tourist sites in Fengdu, but also provided a chance to spread the official branding of the culture of Fengdu, in which moral education was highlighted, and religious contents largely neglected.

Ms. Dong Qing, the nationally famous TV presenter, was at the concert, introducing Fengdu to the audience and TV viewers. She mentioned a lot about the Ghost City, and highlighted the theme of “Righteousness makes harmony” (唯善呈和), which is inscribed in a stone tablet in the Ghost City. During the whole concert, Ms. Dong Qing constantly emphasized the Ghost City and its value on moral education, and images of the Ghost City were frequently shown on the big screen.

Another Version of Local Culture

Although Fengdu officials used *wenhua* as a disguise for religious elements in the Ghost City, most of other informants did not discuss local culture in interviews and casual talks, since “culture” was an abstract concept far away from their daily life. However, there was one informant who shared his understanding of local culture.

I met Teacher Huang on campus of Fengdu High School. My friend introduced him to me as “the most respectable teacher in this school”. People with degrees of higher education are rare in Fengdu. It thus did not surprise me that people who knew Teacher Huang would always mention that he had a M.A. degree from a teacher’s college in downtown Chongqing city. Usually, the local high school recruited college graduates with bachelor degrees from nearby teacher’s colleges and only very few master graduates from cities would go to remote areas such as Fengdu.

Our talk went well since we shared the same background of having majored in Chinese literature; “culture” became the key topic of our conversations and his perceptions provided a local intellectual’s thinking. He dismissed the notion of the Ghost City being a part of local culture, but mentioned an ancient hero from two thousand years ago to emphasize moral merits and related him to the local history. He was outspoken and quite disappointed about the current materialism (物質主義), which my other informants all cared about. He believed that mammonism cultivated dishonest merchants offering fake goods, such as Sanlu toxic milk powder. All these social problems, in his opinion, were a resulted of the lack of “spirits” and merits:

You can see that the CCP government is cheating us all the time. My master’s thesis was about literature works in the Anti-Japanese War (WWII). You know, during that time, Chongqing was the wartime capital of the Republic of China. When I was doing my Master’s research in Chongqing, I found data and

documents revealing the real history, not the history provided by textbooks that were edited by CCP.

His frank words and liberal outlook surprised me. Obviously, he knew that I could understand him when he criticized the social chaos that the state had caused in a tiny town such as Fengdu. He seemed to have high expectations of alumna of Peking University, as many past literati and intellectuals fostered social movements such as the May 4th and June 4th movements. I was sure that he had read Lu Xun and his critical accounts of society and the government in the 1920s, using his pen as a dagger to attack the ruling officials. Therefore, according to Teacher Huang, “culture” was something following orthodox values and merits, namely Confucius ideologies:

About local culture, you know, General Ba Manzi (巴蔓子), his spirit has already disappeared today. But General Ba is our ancestor. His spirit has nurtured local people, but now no one follows the traditional values. He was loyal and full of courage, willing to sacrifice for the nation. I’m so sad that nowadays, people have no sense for moral value and honesty. Culture has been lost and nobody cares.

Teacher Huang admired Ba Manzi¹⁸ as a hero. Although he talked little about the Ghost City, I thanked him for sharing his understanding of the local culture. To Teacher Huang, the Ghost City was not the core of the local culture at all.

Coincidentally, teacher Huang’s perception of local culture was quite similar to the official usage of *wenhua* as it excluded popular religion, deities and ghosts. Rather, in his perspective, local culture was about values of morality, loyalty, and following Confucian ideology:

¹⁸ Ba Manzi was a native, born in today’s Chongqing region, and a general of the Ba Kingdom in the Warring States Period (475 – 221 BC). In a war, Ba Manzi sacrificed his life to defend his homeland, and his great loyalty even impressed his enemies. For the reasons given above, he was respected as the most famous historical figure in Chongqing.

Confucius said, “The subjects on which the Master did not talk, were extraordinary things: feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings (The Analects 2006: 40).”

As Confucian ideology has long been the orthodox and ruling ideology of China, to a much greater extent than any religion, Confucius’ conservative attitude towards “spiritual beings” has consistently affected Chinese intellectuals such as teacher Huang. Therefore in teacher Huang’s category, the Ghost City cannot be considered as “local culture”. The only difference lies in the interpretation of the Ghost City: as an important base of the local tourist industry, the Ghost City was promoted by the local government as “local culture”.

Conclusion

Wenhua and *zongjiao* serve different functions in China’s administrative system, despite their definitional boundaries being indistinct. In the Ghost City, religious phenomena and practices were often connected with superstition and evoked criticism; thus *wenhua* functioned as the legitimizing label, which accorded with the orthodox ideology and indicated approval and recognition from the authorities – that was why the official discourse of “the culture of the Ghost City” was formulated and taken into effect. The Ghost City was subsequently showcased in an alternative way and any “religious” terms were eliminated. The value of the Ghost City, such as “righteousness makes harmony”, was sophisticatedly presented for moral education and justice, and was highlighted to cover its religious essence.

As has been long noted, the authority of religious ritual has usually held absolute power in Chinese society. Many methods that had the power to define culture, to control state and society, to associate with different social groups, and to achieve social stability

have long been used and proven effective in China's history (Duara 1988; Watson 1985). Therefore, using alternative ways to legitimize religious symbols, deities and ghosts were by no means inventions by Fengdu officials. In Watson's analysis (1985) about standardizing the Empress of Heaven, Tian Hou, the central government a legitimized pirates' god by making her orthodox and thereby strengthening their governance. As he noted, the court gave titles to the pirates' god in the hope that people would worship the "approved" god and accept the approved culture. Symbolically, pilgrims did not only worship the deity of Tian Hou, but also subjected themselves to the state power.

In Duara's research on the Guandi cult in northern China, organizing religious cults was usually the same process of struggling for leadership and the extension of state power (1988). As he noted, religious life always went hand in hand with politics as the state power penetrated different levels of religious cults, as his analysis of Guandi cult and Watson's research on Tian Hou cult show.

As Sally Merry mentioned in an article about culture and rights, culture was "historically produced", and developed and changed through actions and struggle (2001: 39 - 41). By her insights, the invention of "the culture of the Ghost City" was a mixture nurtured under the condition of the particular meaning of *wenhua* and the sensitive topics of religion, superstition and "ghosts". It seemed that *wenhua* was the only way to protect the local tourist industry and the only weapon to fight against criticism and accusations of superstition. The positive effect was that the upper levels of authority showed their support and recognition in local temple festivals. To sum up, the invention of "local culture" and its application in the development of the Ghost City suggested how politics mattered and intervened in legitimizing religious sites, especially how local

officials justified themselves and tried with enormous efforts to standardize and transform religious memories for the sake of tourism, and ultimately, economic interests.

“The Culture of the Ghost City” seemed to be a major concern only amongst local officials, using *wenhua* to legitimize the development of local tourism. The case of Teacher Huang was highlighted because his interpretation of culture neither fitted the official notion nor the local folktales. His version of culture reflected insights from perspectives of an orthodox Confucian intellectual. However, Teacher Huang’s educational background did not really guarantee him a comfortable and well-off life, but a spiritual struggle at the grassroots-level of Fengdu society, which could be regarded as a miniature of China in transition.

Chapter 4: Fengdu Temple Festival 2009

Fengdu Incense Festival in the Past

Festival Origins and the Incense Festival Before 1949

According to Wei Huilin (1935:31), religious festivals date back to the early Ming Dynasty when the Emperor of the Netherworld began to be worshipped in Fengdu. Wei Huilin's ethnography describes the 1935 "Fengdu Incense Festival" (鄧都香會; 燒香會), which lasted from early January to Mid-February according the lunar calendar, and which was attended by pilgrims mainly coming from neighboring regions, namely the eastern Sichuan area.

As shown in Wei's account, the number of pilgrims in 1935 was lower than before due to the war between the Sichuan warlords and the Red Army during the Long March led by the Communist Party. In 1935, the local police department required registration for pilgrims for the first time, as a result the total number of participants was 3,519, of which less than one third were local pilgrims and all others were from neighboring regions within the eastern Sichuan area. According to Wei, the estimated number of pilgrims was only one tenth compared to during the peak years.

At the time, the most popular destination for pilgrimages was the Temple of the Emperor of the Netherworld, at which pilgrims presented offerings to the Emperor and the Empress of the Netherworld. There were many groups of pilgrims to worship the Empress, claiming that they were the Empress's relatives coming from her home region.

According to folktales, the Empress was born and raised in a rich family in eastern Sichuan. Pilgrims worshipped the Empress on Feb. 8th of the lunar calendar, the date on which the Empress became a deity.

After 1949, the incense festival was no longer held; temples were demolished or transformed for other uses during the Culture Revolution; Buddhist monks and Daoist priests were forced to live a secular life; and other religious specialists such as shamans were forced to quit their careers. Since the 1980s, however, temples on Mount Ming have been gradually restored for tourism and a few Buddhist monks took up their previous careers. In 1988, the temple festival was revived by the local government under a new name: “the Ghost City Temple Festival” (鬼城廟會).

The revived temple festival differed from the traditional incense festival in several ways with the most distinctive difference being the time period, their names and their putative origins. Firstly, as for the dates of the temple festival, the incense festival before 1949 all followed the lunar calendar: the 8th of the first lunar month was said to be the birthday of the Emperor of the Netherworld, and 8th of the second lunar month was the date that the Empress of the Netherworld became a deity (Wei 1935:31).

