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## Belief or Leisure: The Evolution of Miaofeng Mountain Temple Festival in the Last Century\*

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### Abstract:

The Miaofeng Mountain temple festival is based on Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君, known as Laoniangniang 老娘娘, belief in Beijing-Tianjin area. The paper discusses its historical changes and transformation through methods of text analysis and fieldwork. The historical changes of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival are organized as follow: 1) its origin, 2) the space-time distribution, 3) the ritualized behavior and interactive mode of incense organizations (Xianghui, 香会) and unorganized discrete pilgrims when offering incense and sacrifices, and 4) the impact brought by the participation of special forces represented by the Bannermen and the royal family of Qing dynasty. The driving force behind the contemporary transformation of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival is mainly tourism economy, leisure culture and the decline of the sanctity of the goddess beliefs. Changes were found in temples, managers, the time of the temple festival, the roads to the mountain, the composition and mind set of the Xianghui, etc.

**Key Words:** Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, Laoniangniang, Belief, Leisure, Everyday life

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Miaofeng Mountain temple festival has been a way for people in greater Beijing to express their belief of the Bixia Yuanjun, who is locally known as Laoniangniang, since late Qing dynasty. Many Chinese folklorists had been constantly focused on it because of its location on the east of Beijing city - the political and economic center of China. The degree of its prosperity has a clear correlation with the degree of participation of the urban elites and the historical context at the time.

The Miaofeng Mountain, has always been a holy place of Bixia Yuanjun belief for pilgrims (*Xiangke*, 香客) from North China, especial from Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province since late Qing dynasty. During the annual spring sacrifice, pilgrims from all over North China come to visit the holy mountain (*chaoshan jinxiang*, 朝山进香) and participate in a prayer service at the temple festival (*xingxiang zouhui*, 行香走会), some of them act as servants of the goddess and doing good with a pious mind, some beg for the goddess's blessing with an urgent mood, some are back to redeem a fulfilled wish full of appreciation to demonstrate the goddess's efficacious, some are here only for traveling or hiking. The Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, the beautiful scene and the goddess belief, has been woven into people's daily life in a changing society. It keeps pace with the times, and has long been an event and a key point in people's lives.

## 2. THE GODDESS, THE MOUNTAIN AND DAILY LIFE

### 2.1 As a member of the “Three Hills and Five Summits”

Miaofeng Mountain, also called *Miaogao Feng* 妙高峰 or *Yangtai Shan* 阳台山, belongs to the Miaofeng Mountain town, Mentougou district, Beijing city. It is on the southeast of Beijing and about 40-kilometers from Fucheng Gate. The summit of Miaofeng Mountain has an altitude of 1,291 meters and is known as the Golden Summit (*Jinding*, 金顶) because the temple of Laoniangniang was built there. Miaofeng Mountain is also known for growing roses. A major part of nearby villagers' income comes from roses and their products. In every June, blooming roses make the mountain a sea of flowers which attract millions of pilgrims, tourists and fit-keepers.

There were four arguments of the specific image and identity of Bixia Yuanjun in literature and folk tales: firstly, she was the daughter of Tai Mountain; secondly, she was an ordinary woman who became an immortal; thirdly, she was one of the seven daughters of an emperor; fourthly, she was *HuaShan Yumv* 华山玉女. Regardless of the goddess' true identity, the belief of Bixia Yuanjun is originated from the ancient belief of goddess(es) in China, especially in the form of reproductive goddess.

In 1008 AD, the Emperor, *Zhenzong of Song* (968-1022), had a sacrifice on Tai Mountain in order to enhance the legitimacy of his rule. At that time, a legend of a female statue showed her lively image in front of Zhenzong of Song was widely spread among the emperor's subjects.

Zhenzong of Song took the legend as a sign and rebuilt the statue and built *Zhaozhen Ci* 昭真祠 to worship the goddess. As a result, Bixia Yuanjun is often regarded as the goddess of Tai Mountain. The belief of Bixia Yuanjun has flourished under the official guidance since then.