However, since 1988 there has not been a regular date for the temple festival and it has followed either the lunar or the solar calendar. At first, in 1988 and 1989, it was held on 3rd day of the third month of the lunar calendar; later, it was held on the 5th of the fourth lunar month. From 2003 onwards, it has been held in late September or early October according to the solar calendar. In addition, since 2001, the festival has been held biennially instead of annually. There was no incentive to hold the temple festival following the lunar system, and the festival has been scheduled according to the solar

calendar to coincide with public holidays, because they bring more potential tourists, such as during the “Golden Week”¹⁹ vacation. In 2009, the festival was scheduled in June to coincide with the Chongqing Three Gorges International Tourism Festival. On the whole, the new temple festival has little in common with the incense festival. Current sponsors who are also decision makers in the local government are more interested in choosing public holidays during which more tourists will be able to attend.

Secondly, the main theme of the revived temple festival is different from the incense festival. The latter was about religious cults and the majority of participants were pilgrims and religious masters; the former, on the other hand, serve as carnival-like events, aiming to promote traditional local culture and attract tourists with no Buddhist monks or Daoist priests participating. Moreover, the function of the event has also totally changed. Currently, seeing it as a crucial part of “Culture as the Stage for Economic Performances”²⁰, sponsors of the event are predominantly concerned about sourcing investment avenues and therefore most VIPs invited are entrepreneurs and investors, which is definitely different compared to the original focus on regional cults. Nowadays, the ability to attract investment is an important indicator by which to evaluate local officials’ political performance, and thus, all activities are, without any exception, about economic development.

Even the putative origins are very different: in the past, every temple or shrine had its own specific dates for rituals in the incense festival and pilgrims visited them to worship and make offerings. The current temple festival, however, features only one

¹⁹ Golden Week (黄金周) in the Mainland is the name given to two annual 7-day national holidays that have been implemented since 2000: the “Spring Festival (or Lunar New Year) Golden Week” begins in January or February, and the “National Day Golden Week” surrounding October 1st.

²⁰ “Culture as the Stage for Economic Performances” means “文化搭臺，經濟唱戲”，a strategy used by some local governments utilizing cultural activities and influence to promote economic benefits.

ritual, which is the wedding of the Emperor and Empress of the Netherworld and which is highlighted as the essential core of the temple festival. Other activities such as the wedding celebration parade are part of this. According to a piece of local folklore I heard from a tour guide, the Emperor fell in love with his future wife at first sight during a temple festival. In an incense festival, the Emperor was observing pilgrims and then noticed a young lady, who accompanied her mother on the pilgrimage. This lady was Lu Ying (盧瑛) from Dazhu County, Sichuan Province. After Lu went back to Dazhu, the Emperor proposed to her through a matchmaker, a honeybee, in her dream and Miss Lu accepted. At midnight, Miss Lu's parents saw her saying farewell in their dreams and then the next morning found their daughter had disappeared. Later on, the old couple went to Fengdu and found that the Empress' statue looked exactly like their daughter.

An alternative version of this story is found in Wei Huilin's account (Wei, 1935:31): here the Empress of the Netherworld was named Miss Li and was said to come from Chongqing city, but the narrative patterns and plots are the same. No matter where the Empress of the Netherworld came from or what surname she had, the stories reveal that pilgrims came from many different places. Also, these stories connect the temples in Fengdu with the pilgrims from Dazhu, Chongqing and other regions. In sum, this piece of folklore was passed down and has become the core of current temple festival, even though it used to only be important in one part of the incense festival in 1935.

Names and Organization

The temple festival was revived in 1988 by the Fengdu County Government; it was co-sponsored by local culture and tourism departments and its main aim was to

promote local culture and attract tourists. From 1993 onwards, generating business and investment opportunities became another goal of the temple festival.

Since 2001, the temple festival has had a variety of different names such as “the Ghost City Temple Festival” and “The Divine Comedy Folk Culture Festival”. I noticed the latter title in 2002 when I was passing through Fengdu and felt curious about why the *Divine Comedy* would ever come to Fengdu. The connection between Dante’s work and the Ghost City did not immediately make sense to me; nor did it to most Chinese tourists.

The 2009 Temple Festival was special in that it had three names designated by three different administrative and organizing bodies. Initially, the event was named “the 14th Chongqing Three Gorges International Tourism Festival” in order to emphasize the sponsorship of the Chongqing Municipal Government and the National Tourism Department. Then another two titles for the same event appeared: “the 5th Folk Culture Festival” and “the 16th Ghost City Temple Festival”.

In official documents, on entrance tickets, as well as on work permits, “the 14th Chongqing Three Gorges International Tourism Festival” was used; most governmental departments also used this as opposed to “the temple festival”. Ironically, however, most people only knew the event by “temple festival” instead of “Folk Culture Festival”.

Like the previous incense festival, the new temple festival was originally held in the county seat where temples, residential resettlements and markets used to be located. But after the relocation of the county seat in 2003, the venue of the temple festival was moved to the new town across the Yangtze River, far from the temples in the Ghost City. No Buddhists or Daoist priests were invited to the new temple festival, and neither was

it in any way associated with religion. Since these temples were registered as scenic spots that were part of public institutions instead of officially authorized religious units, neither Buddhist monks nor abbots were appointed to temples in the old Ghost City.

The Fengdu Temple Festival in 2009

As aforementioned, the new temple festival did not revive the traditional incense festival; however, religious contents were still preserved, particularly in the form of paying tribute to deities such as the Emperor and Empress of the Netherworld. The temple festival, though it lost its original religious features, was still an important event for both people from Fengdu and tourists. As the temple festival has been revived for over twenty years now, it has become quite well-known, even outside the Fengdu area. The 2009 temple festival was held as a state-level festival and supported by the Municipal Government and the National Tourism Administration; it was the first time that Fengdu County held such a high-end event.

Entertaining high expectations, preparations started months in advance; activities included the improvement of local infrastructure and public facilities as well as landscaping. Though they had only been paved a few years ago, the main roads in town were newly paved with bitumen; red lanterns were put up along the streets to create a festive atmosphere. Landscaping was carried out with unprecedented efforts, including a lot of cleaning and decoration work. As the new town had only been in use since 2003, many of the newly planted trees had not grown big and tall. Therefore, for a greener environment, transplanting taller and more fully-grown trees into the new town was taken as a quick measure, which happened at huge costs and with rumors about corruption in the process.

The 2009 Temple Festival lasted for two days and included a public parade performance on both days, a concert performance directed by CCTV-3, photograph exhibitions of the migrants' new lives, and a closing ceremony. Meanwhile, performances and celebrations were also held in the Ghost City, the park across the river. At the doorway of the Ghost City, performances of folk operas, such as Zhong Kui (鐘馗) Catching Ghosts²¹, were held at the entrance gate to welcome VIP guests and tourists.



Photograph 4.1. An exhibition of recent accomplishments titled “Leaders’ Care and Encouragement”, showed the municipal party secretaries’ and mayors’ visits to Fengdu

To welcome guests to the festival and create a good image of Fengdu, various changes were made before the festival. An announcement from the local Public Security Department addressing social order and security was issued, and a stronger police force was sent on duty to patrol the streets. For residents in Fengdu, it was not only this increased police presence but also the new traffic regulations during the festival that

²¹ Zhong Kui is a figure of Chinese mythology, traditionally regarded as a vanquisher of ghosts and evil beings.

served as an indicator that this was a special event and many people seemed to find it hard to get used to this new situation. Traffic lights did not use to be heeded by either pedestrians or vehicles; people used to just cross streets whenever they wanted to. During the festival, however, temporary traffic coordinators were hired to supervise every crossing and remind pedestrians to walk only at the green light showed.

The Parade: Memories of Fengdu

Although titled “temple festival”, this event only featured very few religious rituals; no organized pilgrimage groups showed up, and neither did any Daoist priests or Buddhist monks participate in the activities. However, people in Fengdu still entertained high expectations towards the temple festival; the progress of the preparations was commonly and readily discussed among local people. In the 1935 Incense Festival, 2/3 of the participants were non-local pilgrims (Wei 1935:33); in 2009, pilgrims were replaced by tourists and guests. In fact, many local people took the temple festival as an opportunity to organize a reunion for family or friends, inviting friends and relatives from nearby regions to join the “spectacular local event”; also, it was regarded as a rare opportunity to get to see a high-end performance such as the concert presented by CCTV-3. However, not everyone was able to enjoy the live show at the stadium for seats were limited.

Compared with the not-so-accessible concert, the public parade was free of charge and enjoyed incredibly high popularity. Before the parade began, people had in advance occupied roadside space along the parade route. Deities from Mount Ming (the Ghost City) and the juridical system of the netherworld were all represented in the parade. The marching floats carrying statues of deities slowly moved along the road.

Meanwhile, countless people, anxious for every spectacle, were coming from all directions, lining the streets to witness the parade with their own eyes.

Emperor of the Netherworld and His Wedding

The wedding celebration was the most popular event during the new temple festival, and something everyone could participate in. Deities would be on display, going around the town, including all officials from the netherworld, the Emperor and Empress of the Netherworld, and ghost guards. The parade showcased the proud history and accomplishments of Fengdu folk culture. Although the chief deities and the Emperor and Empress of the Netherworld never really “made it” to the new county seat, they were warmly invited to join the temple festival. Their wedding was emphasized as a core part of the parade to represent local folk culture.

The actors were standing high up on a “dragon boat” – a festooned vehicle decorated as a dragon boat that was slowly moved along the road, surrounded by dancing fairies holding the Chinese character 囍 (usually used in weddings which literally means double happiness). Even though Fengdu people today rarely go on regular pilgrimage to visit the deities in the Ghost City, they still showed great enthusiasm for the presence of “the ruler of Fengdu” in ancient tales. Actors and actresses playing fairies and deities were standing on the dragon boat, greeting everyone.