Around Yuan dynasty, people from Beijing started to build temples to worship Bixia Yuanjun. The saying of 'Three Mountains and Five Summits' (*Sanshan Wuding*, 三山五顶) refers to areas deeply influenced by Bixia Yuanjun belief. Three Hills refer to Miaofeng Mountain in Mentougou district, *Yaji Mountain* in Pinggu district and *Tiantai Mountain* in Shijingshan district. Five Summits for giving sacrifice to Bixia Yuanjun in Beijing area had been formed during Ming dynasty. The Central Summit was outside *You'anmen*, north to *Cao bridge*. The Eastern Summit was located in *Xiaoguan*, out of the *Dongzhimen*. The Western Summit was in *Landianchang*, out of the *Xizhimen*, north to *Maizhuang Bridge* and was built on the old *Wanfu* temple (万福寺) in Ming dynasty and restored and renamed as *Guangren* temple (广仁宫) in 1712. The Southern Summit (also known as the Big Southern Summit) was in *Maju Bridge*, outside the *Zuo'anmen*, and was originally built during *Chenghua* period of Ming dynasty (1465-1487). The Small Southern Summit referred to the Bixia Yuanjun temple in *Nanyuan Dahongmen*, outside the *Yongdingmen*, and was built during *Zhengde* period of Ming dynasty (1491-1521). The Northern Summit was in *Beiding village*, outside the *Andingmen*. Apart from the Five Summits, there are also sayings of Six Summits or Eight Summits in Beijing (Zhao 1998:20).

The Five Summits reflect the Chinese worldview of the centre and the quartet. The Five Summits constructed a holy space of Bixia Yuanjun belief which was described as the five summits ring around the city and showed that the worship of Bixia Yuanjun had been flourishing in Beijing during Ming dynasty. In fact, there were more than twenty Bixia Yuanjun temples in Beijing at the end of Ming dynasty. Among the temples, the two in Tongzhou 通州 and Zhuozhou 涿州 were very prosperous according to the book *Zhuozhong Zhi* 酌中志 written by Liu Ruoyu (刘若愚, 1584-?) in Ming dynasty. The Bixia Yuanjun temple in Miaofeng mountain was also built at that time. In a sense, it could be regarded as the beginning of the transition of Miaofeng Mountain from a natural landscape to a sacred space.

As a minority regime, Qing dynasty selectively fostered some gods of Han people including Bixia Yuanjun in order to consolidate its rule. Fostering Bixia Yuanjun belief is also in accordance with the worship of female goddess of Man nationality (Wang 2002). Therefore, the worship of Bixia Yuanjun in *Yaji Mountain* (Xuan 2001) and Miaofeng Mountain besides the Five Summits started to flourish at that time.

In early Qing dynasty, the imperial family often had sacrifices in *Yaji Mountain* on their way to Chengde 承德 summer resort and the worship of Bixia Yuanjun in *Yaji Mountain* had become flourished gradually. Therefore, *Yaji Mountain* started to be famous for its rich incense (*Fuxiang*, 富香) because of the participation of the imperial family and that made the poor pilgrims turned their pilgrimage to the Miaofeng Mountain. Compared with the incense in *Yaji*

Mountain, the incense in Miaofeng Mountain was not so prosperous in early Qing dynasty. However, it was able to attract many ordinary pilgrims because of its characteristics of being poor and bitter, and its holiness was reinforced by its location which is far from the centre of Beijing. The imperial family directly participated in Miaofeng Mountain when they faced challenges at home and abroad in late Qing dynasty. At the same time, Yaji Mountain has lost the imperial support and had gradually become an important sacred place of the worship of the Four Sacred Animals (*Sidamen*, 四大门) in Beijing (Li Wei-tsu 1941, 102-108).

However, the rich incense and the poor and bitter incense only have meaning when compared with each other and many pilgrims and incense organizations (*Xianghui*, 香会) had sacrifices in both Miaofeng Mountain and Yaji Mountain. (DTFM 2004, 29-270). The worship in Miaofeng Mountain had gradually become popular since the Kangxi (1662-1722) and Qianlong (1736-1795) period and arrived its peak in late Qing dynasty when its popularity had greatly surpassed the Five Summits and Yaji Mountain.

Like many Chinese religious centres where gods from Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism often co-existed, the type of religion in Miaofeng Mountain is also ambiguous. In fact, although the religious belief of Chinese is influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, the gods they worship are obviously different from the gods in Buddhism and Taoism even if they share the same name. People often seek cultural and institutional legitimacy of their religious belief in the form of legends. There was a legend of Miaofeng Mountain concerning how Laoniangniang occupied the place. Like always, the victor of the fight for the holy place was always the one who is worshiped by the locals, such as the legend of Cangyan Mountain 苍岩山 (JXMJ 1986, 10, 29-31, 126). Laoniangniang of Miaofeng Mountain defeated the Buddha in this legend (Wang 2002, 19-20, 97-98; Zhang Chengfu 2005, 126).