Photograph 4.2. People taking photos at the scene of the Wedding Celebration

The next performance was the Parade of the City God (城隍巡游), accompanied by guards of the netherworld such as the Ox-head Guard and the Horse-face Guard (牛頭馬面) as well as the judges. In the performance, the City God (城隍) was leading the Black and White Wuchang (黑白無常)²² through the new town. The actors of the Black Wuchang were dancing with chain-like iron instruments, which were believed to have been used for chaining up evil souls; actors of the White Wuchang were dancing with umbrellas and fans.

²² Black and White Wuchang (黑白無常) are ghost guards in netherworld. Black Wuchang has an angry or sad face and leads people to Netherworld. White Wuchang has a happy face and leads people to Heaven. Black and White Wuchang also have other names but their work in Netherworld is the same, namely Generals of Fan and Xie (范謝將軍), Seventh and Eighth Lords (七爺八爺).



Photograph 4.3. The performance of the Black and White Wuchang

Fengdu in History and the New Cultural Symbolism

The performances titled “Fengdu in History” and “The Ba State²³” was supposed to present local history. Bare-chest warriors with bare feet symbolized the ancient Ba culture and Ba people from over two thousand years ago. With a flag showing the Chinese character “Ba”(巴) and a head of the white tiger, the totem of the ancient Ba people, warrior actors were dancing with blades and lances.

A statue of the Divine Bird of Ba (巴渝神鳥) beautifully decorated with colorful feathers followed. Its wings could even flutter in slow motion. The Divine Bird of Ba, as introduced in Chapter 3, is currently used as a new cultural symbol of Fengdu and highly promoted by the Fengdu government.

People’s Participation

The carnivalesque scenes of the parade performance successfully attracted many

²³ Ba (巴) was an ancient state in eastern Sichuan. Its original capital was Zhi (Fuling), Chongqing. Ba was conquered by Qin in 316 BCE. Warfare played an important role in Ba society. Ba people were famous for their war songs and dances. Their warriors were often employed as mercenaries by other states, and most of the unearthed relics from Ba graves have been weapons.

local people. Since the organizers have gradually turned the temple festival into an event without any religious rituals, most festival-goers attended the temple festival and other activities not directly for religious reasons. They went to the opening ceremony because some well-known celebrities performed there, and they joined the parade tour simply to join in the big event.

During the temple festival I neither had the time nor the chance to interview local people due to my commitment as a volunteer, but discussions about the temple festival were quite regular among my fellow volunteer colleagues and my informants, which I interviewed before and after the temple festival.

Aunt Qian, in her 30's, felt that the temple festival in the old town was more “*re nao*” (熱鬧)²⁴ and was a real grand event:

You cannot imagine the scale of such a grand occasion in the past: the whole town was involved (萬人空巷) – people were all on streets to watch the parade of deities; no one stayed at home. Maybe entertainment opportunities were quite scarce back then and so the temple festival was an important one for us.

Ms. Wang, a primary school teacher, one of the 1980s generations, also recalled the temple festival during her childhood: “The atmosphere is different now (in the new county seat).” She always compared the temple festival in the old town with those in the new town. Buildings could be made as grand as possible, people could be relocated, even the temple festival itself could be relocated to the new town; but the “atmosphere” could hardly be reproduced.

Among my colleagues, there were a few teenagers who had just finished the National College Entrance Examination. Once I worked with Xiao Chen to lead a team

²⁴ *Re nao* (熱鬧), literally means hot and noisy, usually refers to a lively and happy festival.

of guests. He was famous in our team, not just because of his young age, but also for his knowledge and experience in serving guests at temple festival. He participated in the last temple festival in 2007 when he was in high school and he had also worked as a tour guide. He often shared his working experience with us in his beautiful standard Mandarin – most local people used the Southwestern dialect in daily life and their Mandarin was poor. Since the Fengdu accent is strongly looked down upon by most city people²⁵, workers in the temple festival were required to speak Mandarin at work even though most could not speak it well.

To my surprise, Xiao Chen spoke Mandarin better than anyone else. Later he told us that his dream was to be a TV presenter. His answer to the question why he worked for the temple festival twice was simple and direct:

It is an unforgettable experiences [...] working for the temple festival. As a high school student, I learnt a lot from my work here. It is an interesting event, which is meaningful to me, for I have made so many new friends. Also, I have learnt a lot from this work.

Once during break time, my colleague told me that Xiao Chen argued with a professional tour guide over the tour commentary. Since he was once trained as a part-time professional, he sometimes interrupted the professional tour guides, and corrected their mistakes in representing local folktales, which inevitably embarrassed these tour guides in the presences of VIP guests. Therefore, my teammate used a rather mocking expression saying that Xiao Chen was “too serious”.

Xiao Chen did not deny having this incident when I checked with him, but he did not tell me all the details. This incident did not affect his work anyway. He summarized

²⁵ The local Fengdu accent is often made fun of by urban dwellers in Chongqing downtown; many migrant workers doing labor-intensive work are from Fengdu and nearby areas, and people with Fengdu accent are disrespected by city dwellers as illiterate, uneducated and socially inferior.

his experience of serving at the temple festival as follows:

I'm proud of my hometown Fengdu – its cultural resources, its long history and its accomplishments in building the new town. I've learned about our history and culture when I worked as a volunteer. It was a golden chance for me to know about my beautiful hometown.

As a high school student who was much younger than my other colleagues, Xiao Chen's case might not be typical. But he already had the extraordinary experience of volunteering at two temple festivals and his case reveals the younger generation's understanding of the temple festival and it shows that there are still young students who are interested in temple festival and gain something from training and work experience at the festival.

As for my other colleagues, the opening ceremony was the most attractive activity. Since I worked with volunteers who were in their twenties and thirties, we often discussed the ceremony when we prepared for the temple festival – even though the show did not directly relate to our duty. The famous female host from CCTV, pop singers, and the content of the performance were frequent topics. Most of my colleagues were junior staff from *danwei* within “the system”. The non-paid volunteers would be given a free ticket for just two days of voluntary work and they happily accepted this arrangement. The evening before the temple festival, a team leader even argued fiercely with the volunteer officer over issues concerning the concert tickets, threatening that the whole team would quit if there was no guarantee of seats with a good view.

Different from local participants who enjoy the lively scenes, guests and tourists also share their opinions to the temple festival. In the parade celebration, A VIP guest even required me to transfer all VIP guests to a quiet and safe place for the parade was “too chaotic and overcrowded” – which could be seen as evidence that the event was a

successful local festival and had gained great popularity.

Since religious beliefs and rituals are no longer the major reasons for people to participate in this event, there are other explanations to account for the popularity of the government-staged temple festival. Although it seemed absurd to hold a temple festival in a new town in which no temples were found, the reminiscences of its religious past resonated in people's mind. Thus, the temple festival, although it was not created for this purpose, managed to restore a sense of the past for those who had been forced to migrate to the new city. The festival was a significant part of people's shared memories and recollections of the old town, which still echoes in the new town and is remembered by local people today. Apart from local events such as the temple festival, we also observe some aspects of people's daily lives that show that they still cherish certain past memories. For example, as mentioned previously, the residential community I once stayed with is named Sanhuan Road in the new town, yet migrants still refer to it by its former name, Yaque Street.

Conclusion

Comparing the 2009 temple festival to the 1935 incense festival, the revived temple festival was no longer about pilgrimage and popular religious rituals. The current sponsor, the local government, was careful in trying to evade any connection with "religion" or "superstition", which was a difficult undertaking as these terms came up consistently when developing tourism in the Ghost City. The terms "tourism" and "culture" appeared frequently in connection with the event, but its religious origins and religious rituals were deliberately neglected. Over the past decades, festival-goers have changed their attitudes: pilgrims in the 1930s came to Fengdu for religious reasons;

today's festival-goers, however, have been attracted by its extraordinary entertainment activities.

Unlike the traditional incense festival that was organized by local temples, the new temple festival was staged by the local government and their main purpose was the promotion of tourism, not the revival of popular religion. The new temple festival had no connection with temples or religious associations. In fact, it was a display of the local authority's absolute power at the regional level: every procedure was arranged to advocate tourism, including the showcasing of cultural symbols, local history, cultural resources, and deities in the parade, and also including the performances of pop celebrities at the opening ceremony. Although no temples were found within the range of the new county seat, deities and supernatural beings in the Ghost City were still invited to join the parade and received a great welcome from local festival-goers.

As has been discussed in Chapter 3, having infiltrated every facet of the event, the whole organization of a religious festival underlay the power of leadership: the temple festival was monopolized by the government authorities. In spite of its official background and political contents, local people and festival-goers were the major actors in this event. More importantly, the temple festival served as a symbol of remembrance for people in the new town of Fengdu, as it became a daily topic among people in Fengdu. Local people would invite relatives and friends to come along, or try to get hold of free tickets, or just simply came to watch the new image of Fengdu that has been specially created for the festival. The atmosphere of excitement has reached its climax during the public parade – it was a carnival with countless local people jamming the streets. Festival-goers entertained their own understanding and meaning of the temple

festival that were different from the organizers'; the festival has become crucial in resonating social memories of the past.

Chapter 5: People's Religious Life in Current Fengdu

Tourism and Its Influence

Tour Guides

After the relocation, many businessmen working at scenic spots in the Ghost City gradually moved to the new city because of the decline of local tourism and inconvenient transportation from the new county seat to the Ghost City. For tour guides, however, the situation was more complicated: it was not that easy for them to start a new career as they had very specialized knowledge of the Ghost City, including local history, popular religion and taboos, as well as of how to successfully market religious commodities and services.

Summer was a busiest time for tour guides, as most people would be traveling. Usually, there were around five or six cruise ships ashore at the Mingshan dock every day, but not every ship had full capacity. When there were fewer tourists, tour guides worked in rotation. Each tour would last two hours, including the trip from the pier to the mountain and the tour in the Ghost City.

Ms. Qian, the hostess of the family I stayed with in Fengdu, once worked in the largest local tour agency as a tour guide and later as a manager. She brought me to her work place and showed me around the Ghost City. With her help, I became acquainted with some tour guides and learnt about the tour arrangements.

Tour guides were interpreters of local culture. Their interpretations in and of the Ghost City were similar to oracles that decode messages of deities for the mortals.

However, as cultural interpreters, they needed to convince the tourists of their devotion to popular religion by profound knowledge of popular religion and local history. Without tour guides, there would not be a unique “Ghost City” but a site of temples which could be found anywhere. Tour guides led people into an imaginary world of Hell, and then encouraged them to donate money for the purpose of “accumulating merit” in this holy place. In fact, no one has ever experienced a tour in Netherworld and no one can imagine what it would be like. Therefore, tour guides often emphasized that one’s behavior would always be inspected by guards and deities in Netherworld, and there were taboos which outsiders did not know. By telling these stories, tour guides tried to convince visitors that they were the only professionals who could lead them through the Ghost City properly.

Taboos were constantly mentioned during the tour. Tourists had to also obey certain rules in the Ghost City otherwise they would encounter misfortune in the future – in Chinese folklore, deities in the Ghost City controlled people’s life span: your life span could be lengthened as a result of virtuous behavior but could also be shortened as a result of depravity. Symbolically, tourists could experience these judgments by passing different tests in the Ghost City. They were told that they could all easily pass as long as they listened to the tour guides and refrained from violating taboos.

Taboos in the Ghost City were not shown in the official introduction of tour sites, but were important contents in the tour guides’ interpretation to make the visit memorable. Many of these taboos may be recently invented to entertain tourists, and looked like the passing on of traditions. I will give some examples here. The first taboo was at the Naihe Bridge (奈河橋), the first pass at which people would receive

judgments in Netherworld. In Chinese folktales, here, evil spirits would fall into the bloody river and never transmigrate. So tour guides would show tourists a safe way to pass the bridge; female tourists had to cross the bridge by using steps of odd numbers and walk along the right side; male tourists were supposed to finish this journey by using steps of even numbers along the left side. Couples were encouraged to cross the bridge together so that they could remain their relationship in the afterlife.

After passing the Naihe Bridge, tourists came to the Ghost Pass (鬼門關). Mini statues of ghosts carried the signpost of the Ghostly Gate Pass. Then tour guides would remind people to watch their steps, because by touching the threshold, one would become one of the ghosts.

The next “test” was Huangquan Road (黃泉路) where tourists should never reply to the calling of their names. Ghosts wandering along Huangquan Road would call people’s names and if anyone reacted, this person’s spirit would be trapped by the ghosts and be lost on the way to the final judgment and miss the chance for transmigration.

At the end of the Huangquan Road, there was the Farewell Tower (望鄉臺). This tower was erected for ghosts to take a look at the living world and release their nostalgia for their families. According to local folklore, since ghosts never had the chance to see their families again, they cried day after day and the Emperor of Netherworld was quite annoyed by these cries of misery, but being kind and understanding, the Emperor of Netherworld agreed to build a tower for ghosts from where they can have the last look at their families before their final judgments.

During my observation of a tour group, the tour guide said to her tourists, “You’d better not enter the tower; it’s not for the living”. She said this to reinforce the taboo.

Right after she had said those words, I noticed two tourists just coming out from the tower, and tourists in her group started laughing at the scene. One tourist curiously asked: “Why were people in there?” The tour guide seemed a little bit embarrassed and replied, “They might not have known about the taboo.”

After finishing more than a half of the trip, tour guides finally led tourists into the Temple of the Emperor of Netherworld (天子殿), the destination of all spirits after death, where the final judgment was passed. The grand shrine was open to all, including the gate pass, a shrine for deities of lower rank who were responsible for catching spirits, a court with statues of higher rank deities such as judges and military leaders, a grand statue of the Emperor of the Netherworld, and a smaller back hall for the Empress of the Netherworld.

The temple is the most significant cultural relic in Fengdu, not only for it is an ancient architecture re-decorated in the Qing Dynasty, but also for its religious importance – it is a shrine for worshipping the Emperor of the Netherworld who governs the underworld and people’s life span. In pre-modern China, pilgrims came here for the Fengdu Travel Permit (酆都路引) and to visit their deceased family members. The Travel Permit represented the “passport” to Fengdu, endorsed by seals of the Fengdu City God (城隍), the Emperor of the Netherworld and the Fengdu County Mayor, to authorize a “visa” to Fengdu’s netherworld. Usually, people burnt the Travel Permit when a family member passed away, to make sure the spirit is on the right way to Fengdu.



Photograph 5.1. A Staff Showing Fengdu Travel Permit in the Temple for the Emperor of the Netherworld

The Travel Permit is still for sale in the temple, and staff there sell a different kind of paper for the living, called Blessed Paper for Longevity (福壽文書). It cost 5 *yuan* each when I began my field research in June 2009. However, when larger numbers of tourists began coming to Fengdu after mid-June of the same year, the price was raised to 10 *yuan*. Also, the back hall for the Empress of the Netherworld was closed for conducting private rituals at extra cost. Singing and fragments of words could be heard outside the hall. Tourists were encouraged to buy incense to worship the Emperor and burn paper for the family. Tour guides usually asked tourists to pay and complete these rituals for the good of the whole family:

This is the only shrine for the Emperor of the Netherworld! This is the only holy place you can buy these papers! It's the best chance for you to do good deeds! No matter whether you want to pray for the dead family members, or plea for blessings for the living ones, these papers can satisfy your needs. We (Chinese) are filial sons and daughters, now is the opportunity to do something [...]

These persuasive remarks were usually very effective, as many tourists would then go and buy blessing papers and incense to worship the Emperor of the Netherworld. Ten *yuan* for a set of the paper and incense was not expensive; however, profit could become incredibly higher if tourists were successfully persuaded to participate in religious rituals inside the back hall. The back hall, where the Empress of the Netherworld was placed, was open only to tourists buying these papers as they were regarded as potential consumers of rituals.

The first few times I went to the Ghost City, I did not get the chance to enter the back hall to see what was going on there. Then, out of pure curiosity, I asked my informant, Ms. Luo, a former tour guide and now director of the tour spot, about what was going on in the back hall. She gave me a mysterious smile and referred to the Ghost City by its nickname: “a gold mine”. This nickname stems from the fact that all staff employed inside the Ghost City relied on its profit to obtain their wages and bonuses. After I visited the back hall and saw how much it charged, another informant, Ms. Zhao, admitted that tour guides also received a share in these profits.

My investigation has shown that ironically, while usually the government accuses religious professionals of cheating the public, it is the local government, through its tourism company, that cheats tourists by pretending to offer religious services but not having religious personnel on hand to actually carry them out.

In a trip to the Ghost City for investigation, after I bought a set of Fengdu Travel Permits, a female staff led me to the back hall. I was directly led to the counter while two pilgrims were kneeling in front of a statue surrounded by two people reciting scriptures in Daoist cassocks; it was hard to recognize people’s faces in the dancing

flame. Then the staff began to introduce their ritual package to me, which included blessings from Buddhist masters and rituals for deceased family members. A female staff showed me a photo of monks in cassocks, trying to prove that it was Buddhist masters who were professional that conducted the rituals. But as far as I knew, there were no monks officially registered in any temple of the Ghost City because the local government had never authorized any religious activities in the Ghost City.

Records of names and prices were shown to me as the staff tried to convince me that filial tourists would want to pay money. I was wondering how much they charge, right after I saw the last two orders which they provided as a reference, someone had generously paid 1,400 *yuan* and the other had paid 1,600 *yuan*. Immediately, I sort of terminated my exploration there by saying, “it’s too expensive”, because I never carried so much cash with me in Fengdu. I was not sure whether it was a trick, nor did I have a chance to enquire about the price. But undoubtedly, from my perspective, their conspicuous display of the two orders implied their expected price. As I decided not to make the deal, consequently, I was asked to leave right after it was clear that there was no money to be made: “you can go out now and burn the paper outside”, a staff said in an unpleasant voice.

Ms. Zhao, a tour guide in her 20’s, openly admitted that a considerable part of her income depended on pilgrims’ consumption of religious services in the Ghost City. This was the reason why tour guides worked so hard as marketers, trying to promote the blessed papers and religious services in the Ghost City.

Tour guides were important for the tourism economy, but it did not mean that money was the only concern. Stories about the efficacy of deities were always told by

tour guides in order to convince tourists that it was worth paying the money. In most cases, tour guides would show both enthusiasm for and expertise in religious beliefs when working, and this stemmed from of their own economic interests. However, tour guides also respected deities and had religious beliefs when they were not working. Unlike tourists, they seldom donated money or bought any religious artifacts in the Ghost City, because they knew exactly how income from tourists would be distributed. I will take examples of my informants, Ms. Luo and Ms. Wang, to demonstrate their religious life.

Ms. Luo was very close to me during my fieldwork. On different occasions she shared her opinions about her belief with me: “I believe in the ‘religion of moneyism’ (錢教). And so does everyone else: we’re chasing fortune.” As a divorced woman taking care of her 8 year-old daughter on her own, she experienced how tough life could be in a small city. However, she tried her best to educate her daughter. For example, she paid the expensive tuition for a private piano course and bought expensive imported candies for her child. Although she always emphasized the importance of money and talked little about belief, her religious belief was quite apparent when we were touring through the Ghost City. Once when we were in the temple for the Manjuri Buddha, she devotedly kowtowed to the statue and prayed. Not allowing me to ask any questions, she whispered before the statue, showing her respect: “I believe in these (deities)... You know, I have a daughter, and I hope she can be blessed by Buddha and perform better in school.” Working in the Ghost City for over 15 years, she had a lot of stories about the efficacy of deities, which made her believe in these deities and ask for protection. Her belief in the deities represents her hope for the future.