## 2.2 Miaofeng Mountain temple festival in daily life

The history of how the Bixia Yuanjun belief spread to Miaofeng Mountain and flourished is also the history of the transition of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival. Based on the Bixia Yuanjun belief, Miaofeng Mountain temple festival had gradually become a composition of sacrifices, commercial exchange and performances for pleasing the goddess. Up to now, the temple festival, as a major event and ceremony in people's life, generally takes place from the first to the fifteenth day in April of lunar calendar, but it is not unrelated to everyday life.

The cultural elements of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival were all derived from the pilgrims' local knowledge and reflected their demands and cultural mode. Laoniangniang belief was associated with pilgrims' mental world, everyday life and the changes of their mind under the changeable social historical circumstances. Many local legends about the origin and the power of Laoniangniang had been widely spread and renewed according to the social circumstances after the belief drew in the Miaofeng Mountain. The spread of these legends became an effective way for pilgrims to keep their local knowledge, local history and group memory on. Serving Laoniangniang and trading during the temple festival affected the

economic life of the people, especially the Jiangou 涧沟 villagers living at the foot of the Golden Summit of Miaofeng Mountain. The organization form of the pilgrims became an effective way for interaction for pilgrims who were in the same or across the different areas and did the same or different jobs, and affected their daily social communication. Various performances pleasing the goddess not only enriched the daily life both of the performers and the audiences, but also had been the performers' motivation and hope of their daily training and art transmissions.

Such relation showed that the temple festival and people's daily life had been combined although they seemed to have two independent ways of life, different space and time experiences such as the sacred against the secular, the carnival against the everyday life and the normal against the abnormal, and hard to be cut mechanically (Yue 2014a; 2014b). The combination with the daily life made the tradition of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival lasting and lively.

### 3. TIME, SPACE AND ACTORS

#### 3.1 spatial and temporal distribution

The offering incense date of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival was settled on the first to the fifteenth in the fourth lunar month in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. This was called "spring pilgrimage" (*Chunxiang*, 春香) and the eighth was the Main Day (*Zhengrizi*, 正日子) of celebration. There was also sacrifice hold in the seventh or eighth lunar month in the middle of Qing dynasty, also named "autumn pilgrimage" (*Qiuxiang*, 秋香), but not prevalent (Naquin 1992, 342, 369). To select spring as the time of the temple festival was related to the nature of the Bixia Yuanjun as the reproductive goddess. For many civilizations, spring is a season for revival when growth of crops, reproductive of animals and human will promote and influence each other (Harrison [1913]2016, 37-104). Therefore, as to Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, spring pilgrimage was very lively and autumn pilgrimage was relatively cheerless. More than 80 years ago, pilgrims went to offering incense very actively in every fourth lunar month, from the first to the fifteenth and there were tens of thousands of pilgrims especially on the sixth, seventh and eighth. (Gu 1928, 1)

The space of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival was composed of the pilgrims' villages and district, the pilgrimage roads (*Xiangdao*, 香道), Chapeng 茶棚 along the pilgrimage roads, temples on the Golden Summit and squares. In the past, there were five main pilgrimage roads to Miaofeng Mountain, followed as: the south road, through Sanjia Dian 三家店; the middle road, through Dajue temple 大觉寺; the north road, through Niede Zhuang 聂各庄; the north central road, through Bei'an river 北安河; the south central road, through Jianyang Dong 建阳洞. The south central road had been abandoned in late Qing dynasty. These pilgrimage roads were long, steep and dangerous and therefore there were full of Chapeng along the ways as Laoniangniang's palaces for pilgrims doing-good in the name of working for her.