At the time, a staff member tried to sell incense to her, but she did not buy any. As a member of staff, Ms. Luo knew that income from tourist consumption would be used for salaries rather than for pleasing deities. As a former tour guide, she knew how money was made through the so-called donations to deities and consumption of religious services. At that scene, she only reluctantly admitted her religious beliefs, and she was trying to avoid mentioning names of deities or ghosts and gods while we were in the temple of Manjuri Buddha.

Ms. Qian, my hostess working in a tour agency, ran her own construction company with her husband. Every time when she came back from work, she and her colleagues played mahjong at home. She admitted being obsessed with playing mahjong, the most popular entertainment activity in this area. She had a mahjong table in the living room so that they could play at home and did not need to go to the expensive teahouse and pay for the games. Also, she quite enjoyed online shopping, and her monthly order at Taobao.com²⁶ was on average 2,000 *yuan*. She did not actually live on her income as a tour guide, which was less than 2,000 per month. In her leisure time, she also helped her husband with the business.

Although I never saw her worshipping deities in the Ghost City, she told me that she usually went to the Wantian Shrine (萬天宮) during Chinese New Year and also invited a mini-sculpture of a deity to their home. In the living room, a statue of Maitreya Buddha (彌勒菩薩) was placed on the top of a glass shelf with the background in red and a small incense burner below, directly facing the automatic mahjong table. The table was covered with a wooden board and a red tablecloth, and was used as a dining table,

²⁶ A popular shopping website in China

too. When people played mahjong, the small sculpture, which was facing the table, could hopefully bring in fortune.



Photograph 5.2. Ms. Qian's Living Room

Communal Temples

Before the relocation, the Yansheng Temple was relocated in a place neighboring the Ghost City, at the foot of Mount Ming and close to local residential communities. However, the temple was never considered to be relocated to the new town, but was left on the northern bank, and eventually moved afar to a wild valley without residential compounds, a place where mini buses were reluctant to go.

The new county seat is constructed on the southern riverside, and the Wantian Shrine is managed by a suburban community near the Long River Bridge. As indicated on the map below, the Wantian Shrine is temporarily located in a corner of the Yangtze embankment, in fact engaging in religious activities without a license. Although there are no clergies inside, it became more popular for its convenient location for people

living in the urban area.



Map 5. The Yansheng Temple and Wantian Shrine in Fengdu

The Yansheng Temple, literally meaning “Longevity Hall”, is the best-known temple and the only Buddhist center in Fengdu. The Yansheng Temple belongs to a Zen Buddhist Monastery, with the official title as the Yansheng Zen Temple (延生禅院).

After the liberation of Fengdu in December 1949, temples were shut down and clergies were forced to resume a secular life. The Yansheng Temple once had 13 registered monks in residence, but they were all forced to live as lay people. In 1958, the Yansheng Temple was enlisted as a Key Protected Area at the provincial level but was still affected by the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s, monks were forced to leave and all religious practices were ceased. In the 1980s, people gradually restored halls, statues of the Buddha, and facilities such as accommodation and vegetarian canteens.

The Yansheng Temple is situated at the foot of Mount Ming, and all the temples on the mountain were fenced for the restoration work of the Ghost City in the 1980s.

The Yansheng Temple, however, was not included in the Ghost City, but authorized as the only Buddhist center in Fengdu in 1987. The Abbot was appointed and religious rituals were revived in 1988 (CQZX, 2009:37-38).

Before the resettlement project began, the Yansheng Temple was not only preferred by local pilgrims, but also visited by pilgrims and tourists who had come to visit the Ghost City. Local pilgrims and Buddhist believers regularly participate in Buddhist rituals in the main hall, whereas tourists usually only stop for a short time for a glimpse on their way to the pier or the Ghost City.

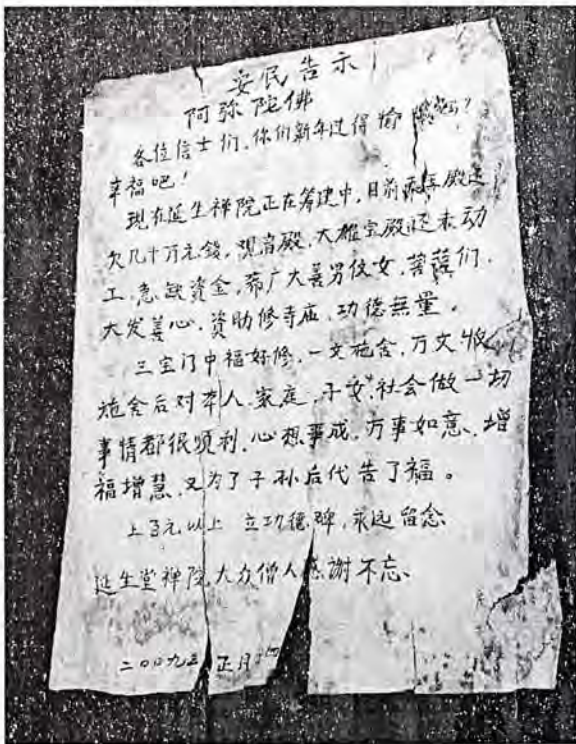
The temple was listed for relocation in 1998. However, while all industrial units, public institutions and residential settlements were designated to be rebuilt on the southern bank of the Yangtze River, the temple was left on the northern bank to be moved to a higher location. Ever since, the temple has been in financial difficulties and the relocation is still unfinished. According to “Talk to the County Mayor” program²⁷ on a public forum financed by the Fengdu County Government, the county mayor stated that the Yansheng temple was the only religious site that was left unfinished in the Reservoir area; and the compensation for the relocation was less than 500,000 *yuan* in 1998, while the ongoing restoration has already cost more than 6 million *yuan* (as of September, 2009).

From 2003, the temple in the old town was being demolished and moved to a barren piece of land beside a mountain valley, which distanced it even further from most local pilgrims. While its past area was flooded by the river, monks and staff rebuilt the temple in its new location. Since the relocation process was regarded as a political

²⁷ http://bbs.gcfid.cn/htm_data/54/0909/37035.html

accomplishment, negotiations on the land or compensation were discouraged by the local government, and viewed as having obstructive impacts. Therefore, it was not surprising that the restoration of the Yansheng Temple happened at a very slow pace.

Securing funding is a serious problem and a full restoration requires millions. On a poster on the gate of the temple it is stated that the temple is still in urgent need of money for restoration, and any benefactors donating 100 *yuan* or more would get their names carved in the monuments.



5.3. A notice in the Yansheng Temple

Notice

Amitabha Buddha

Dear Buddhist believers:

Wish you a happy New Year!

The Yansheng Temple is currently still under construction: for the construction of the Heavenly Guardian Hall we are still short of several hundred thousand *yuan* while the construction of the Guanyin Hall and the Main Hall has not even started yet. We are facing a shortage of funding and sincerely hope you can help the temple with your benevolence, and your kindness will be meritorious.

You will get blessed in the Three Treasures²⁸ and your kind support will be rewarded. You will have a smooth career, a harmonious family, and you are doing something meaningful to society.

We will establish tablets to remember your merits for every donation of over 100 *yuan*.

All members in the Yansheng Temple
2009 January 4

I did not meet any pilgrims during my visit, but saw some long incense sticks standing on the incense shelf, still burning; pilgrim(s) might have just left before my arrival. The gatekeeper told me that there were about ten pilgrims per day. During religious festivals, however, the temple could attract hundreds of local pilgrims. Although I missed the incense gathering on June 19th, the gatekeeper willingly shared his memory of that day:

We prepared 40 tables of vegetarian meals and each table held 8 people. However, it was not enough. We will prepare 60 tables on September 19th (lunar calendar).

He thus optimistically estimated the number of pilgrims for the next gathering to be 480. Donations from pilgrims were important income to support the reconstruction project, as the lack of funding was a crucial problem.

It is noticeable that pilgrims still go to this temple and join in religious activities, regardless of the inconvenient transportation. The gatekeeper was not exaggerating, as other informants confirmed its popularity as well. Manager Liang, the director of a local tour agency, recommended the Yansheng Temple to me when I was at his office inside the Ghost City. He encouraged me to pay a visit there and recommended its vegetarian food, asserting that it was authentic and deserved my attention.

I thus decided to pick a day for a more thorough observation of the temple after

²⁸ The Three Treasures in Buddhism refer to Buddha, Dhamma (Dharma), and Sangha.

my first preliminary visit. June 19th would be an important day in the Buddhist calendar, as it was the date Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy) attained enlightenment. So it seemed a good day to go and clerks at the temple also invited me there on that date. Data from my next visits will be introduced in later sections, as an unexpected crash has made it very personal to the whole ethnography.

The Wantian Shrine

The Wantian Shrine (萬天宮) is situated in the outskirts of Fengdu's new county seat. It is run by a local peasant community and has gradually gained in popularity since 2003 when the new county seat was built. The temple charges an entrance fee of 2 *yuan* for each person. Entrance fees and donations are used for maintenance and also as subsidies for community members, who are all farmers living nearby. This shrine is not registered in the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, so in contrast to the Yansheng Temple, which receives financial support from the government, there is no governmental funding available for the shrine.



Photograph 5.4. the Wantian Shrine

The Wantian Shrine is situated on the levee of the Yangtze River, right where the Long River merges into the Yangtze River. Lying upon the hillside, the shrine can only be accessed from the town via a twisting and difficult pathway: pilgrims need to go through alleys in the hillside and cross a maize field.

As a communal temple in a peasant community without governmental or public funding, the Wantian Shrine is not home to resplendent architecture or effulgent statues of deities. In fact, the shrine has a half-open space, covered by a canopy, only supported by irregularly piled bricks. Statues of deities are made of clay; some are gilded, while others are just grey. Most of them are so simple that their facial expressions are hard to make out. Statues are all placed inside the hall, including Buddhist and Daoist deities, i.e. the Goddess of Mercy (觀音), Guandi (關帝) and other deities with symbols of Eight Diagrams. Tudi (土地) is located next to the doorway, surrounded by offerings.

Ms. Qian told me she went there for Chinese New Year. Also, another informant of mine, Ms. Hu, a helper in a small restaurant, stated that she would go to the Wantian Shrine whenever she needed help from divinities.

“Why do local people go to the Ghost City?”

Although the Ghost City is advertised as a tour site for pilgrims and tourists who want a longer life, it is not popular among local people. According to interviews with my local informants, the Ghost City was not their first choice for religious activities; it was not even a choice for pilgrimages. The commercialization of the Ghost City has made local people turn to other temples and drawn a distinct line between the commercialized temple sites in the Ghost City and other temples. The Ghost City has not only lost its attraction for local religious people, but also become undesirable for local people as a

scenic park with its expensive entrance fee.

Mr. Chang was a Fengdu native, and the driver for the Fengdu People's Congress. The first time we met for dinner, I told him why I was interested in Fengdu and then asked about his impressions of the Ghost City. He replied, "[The Ghost City is] vapid. I seldom go there." The last time he visited the Ghost City was for public affairs, when his work unit received guests he took them to the Ghost City for a tour. Except for these business trips, he never went there for himself.

Mr. Yan, near his 40's, was an office assistant in the local people's congress. Since his job was delivering newspapers and documentary files, it was a relatively easy job. Usually he was quite unoccupied and started his daily reading in the morning. When the day of the temple festival was approaching, I asked him whether he'd gone to the temple festival. He paused from his daily reading, and gazed at me. He talked slowly in a dry voice, showing a smile on his face:

I went to the parade, but won't go to the concert this year...I don't like these singers (in the 2009 temple festival). People at my age don't fancy them. They (the organizers) invited some famous old singers before, but this year, in my opinion, only Chen Rui...was ok. I have no idea about the other singers.

I asked more about his ideas and comments on the parade. He answered:

It is hard to say [...] I go to the parade at every temple festival; for me, I have no idea about its meaning. I just go there and watch.

Mr. Yan participated in every temple festival in spite of its "meaninglessness". However, he seldom went to the temple sites in the Ghost City.

Alternative Origins of the Ghost City

Scholarly research is interested in Fengdu's religious significance, especially for Daoism. Research in Daoist cosmology often pays attention to the landscape of the

Ghost City, especially the setting of temples and shrines (Chenivesse 1997). According to official data and academic literature, investigations all take a religious perspective. However, local people like to offer a different account of the origins of the Ghost City.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, my next visit to the Yansheng Temple was in August, which was June the 19th according to the lunar calendar; however, halfway there, my journey was interrupted by a traffic accident which made me stay in hospital for a whole day. According to my schedule, I planned to visit the Yansheng Temple for the religious festival and to see an informant. As I was on a minibus to the northern bank of the Yangtze River with my friend Ms. Wang, a truck hit the rear part of the minibus. As we were unfortunately sitting in the last row, we were both shaken violently by the crash. Shortly after that, an ambulance came and took us to a local hospital.

After some medical examinations, including X-rays, I turned out to be fine except for some bruises. But Ms. Wang needed further examinations so I stayed to keep her company. She stayed in hospital for observation, and shared a ward with another patient. To pass time, I engaged in conversations with the other patient's daughter, a middle-aged woman. She was taking care of her elderly mother who had serious asthma and suffered from coughing. People in the ward had nothing else to do but share their own analysis of the accident.

The troublemaker, a young driver at 22, kept on apologizing to us in a non-local accent, embarrassedly standing in the ward. He sometimes sighed about his unfortunate experience in Fengdu by saying "we were caught by ghosts in the Ghost City", which meant, "We encountered troubles in Fengdu". However, the woman taking care of her mother did not agree with his impression of Fengdu. In her version of how the Ghost

City came into being, the hero was not a ghost but a human being:

Why is Fengdu called the Ghost City? It is not because of any ghosts or netherworld in Fengdu. In the past, people in Fengdu were cut off from cities and most of them were too poor to afford decent clothing. When outsiders came, especially people from cities like Chongqing, their impression of Fengdu was that of people in rags, like beggars and hungry ghosts. That's how we acquired our nickname as the Ghost City.

After I showed some interest in her talk and asked about the source, she paused a little bit and then continued with some follow-up evidence:

The old people told me this tale: there is a man dressing like a beggar in Haike Community. He wears dirty clothes while carrying living chickens or ducks on his hands. Every time when international tourists pass by, he rushes to them and lets them take photos. Then he asks for money from these foreigners.

This is how he makes a living. People like him really ruin Fengdu's image. Foreigner would think we're still poor and would starve to death.

Weller (1985) stated that ghosts in Taiwan were used as interpretations of the "social marginal" such as bandits and beggars, and the structural interpretation was used for the system of ghosts, ancestors and gods. However, although Fengdu people did not provide such a system, images of ghosts were still related to beggars as the "social marginal" to emphasize the fact that Fengdu was once a remote and marginal place compared to the city. Therefore, this interpretation of the Ghost City, although ignored by the official records, reveals the diversified understanding of Fengdu, ghosts and the relationship between the two.

Local Pilgrims

Local pilgrim refers to those Fengdu people who go on pilgrimages to their communal temples, as opposed to non-local pilgrims heading for the Ghost City. The distinction between Fengdu people and pilgrims or tourists from outside regions is clear.

Communal temples, not temples in the Ghost City, are favored by pilgrims from local areas, with only a small number coming from nearby regions.

Indeed, the concept of “local pilgrim” emerged to me as a clear category after the traffic accident happened. When policemen investigated the case, the bus driver carefully recalled everything he could. It was an awful accident for me, but our bus driver kept easing the tensions by continuously retelling the story to everyone in the ward:

At the gate of the People’s Court, I stopped as you were waving your hands. You asked me whether I was going to Mount Ming. I replied that my route would end at Mingshan Town and I would not go to the Ghost City. I remember you asked twice to make sure. At that moment, I was a little bit surprised and wondered why local people wanted to visit the Ghost City. You know, Fengdu is not a big city, and as a bus driver I can recognize most people’s faces. Obviously I know you (my friend and me). Right after you got on the bus; I was going along the road and then got hit by the truck.

On that day, I planned to visit an informant living near the Ghost City and the Yansheng Temple – both sites were on the opposite side of the river where the transportation was inconvenient. After I said my destination was the Ghost City, the driver thought we were going there for pilgrimage. As he refused to go to the Ghost City, but said he was going only to the Mingshan Town, midway there, I planned take the minibus to Mingshan Town then we would take motorcycles to our destination.

From what he said above, the bus driver thought the Ghost City was not a proper and authentic pilgrimage site for the local people. Moreover, When Ms. Wang’s mother, Ms. Hu, came to the hospital, she couldn’t help but angrily complain about us wanting to visit the Ghost City, as Ms’ Wang told her mother we were heading for the Ghost City when the accident occurred:

Doesn't the new town have a temple? Can't you worship deities at Miaozi (where the Wantian Shrine is located)? Why did you bother going across the river?

As Ms. Wang told her mother that the purpose of our trip was to “cross the Yangtze” to “burn incense at the religious festival”, her mother still couldn't understand Ms. Wang's senseless plans. In Ms. Hu's opinion, if her daughter had not gone on this tour across the Yangtze to attend the religious festival, she wouldn't have been caught in the accident and got injured.

During the last month of my fieldwork, I moved in with Ms. Hu's family. She had only received primary school education and worked as an assistant in a restaurant; she never understood my research in Fengdu. Therefore, from her perspective, the Wantian Shrine, the nearest temple in the new county seat and only a short walk or minibus trip for 1 *yuan* away, was a reasonable choice for a pilgrimage.

Although most local people seldom visit the Ghost City, it does not mean they do not have any religious belief. Among my informants, not only Ms. Han frequently pays visits to the new built Wantian Shrine, Ms. Qian, Ms. Wang and Mr. Hong also visit the Wantian Shrine when they need mediums' help. Since this temple is close to the new county seat, mediators and fortune-tellers are often waiting for business there.

Spirit Mediums

Due to its geographical convenience, the Wantian Shrine has successfully attracted local pilgrims. In fact, not only pilgrims go there, shamans and spirit mediums also take a place near the shrine, waiting for people who seek help. Since the Wantian Shrine is situated in a rural area, shamans and spirit mediums usually settle along the sides of the streets leading to the shrine. Seeking help from spirit mediums is a common

practice among my informants, for a variety of services such as exorcising evils, fortune-telling, choosing a date for weddings or funerals, etc. Some spirit mediums enjoy a high reputation for their “accurate” (準) interpretations of the past and the forecasting. In my fieldwork, I only accompanied an informant to a spirit medium for consultation once; but stories of famous others were mentioned a lot during my stay.

Grandma Long

One day, I left the Wantian Shrine onto the main road, tortured by the temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. Feeling thirsty and hot, I went into a grocery store on the roadside for a bottle of icy water. The shopkeeper kindly placed a wooden bench on the street side, and asked me to sit down. She was in her 30’s and spoke with the local accent. From our talk, I got to know that her hometown was Gaozhen town, situated 30 km away from the county seat. After marrying a local man, she had come here to start a small business. Although from my perspective, since she lived there she could be considered a local, but she emphasized “I’m not a local here.”