Some pilgrims took some cruel ways when offering incense: *Paxiang* 爬香, pilgrims carried a saddle climbing the hill with crawl; *Gunzhuang* 滚砖, pilgrims held a brick and kowtowed once he turned over the brick again and again; *Zhuoliao* 鐳镣, pilgrims wore red cloth of galley slave and climbed with the chain; *Xuandeng* 悬灯, pilgrims hung a lantern which through the skin of arms; *Gualu* 挂炉, pilgrims hung two little burning incense burners. The Chapeng would immediately hold their arms and help them when they met such pilgrims. Such special ways enhanced the holiness of pilgrimage although they looked very cruel. The activities of the Chapeng and their interaction with pilgrims and incense organizations also showed the holiness and efficacious of Laoniangniang. In other words, the pilgrimage roads were not only the ways to Miaofeng Mountain, but also processes for pilgrims to get close to their goddess and feel the holiness. Therefore, the pilgrimage roads became an important part of the scared space of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival.

Feng (1929) and Gu (1928) respectively described layout of the temples on Miaofeng Mountain in late Qing dynasty and early Republic of China (ROC). The temples had been destroyed year by year since the invasion of Japan in 1937. From the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the Reform and Opening-up period, Laoniangniang belief was in a latent state because that the folk religion was regarded as "feudal superstition" which was harmful to the socialist construction. It was not until 1985 that people began to repair the temples and other infrastructure on Miaofeng Mountain.

Now, Laoniangniang Dian 老娘娘殿, namely *Linggan Gong* 灵感宫, *Wangsan Nainai Dian* 王三奶奶殿 and the *Caishen Dian* 财神殿 had been rebuilt. The *Huatuo Dian* 华佗殿 had been changed to *Yaowang Dian* 药王殿 and the god been worshiped had been changed to *Bianque* 扁鹊. *Guangsheng Dian* 广生殿 and *Sanjiao Tang* 三教堂 had been changed to *Guanyin Dian* 观音殿 and *Xishen Dian* 喜神殿 and located in the northeast of Laoniangniang Dian. *Wusheng Dian* 五圣殿 had been changed to *Yuelao Dian* 月老殿 and *Baiyi Dashi Dian* 白衣大士殿 had been changed to *Yuxian Lang* 遇仙廊. The original area of *Huixiang Ge* 回香阁 were the *Dongyue* temple 东岳庙 where worshiped the *Dongyue* Emperor and *Subao Si* 速报司 and *Xianbao Si* 现报司 where worshiped Yuefei 岳飞.

At the same time, *Yuhuang Ding* 玉皇顶 had been built up the *Huixiang Ge*. The government increased the investments to build amenities for traveling such as hotels, museums and parking lots and repair the *Lingguan Dian* 灵官殿, *Sha Gege Dian* 傻哥哥殿 and *San Xianggu Dian* 三仙姑殿 of Jianguo village. Therefore, the Golden Summit not only fulfilled the needs of the pilgrims for sacrificing, but also the needs of tourists for traveling.

The squares in front of these temples were the space for performing to please the gods. These performances not only reflected their admiration to the goddess and their praying for good life, but also shaped a holy communication atmosphere between pilgrims and their goddess. Nowadays, based on the traditional function of the temple festival, these squares were added some new activities such as taking photos and knocking at the "money eyes" (*Jinqianyan*, 金钱

眼) to meet the demands of the development of tourism and the needs of tourists' entertainments.

The spatial distribution of Miaofeng Mountain was cooperated by cultural elites, tourism companies, local government and common people on the basis of tradition and reflected the needs of people in nowadays daily life to some extent. The god people sacrificed was mainly Laoniangniang who was the reproductive goddess like before and related to every aspects of people's daily life. Although the rebuilt and reparation of temples in Miaofeng Mountain is mainly conducted by cultural elites and for the sake of tourism development, the spatial distribution of Miaofeng Mountain also has relationship with people's mental needs for security under the risk society.

### 3.2 Incense organizations and pilgrims

According to whether be organized or not, the participants of offering incense could be divided into incense organizations and pilgrims who was not a member of any incense organizations. Incense organizations are organized groups of pilgrims to visit Miaofeng Mountain during the temple festival (Tang etc. 1986, 270-271). They might be the variants of ancient "community" from the point of the rheological (Gu 1928:12). Incense organizations could be divided into *Wuhui* 武会 and *Wenhui* 文会 which could be divided into *Xingxiang Hui* 行香会 and *Zuopeng* 坐棚.

*Xingxiang Hui* was regarded as the incense organizations which contributed goods to Bixia Yuanjun temple and all kinds of *Chapeng* which provided services to pilgrims during pilgrimage. They were with features of liquidity and temporary. They often organized before the temple festival temporarily, provided services to pilgrims and incense organizations through the entire process of offering incense, had no steady space, ended at the end of the temple festival and would reorganize before the temple festival next year. There were many kinds of *Xingxiang Hui* in late Qing dynasty such as organizations for building pilgrimage roads, for installing and repairing street lamps, for repairing shoes, china, bronze and tin ware, for contributing utensils for *Chapeng* and goods for sacrifice, for providing daily use such as tea, salt, and medicines, for gathering and incinerating sign paper, for providing hot tea and porridge, etc.

These *Xingxiang Hui* almost contained all the trades in Beijing and Tianjin area. They affirmed themselves and value of their trades through severing pilgrims as the savant of Laoniangniang, and made their trades be a member of Laoniangniang belief system and became a part to express the efficacious of Laoniangniang.

*Zuopeng* was named because of the character of steady, referred to the incense organizations which have a steady place to provide porridge and tea to the pilgrims and serve pilgrims. Their main function was providing porridge and tea, steamed bread, even meat and accommodation. *Chapeng* were built simply by reed mat at the beginning, and then built as little temples or even

big courtyards which could offer accommodation for many people. Chapeng were regarded as the temporary dwelling palace (*Xingong*, 行宫) of Laoniangniang and the displays all have symbolic significance.

Pilgrims often worshiped Laoniangniang and had porridge and tea in Chapeng. People who provided tea and porridge for pilgrims often wore yellow coat and yelled: “please worshipping first and then having the porridge”. The pilgrims went into Chapeng and worshiped Laoniangniang and then had porridge by themselves as a break, and could have accommodation at night (Li Jiarui 1937, 61). Chapeng should greet pilgrims who took special cruel ways to offering incense 100 meters out of the boots. Xingxiang Hui should worship the card (*Baitie*, 拜帖), offer offerings (*Xiangong*, 献供), burn incense and perform. The words and deeds had certain rules both of Chapeng and Xingxiang Hui such as Wuhui must perform when they met Chapeng back on their way of pilgrimage.

Wenhui have been declined gradually although Miaofeng Mountain temple festival was recovered in 1990s. All the Chapeng and Xingxiang Hui which provided services to the pilgrims have been almost disappeared because of the improvement of the traffic conditions and the changes of people’s lifestyle and mindset.

Wuhui, also called *Zouhui* 走会, referred to the pilgrims groups which performed shows such as lion dance and stilt walking, etc.(Li Jiarui 1937, 456-457). Because of the forms of the shows were various, there were 13 kinds of shows before the ROC. And there were 16 kinds of Wuhui after the ROC. To be a Wuhui which was qualified to offering incense to Laoniangniang was conditional that the shows performed must be related to Laoniangniang. For example, the association for cars (*Xiaochehui*, 小车会) founded in ROC was qualified to participate in the temple festival because they claimed that they were aim to transport goods for Laoniangniang. Furthermore, the old 13 kinds of Wuhui would really become a landscape of temple according to certain form (Jin Shoushen 1999, 155).

Members of Wuhui trained very hard in daily life in order to express their pious emotion to Laoniangniang. Unlike the usual show for money, the show performed for sacrificing were with diving, aimed for earning face and competing to win (*Qiangyang dousheng*, *Haocai mailian*, 抢洋斗胜, 耗材买脸) and to express the identity of this group and their community. Therefore, every Wuhui has had its own flag, clothing and structure up to now.

Nowadays, people often talk about the differences between *Laohui* 老会, *Shenghui* 圣会 and *Huanghui* 皇会 among all the incense organizations. *Laohui* refers to the incense organizations which has visited Miaofengshan more than 100 years, or that could only be called *Shenghui*. *Huanghui* refers to the organizations whose shows had been watched by the emperor Guangxu (1875-1908) or the empress Cixi (1835-1908). *Huanghui* was not only entitled by *Wanshou Wujiang* 万寿无疆, but also required other organizations to avoid initiatively when meeting each other on a pilgrimage. Therefore, the hierarchy between *Laohui* and *Shenghui* was been disturbed.



There was a clear division of labor and management system inside every incense organization. As Gu Jiegang said: “How precise are their organizations! There have specialized personnel management in all aspects such as finance, etiquette, police, communication and food and so on, and the leaders command all, just like a country” (1928, 26). The rules such as giving way (*Rangdao*, 让道), identity censorship (*Pandao*, 盘道) between organizations showed a competitive atmosphere. The services of all the organizations were free and not aimed to profit. The organizations gained reputation through the cost and services in the temple festival.