She seemed sincere in her religious belief, and shared her “miraculous” experience with me:

I know a famous spirit medium, Grandma Long. She is good at translating codes from burned eggs and does fortune telling. Most people here know her well. Her daughter was once a neighbor of mine. One morning, when I was about to go back to my hometown, I met Grandma Long. She looked into my face and kindly suggested, ‘my daughter, don’t go out today.’ And I followed her suggestion.

I showed great interest in this story and continued to ask, “Why did she suggest you to not go out? Was there any reason?” She answered:

She did not clearly explain to me. But you know professionals like her mustn’t reveal the secret. They have their reasons [...] it’s the taboo to tell the truth. She

just indicated that and I chose to believe her. People in this profession cannot tell too much truth.

Unfortunately, according to the shopkeeper, Grandma Long has been suffering from paralysis for years and had to quit her profession.

Water Bowl Augur

Spirit mediums such as fortune-tellers, physiognomists and chiromancers were usually sitting on roadsides near the Wantian Shrine. Among them, one kind of fortune-telling, called Water Bowl Divination (看水碗), was particularly popular. I got to know this form of divination at a dinner with Ms. Wang, her colleagues and Mr. Hong, a private entrepreneur. When we had a discussion, the topic of spirit mediums in Fengdu was brought up. As I showed interest in the matter and this type of divination, others began to introduce me to this Fengdu specialty and mentioned Master Qin, who was the most famous professional of this divination: the spirit medium used a bowl of water, and 7 or 9 ancient copper coins (銅錢). First, fortune-tellers threw the coins into the bowl. Then, the master decoded the divine information according to different patterns that these coins revealed.

Mr. Hong and Master Qin were quite well acquainted with each other (熟人). Mr. Hong also said this divination was “not expensive”. Once he also gave one of his briefcases to Master Qin as a gift, to help Master Qin being more professional in appearance.

I was interested in Master Qin's profession. However, whenever I passed by his office, a simple wooden cabin near the Wantian Shrine, nobody was there and the door was locked. When I asked people about Master Qin on the roadside, they told me that he

was usually only at work when the weather was not hot. The hot weather in Fengdu was unbearable without air-conditioning. There was no electricity in his cabin for it was built on a small patch of wasteland. When I looked into his office through a crack, it was dark inside but I could still see an old wooden chair, red papers and incense on the table.

A Physiognomist

I passed by Wantian Shrine several times but Master Qin never showed up. During another trip to the Wantian Shrine, my friend, Ms. Wang, wanted to consult a spirit medium. Maybe she had some family trouble or work pressure. I knew the physiognomist whose desk was just at the doorway, which enabled him to easily catch attention and business. At first, I asked the price of a service – if it was too expensive, we would turn to others. But the master answered in a sophisticated way, “Just give whatever you like (隨便給點兒).”

Then the master exchanged some casual words with us and asked me to form both my hands into fists. Then, he began to predict the gender of my child by reading the lines of my fists. I was surprised and felt curious because there was no sign I was going to have a baby in the near future. However, he liked to give free favors of this sort probably because these were popular topics among young women.

This master only provided services by reading palms and fists. Ms. Wang was given a talisman, a piece of red paper with characters and symbols. After the physiognomist read these characters following Daoist rituals, he folded and sealed the paper and told my informant to keep it in a purse or under the pillow. At the end, Ms. Wang paid 20 *yuan* for the service, and the master accepted.

Conclusion

In interviews with local people, it has become obvious that Fengdu people have gradually become alienated from the Ghost City, which has been promoted by the local government as a tour site and a symbol of local culture. Tour guides as a special group are representatives of local pilgrims for they are agents mediating between the Ghost City and the local people. On the one hand, people use temple relics and deities for economic purposes by exploiting their cultural and religious capital; on the other hand, when tour guides go for pilgrimages or worship deities, they mostly go to local communal temples rather than temple sites in the Ghost City. Even if they worship deities in the Ghost City out of respect, they do not consider it as a pilgrim site to burn incense and donate money, as they are aware of the commercial essence, as seen in Ms. Luo's case.

While the Ghost City has been highlighted by the local government as a tour site that boost commercial activities, it becomes less favored by Fengdu people as a pilgrimage site. Although communal temples in Fengdu are under construction or simply decorated, people still regularly visit these temples. As for the two communal temples, the Yansheng Temple is popular for its reputation and long history, as well as its official status. As for the Wantian Shrine, regardless of its illegal identity, its popularity is enhanced by the relocation of the old city and the fact that tens of thousands of potential pilgrims have been resettled to the nearby new town.

There are several ways that people practice their religious beliefs. Apart from pilgrimages, people also invite deities to their homes. Also, spirit mediums are still an active part of local life. While people seldom care about the official discourse of local

culture, they maintain their own understandings of how to live their religious life.

Fake religious rituals in the Ghost City have been promoted as commodities, and the charges are expensive, making a profit for the municipally-owned corporation. There are no officially registered Buddhist monks in the Ghost City, nor are there any Daoist priests – the staff are performing as Daoist priests and provide religious service to tourists, or pilgrims. This is how a state-owned enterprise makes profits from tourists by performing rituals in which they do not believe themselves.

Local people seldom go to the Ghost City, but often choose spiritual mediums who practice elsewhere. Some people keep contact with spiritual mediums, such as Mr. Hong who has a friend who specializes in divination. Moreover, mediums' charges are not expensive, and negotiable.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A Rise of Superstition?

At the beginning of this thesis we saw the contradiction between the promotion of the “Ghost City” and atheism. The Ghost City in Fengdu was on the one hand overwhelmed by criticism; it was accused of promoting superstition and of deviating from atheism – the state ideology. On the other hand, during my field research, Fengdu people seldom cared about superstitious elements in the Ghost City and neither were they disturbed by criticism coming from nationwide media. They did not seem to be concerned about the debates over ideology and reserve their own attitude towards their religious beliefs.

If one asks a Fengdu resident how often he/she visits the Ghost City, the answer would most likely to be “seldom” or never. It is no surprise that people rarely go to the Ghost City for it is not a pilgrimage site for the local people: it has become over-commercialized, with entrance fees that are too expensive, and it is too far away from the new county seat.

The only actors behind the controversies and debates were officials in the local government and entrepreneurs who worked together for the development of tourism. The Ghost City and its cultural resources have been utilized for economic development by the local officials since the early years of the Reform period. However, in the whole restoration project and the process of tourism development in the Ghost City, local people had few chances to participate; this has isolated temples that were once popular

communal pilgrimage sites from the people.

The real Fengdu has never been in accordance with images portrayed in the media, which mainly depict it as a place advocating superstition. In actual fact, my informants in Fengdu no longer regard the Ghost City and its deities as a part of their religious life. As the matter is comprehensively covered and discussed in nationwide media, the aim of this thesis is to respond to the criticism and uncover the real story of Fengdu and its people.

Since ancient times, Fengdu has been considered the location of the netherworld. With the help of popular folktales and fiction, its fame was widely known. As ancient masterpieces and popular fiction described the setting of the netherworld in great detail, temples in Fengdu were constructed following these descriptions. The Emperor of the Netherworld was the supreme governor of the netherworld of Fengdu: he might have been derived from a Daoist deity called Fengdu Emperor or the Buddhist Yama or perhaps, his existence can even be regarded as a mixture of both. Although Fengdu has a long history as a Daoist base, before 1949, Fengdu was home to more Buddhist than Daoist temples.

Fengdu owed its importance to the popular belief of transmigration in pre-modern China, by which the existence of the netherworld was honored and deities who governed people's lives and oversaw transmigration were respected and worshipped. The Fengdu Travel Permit was once a necessity in funerals to make sure the deceased would find their way to Fengdu and could successfully transmigrate to a new life. Moreover, Fengdu incense festivals were popular as important regional events, which attracted large numbers of pilgrims who came to the small town to worship and make

offerings to deities in the netherworld before 1949.

When religious beliefs were discouraged and atheism promoted as the atheist orthodox ideology starting in the 1950s, temples in Fengdu were mostly converted for other uses. But after the 1980s, economic development was highlighted as the central goal in China, temples were restored as they could potentially contribute greatly to an increasingly thriving tourist industry, attracting tourists from across the country who would spend money on entrance tickets and other consumer items and who thus substantially contributed economically to local people's lives.

In the Name of Development

As a once famous religious center, Fengdu used to be home to many prominent temples which enjoyed high popularity. Its religious festivals attracted many pilgrims from neighboring regions and before the 1949 liberation, many researchers came here to study and record these spectacular events. Wei's (1935) amazing portrayal of the 1935 Incense Festivals does not only provide a detailed account of prosperous religious practices, but to a great extent, also served as a reference for the reconstruction of the Ghost City in 1980 and the "revival" of the Fengdu Temple Festival in 1988.

The notion of "development" has profoundly changed China over the past 30 years with modernity and development becoming the ultimate concern at all levels of the administrative system. "Development" also became a political task and the guiding principle for officials in Fengdu, an underdeveloped inland area trying to lift itself out of poverty. Therefore, religious resources have been revived in the 1980s: temples were turned into commercial sites emphasizing profits and were soon opened to international tourists.

Except for the tourist industry, all other key industries and enterprises in Fengdu were fatally affected by the dam relocation. After 2005, when the relocation was completed, industrial enterprises began to gradually reawaken but Fengdu still remained underdeveloped, and was listed as a poverty-stricken county on national level.

Promoting Tourism as a Means to Vitalize the County's Economy

As an important site for Three Gorges tourism, the Ghost City has successfully buttressed the tourist industry in Fengdu since the 1980s. This occurred hand in hand with the prioritization of economic development across China. However, the ruthless journey for legitimacy against continuous challenges just began when the Ghost City first opened to tourists.