Compared with the decline of Wenhui, the performances of Wuhui have been the important view of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival today and show a tendency of increase. The committee of Miaofeng Mountain management, also namely Huahui fraternity (*Huahui lianyihui*, 花会联谊会), often invites Wuhui taking part in Miaofeng Mountain temple festival because most of Wenhui and Miaofeng Mountain temple festival itself have been named folklore, good traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for the last twenty years. Moreover, the members of management committee of Miaofeng Mountain also go downhill to take part in the weddings and funerals of the leaders of Wuhui (Zhang Qingren 2013, 147-169; Yue 2014c, 304-306). Therefore, not only quite a few new Wuhui have been founded one after another but also many Wuhui began to perform for money.

The practices of the incense organizations expressed the demand of the groups because they had a strict organizational structure, clear service goal and unified value orientation, and the individual differences of the members were not stand out. However, most pilgrims of the temple festival were scattered individual pilgrims. Their wishes were various such as praying for a son, safety, illnesses, settling a lawsuit, forming an association and so on (Pei 1929). Some were for redeem a vow to the goddess because the goddess had helped them to realize their wishes. The most extreme form was the cruel way mentioned such as Gunzhuang, Xuandeng, etc. In a word, all pilgrims would carry happiness or blessing of the goddess returning home (*Daifu huanjia*, 戴福还家).

Pilgrims mainly came from urban areas of Beijing such as Dongcheng, Xicheng district, some were farmers from suburbs like Mentougou, Shijingshan, Changping, Fengtai, Chaoyang, Haidian, and some were from Tianjin, Langfang, Baoding, Zhangjiakou. The group constitution reflected both the universality of the Bixia Yuanjun belief and the important of the Miaofeng Mountain in the areas of Beijing and Tianjin, even the North China.

In general, Miaofeng Mountain temple festival shows colourful and lasting depended on the pilgrims and incense organizations came from different region and their activities. Miaofeng Mountain temple festival has its profound meaning as a social drama. It is an adjuster in people's daily life which can make daily life ease and relax to some extent and express people's pursuits of order and mental state which can't be realized in daily life. The temple festival is a rite of passage for groups and individuals with the natural cycle, and restriction and regeneration of group life and local life (Yue 2004; 2010, 50-84). In other words, Miaofeng Mountain temple festival not only exists in various activities during the pilgrimage every year,

but also hidden in the flow of people's life and their cultural logic which might not be awarded by themselves.

## 4. BANNERMEN AND QING ROYALTY

### 4.1 Bannermen

There was a close relationship between Miaofeng Mountain temple festival and the daily life of Beijing people especially the Bannermen. Qing dynasty supported Bixia Yuanjun belief (Naquin 1992, 371). Therefore, there were many Bannermen taking part in all kinds of Miaofeng Mountain offering incense and quite a few incense organizations were Bannermen in late Qing dynasty.

The occurrence of these situations, closely related to the living state of the Eight Banners(*Baqi*, 八旗) in Qing dynasty. In the past, the Man nationality organized people by the way of Eight Banners which made a male bannerman both a common person and a soldier, and was easy to organize a powerful army when the fight occurred. Bannermen could get money given by government monthly and had more privileges compared with Han people. At the beginning, the system of Eight Banners played an important role in the process of founding the state. Instead of the brave spirit at the beginning, while the country became peace, Bannermen weltered in pleasure under the financial support of the government (Yue 2011, 384-385). Under the background, organizing various incense organizations, which gained reputation by cost and skill compete during Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, became a hobby of Bannermen, the leisure class (Li Jiarui 1937, 455; Sun & Liu 1986, 51).

At the same time, Qing dynasty was declining when Bannerman used to this kind of leisure life and they were covered in the sadness of the decline of the country. It is conceivable that under this desperate state of mind, to participate in the incense organizations, pilgrimage to the Miaofeng Mountain and immerse in the power of Laoniangniang might be a preferable way to escape from reality. In other words, under the special situation and psychological state, to take part in Miaofeng Mountain temple festival played a key role in the Bannermen's daily life and formed their deep feeling with the temple festival. Whatever the show off of the statue during the flourishing period, or the desperate of escaping from the reality during the decline period, the Bannermen's feeling to the temple festival was still deep. Hence, many old pilgrims are very excite and proud when talking about traditional Miaofeng Mountain temple festival today (Wu 2007, 118-134).

### 4.2 The participation of Imperial Household

The flourish of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival in late Qing dynasty had deep relationship with the actively participation of Qing royalty. As discussed before, rulers didn't resist Bixia Yuanjun belief but acquiesced to people's activities in early Qing dynasty because of the

goddess belief of the Man people. During the period of Kangxi and Qianlong, the country became powerful, people's life became stable, and therefore, people's worship activities became large scale although the emperor, Shunzhi (1644-1661), had ever asked to forbid them (QSL 1985, 8-9). In late Qing dynasty, the royal family, represented by the empress Cixi, showed interest in Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, supported and participated in it. Similar to the use of the Boxers, the royal's support both for Miaofeng Mountain temple festival and even Bixia Yuanjun belief was aimed to netting for non-governmental forces. It also made the empress Cixi a genuine advocates and protector of folk culture in the oral narrative of Beijing citizen, just like a folk art connoisseur with taste (Yue 2007, 221-224).

Represented by empress Cixi, the royal family's support to Miaofeng Mountain temple festival expressed in both taking part in the pilgrimage and paying more attention to the incense organizations especially Wuhui. The book, *Annals of Miaofeng Mountain* 妙峰山志, written by Jin Xun, said, the empress Cixi went to Miaofeng Mountain in 1899 and rewarded Bixia Yuanjun temple with several clocks and exquisite plaques. Naturally, the royal family had privilege in offering incense and monopolized the right of burning the first incense (*Touxiang*, 头香). During that period, all the activities in offering incense during the temple festival would be hold until the royal family burned the first incense. The participation of the royal family encouraged people and Miaofeng Mountain temple festival showed a prosperous scene.

Then again, the special royal groups such as eunuchs and concubines donated or organized Wenhui directly. Moreover, the empress Cixi was keen to watch the performances of Wuhui and even called some skilled organizations to perform in the Forbidden City or the Summer Palace. According to *Annals of Miaofeng Mountain*, twelve kinds of Wuhui were watched by the empress Cixi and the performers were about three thousand from 1896 to 1898. Since then, the incense organization which was been watched by the emperor of Guangxu or the empress Cixi could be called as Huanghui, entitled *Wanshou wujiang* in front of their own name of the organization and put dragon flag on their cage.

Huanghui was above other incense organizations beyond the original rules among incense organizations. At the same time, some skilled but poor-background members of incense organizations, due to been interested by the empress Cixi, became famous and been the object for people to chase after. Instead of the original intention of the organizations' activities which was to gain reputation by serving Laoniangniang, since the participation of Qing dynasty royal family, the pursuit of organizations had been changed to win the favour of the royalty. It is said that the empress Cixi used to watch the performances by the incense organizations in the Summer Palace after pilgrimage during the Miaofeng Mountain temple festival. And so, many organizations would bypass the Summer Palace when went down the mountain after pilgrimage, whatever which way they chosen to go up the mountain, in order to gain the possibilities to be watched by the empress Cixi and been Huanghui.

It was right because the interaction between the support by government and cater by folk, the flourish of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival reached its peak in late Qing dynasty. Today, whether an incense organization once been Huanghui is a key condition to become an ICH.

## 5. THE RITES OF PILGRIMAGE PROCESS

As common pilgrims, visit to the Miaofeng Mountain was from their own heart and their actions were freedom. As a member of an incense organization, the pilgrimage was highly organized and ritualized. Just as the pilgrimage program of *Xiangqiang Chapeng* 响墙茶棚 (Feng 1929, 106) the pilgrimage program of incense organizations composed the long lasting special ritual system of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival.

### 5.1 Preparation

In the past, generally before the spring pilgrimage, early in the third lunar month, the incense organizations which would offering incense to Miaofeng Mountain that year would put up the posters along the streets or roads inside and outside of Beijing city to inform the schedule of offering incense. These posters became a way for calling up, organizing, unifying activities of organization members and the basis of coordination between incense organizations.