According to the director of the local tourism department, the Ghost City was regarded as “the soul of the local tourist industry” for it has promoted Fengdu as an important destination for religious tourism. As tourists rushed into the Three Gorges regions before the damming and relocation began, related businesses were also vitalized, which generated income for 1/5 of Fengdu residents. During prime time, shops were densely lining the streets in the small old country seat, selling souvenirs, snacks and food. However, after all residential communities and work units were relocated to the southern riverside, most people who were once employed in the tourist industry quit and sought other business opportunities in the new county seat.

Since the 1980s, the Ghost City also started charging entrance fees and a variety of entertainment activities are created to cater to tourists – all have aided the central goal of generating economic revenue. Religious rituals are offered as package services and enjoyed great popularity. However, as I experienced in my fieldwork, although local

government deliberately dismissed “religion”, staff of the state-owned enterprise were cheating tourists, dressing as Daoist priests and charging high prices for so-called “religious rituals”, which have been discussed in Chapter 5.

While the entire tourist industry is concerned with economic revenue, this industry has been disfavored by critics and local residents. The over-commercialization of the Ghost City completely displaced its original function as a site of communal temples for local people. The Ghost City today is no longer accepted as a pilgrimage site. Despite it successfully attracting tourists, the Ghost City has gradually disappeared from local people’s religious life.

The Wenhua of the Ghost City

Aimed at legitimizing the Ghost City, *wenhua* was used as a label to avoid the label of “superstition”, and the discourse of *wenhua* was utilized for the promotion of the Ghost City. Although in China, ideological controversies are still sensitive, the state ideology is still insisting on atheism as the orthodox value and any religious activities are still under strict surveillance, the emergence of *wenhua* has become a perfect cover for the Ghost City, allowing it to pursue economic interests with religious practices in a shielded atmosphere.

Therefore, the invention of *wenhua* – the official “culture”, was part of a process of legitimization. While religious content and significance were downplayed in promotional campaigns, deities and ghosts were emphasized as local cultural heritage. Interestingly, the application of “culture” did not rise until the preservation of culture has attracted nationwide attention. According to data on the reconstruction of the Ghost City, different interpretations of local culture became a point of reference for the new

generation of local officials that took over from the first generation of officials who were in power in the 1980s just after the Cultural Revolution and who only very reluctantly talked about culture and religion.

“The Culture of the Ghost City”

To legitimize the Ghost City as an authorized site, a cultural discourse has been developed to eliminate any religious implications. Religious terminology, even “ghosts” was deployed to refer to all potentially negative aspects and is thus proscribed in official rhetoric. However, the deliberate negligence of religion was not always effective, especially when statues of deities and ghost guards appeared at temple festivals, attracting tens of thousands of local people. Although official sponsors were always trying to reduce the religious influence, instead over-emphasizing *wenhua* values, the religious origins and the themes of the temple festivals were still accepted by local people.

Although the parade has been criticized as an exhibition of “superstitious elements”, it was the local government, the highest authority that decided to incorporate deities and ghosts into the show. Behind the scene, similar to the Imperial Government of pre-modern China, those who had the absolute power in the local state got the privilege to organize religious rituals and arrange worships.

The Lost Ghost

Since “ghosts” have long been a sensitive topic and often criticized as superstitious symbols in new China, the fame of the Ghost City once became an obstacle for the development of tourism. To work against this negative image, a new name was

invented, “the Hometown of China’s Divine Comedy”, replacing “ghost” with “divine”. However, “China’s Divine Comedy” did not have any roots in Fengdu and most people could not make sense of the name and neither did they understand what *Divine Comedy* was and how it was related to Fengdu. This is another way to construct local culture by dismissing religious terms.

Not only has the name of the Ghost City been changed, but the symbol of Fengdu has also quietly been altered by the local government. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Fengdu’s symbol was once a smiling ghost head, but it was abandoned after the relocation. Instead, a cultural relic named “the Divine Bird of Ba” has been made the cultural symbol of Fengdu since its discovery in 2003. Moreover, most of the new constructions in Fengdu were built for the living people rather than ghosts, and thus failed to represent the Ghost City. The remarkable urban planning of the new modern county seat, however, surprised migrants from the old town. People had to bid farewell to the old town of Fengdu, for the Yangtze River drew a line between the imaginary netherworld and the new county seat of the living. However, the future of tourism development in the Ghost City remained unknown: development plans for a theme park and construction of an “ancient town” are both being considered by the local government.

Popular Religious Practices in Daily Life

Alternative Interpretations of the Ghost City

As the official interpretation of the local culture dominated tourism promotions, people outside Fengdu had hardly any chance to get to know other versions. In fact,

local people rarely started to talk about “culture”; even heritage was seldom considered a proper topic amongst ordinary people. When I first went to Fengdu for fieldwork, it was extremely difficult to initiate a conversation about local culture with informants.

The local culture was spelled out in black and white in introductions to the Ghost City, which tour guides had to take great pains to recite, and it was something that only appeared at the official level, such as in documents and officially recognized exhibitions. Unofficial interpretations of local culture nevertheless continued to exist; they could be found in folktales and alternative accounts of the Ghost City or religious practices. Anthropological perspectives allow us to access the memories of local people, which were not presented in the official version of “authenticity” in Fengdu.

Although each narrative of daily practices is unique, I decide to categorize them under the umbrella of “alternative interpretations”, existing parallel to the officially defined *wenhua*. To provide an understanding of tourism development and popular religion from local people’s perspectives and to compare to the official definition, different versions of people’s knowledge of and about the Ghost City have been presented in Chapter 5.

Despite official culture having taken the absolute lead in public propaganda, popular religion is deeply rooted in local people’s minds and local pilgrims regularly visit those temples that had not been turned into commercial sites for tourism. Moreover, while the Ghost City was believed to originate from Daoism, some local people maintained the view that it was a nickname given by urban people to stress the backwardness and poverty of the local region, a version that is rarely seen in any official records.

Local Pilgrim

To address the debate over “the revival of popular religion” in Fengdu, a major concern of this thesis is to examine people’s religious practices. While in reports about the Ghost City and Fengdu, this area has been portrayed as a symbol of the revitalization of religion, local people’s religious life have rarely been investigated and presented. To demystify the story of popular religion in Fengdu, I use “local pilgrim” to refer to religious practitioners who are Fengdu residents, and who are involuntary migrants from the old to the new town because of the dam project.

The concept of “local pilgrim” is adopted to distinguish between locals and tourists/pilgrims from other regions who are the main visitors to the Ghost City. In this sense, the distinction between local pilgrims and tourists/pilgrims relies on different choices of pilgrimage destinations. In my observations, although the two communal temples are only plainly decorated and situated in geographically inconvenient places, their reputation and popularity are not affected. As aforementioned, the nature of the Ghost City has been transformed from temples into markets for religious services and related businesses, and could thus not be accepted as a genuine pilgrimage site.

Local communal temples, although rarely mentioned by Fengdu officials and are hardly known to tourists, enjoy the local people’s regular visits. For example, regardless of the long distance after the relocation, local pilgrims still poured into the Yansheng Temple during religious festivals; people also chose the Wantian Shrine for its convenient location near the new county seat. In fact, most people only visited temples on special dates such as religious festivals or public holidays (e.g. Chinese New Year); but it was also common for them to invite deity statues from these temples to stay in

their homes. For local people, it is more convenient to worship deities at home and thus offerings were made and incense burnt at home.

Moreover, spirit mediums are another part of people's lives that is often rejected as "superstition" in public and suppressed by the orthodox ideology. However, spirit mediums still exist undercover in Fengdu's religious landscape. Consultations are frequently needed in people's lives and spirit mediums are still known. The fame of spirit mediums depends on their professionalism and "accuracy" and their market relies on clients' interpersonal recommendations. Data on this part was not fully explored due to technical difficulties, but according to my informants, spirit mediums enjoyed popularity and people's respect in Fengdu. Comparing to the fake religious rituals provided in the Ghost City, and to the fake Daoists cheating pilgrims, usually it was the clients that sought the help of spiritual mediums, and they willingly paid for the service. The prices were not expensive, and were acceptable for ordinary people in town.

The dynamics of local popular religion were highlighted by the dilemma of spirit mediums: spiritual consultations were denounced as "superstition" and forbidden in the orthodox discourse, but they exist and are active in the private sphere and continue to be alive on grassroots-level of society.

Although people's religious practices have been heavily influenced by state policies and local development projects, local people are never passively subdued but have maintained their religious beliefs. Through this thesis, I hope to present two stratifications of local society, which seldom interacted with each other with regards to cultural and religious issues: the elite/officials and the grassroots/the local people existed parallel to each other but entertained different attitudes towards religious beliefs, temples

and “superstition”. Specifically, mega projects such as the dam construction, development plans, and cultural creations were manipulated at the elite level.

For the grassroots level, the religious beliefs and practices were internalized, and embodied unconsciously in daily life – regardless of whether it accorded with the state policy or not. Consequently, looking into the relation between the development of tourism and local popular religion, it turned out that the two entities belonged to different spheres of local society: one was the orthodox local *wenhua* rhetoric provided by the elites/local officials, and the other was lively religious practices shaped by local pilgrims at grassroots-level of society.

With regards to economic development, the Ghost City was reconstructed as a tourist site, which contributed substantially to this small county seat and economically benefited local people in tourist-related industries. With regards to the elites, tourism entrepreneurs and local officials, creating the *wenhua* of the Ghost City took on the battle to try and legitimate the Ghost City, which in the process debased its religious significance. Nevertheless, the discourse of this *wenhua* hardly managed to fully infiltrate people’s lives and local pilgrims still retained their alternative view of culture and religion.

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