The preparation of offering incense included as follows: (1) Setting up sacrifice altar, marked the beginning of offering incense this year. (2) Informing, sending the card to inform and call up. (3) Gathering, members would gather in the predetermined place the day before offering incense. (4) Setting up tablets of Laoniangniang. (5) Burning incense to Laoniangniang. (6) Keeping vigil in the night, sacrificing the Grand Masters (*Zushiye*, 祖师爷), emphasizing the rules of offering incense by the leader of the organization which includes taking orders, vegetarian diet, prohibition against alcoholics and so on.

### 5.2 Go up and go down the mountain

The process of going up the mountain included as follows: (1) Setting out. The incense organizations would burn incense, worship the *Zushiye* and prepare all the things which were needed for pilgrimage. (2) Burning incense to sacrifice along the way. On the way up to the mountain, members would walk while burning incense along the way. At the same time some would burning waste papers collected which was called paying tax and grains to Laoniangniang. (3) Dining and having rest on the way (*Zhonghuo*, 仲伙). (4) Climbing up the mountain. (5) Declaring the name of the organization (*Baohao*, 报号) and signing in at the *Lingguan Dian*. (6) Reaching the Golden Summit. (7) Warding the goddess (*Shoujia*, 守驾).

The process of return journey, included as follows (1) *Hui-xiang* 回香. Incense organizations would offer incense at *Huixiang Ge* on the way down the mountain in order to say goodbye to the goddess. (2) Setting the goddess tablets back to Beijing. The incense organizations would worship Laoniangniang when back to Beijing. (3) Thanking the goddess, namely thanking the

mountain (*Xieshan*, 谢山). Usually holding the day back to Beijing or the next. (4) Some organizations would also sacrifice the village temple and their Zushiye and some Wuhui would finish the sacrifice until they removed make up.

This was the usual process of common incense organizations and there was a little different in the process of Chapeng. After the preparation of offering incense and rituals up the mountain which were almost the same as other incense organizations, Chapeng began to offer their services such as the porridge and tea organization began to provide porridge and tea, and the sewing organization began to do sewing for people. And then, Chapeng began to up forward the Golden Summit to sacrifice on one day after the eighth of the fourth lunar month. Besides kowtowing to Laoniangniang, Chapeng also had to record the contributors' names as a chart which would be fired in order to let the goddess know. At last, Chapeng stopped all the services and started activities down the mountain which were the same as other incense organizations'.

### 5.3 Special rules of pilgrimage

There were some ritualized interactions and rules among incense organizations, Chapeng and common pilgrims. When incense organizations met each other on the way of sacrificing, both would stop all the activities at 50 paces, the man who picked the money and food (*Qianliang*, 钱粮) would unload the burden. Both of the guides (*Qianyin*, 前引) would forward to introduce themselves to the other for respect (Wu 2006, 115-116).

When the common pilgrims meet Chapeng, they only needed to kowtow to Laoniangniang. But when incense organizations aimed to worship Chapeng, there were strict rules. Incense organizations should stop all the activities at a 50 step distance from Chapeng, and both of their heads should worship each other and exchange their card (*Baitie*, 拜帖). When incense organizations came into Chapeng, they should worship the seven stars flag, the Gate (*Yuanmen*, 辕门) and twenty-eight constellations first outside, until they could worship Laoniangniang in the boots (Wu 2006, 118).

The rituals of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival included not only the sacrifice of the common pilgrims in the main hall (*Zhengdian*, 正殿), Linggan Gong, but also the ritualized actions among the incense organizations' interaction. They all expressed the pilgrims' devotion to Laoniangniang and the equal relationship or expectation of equality among incense organizations through the highly stylized and normalized rituals, and formed the Miaofeng Mountain sacred space during the temple festival (Yue 2010, 302-346; 2013). The specific practices of common pilgrims were the basis of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival which not only contained pilgrims' understanding of Laoniangniang but also formed the cultural logic of the temple festival and the orientation of emotion. Pilgrims have recorded the past and looked forward to the future in the carryout of the rituals every year.

## 6. THE CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATION

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## 6.1 From Huanghui to ICH

The basic characteristic of folk culture is the variable transmission and spread. There were variations in the transmission of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, big or small, obvious or hidden.

From the rising of Miaofeng Mountain temple to the beginning of the ROC, the main changes of the temple festival occurred in late Qing dynasty when royal family participated in it. The presence of Huanghui showed the official force wanted to control and use the power of the folk society by participation and the organizations which served Laoniangniang and pursued the fame became to strive for the favour of the royal family. To some extent, the original traditional folk culture, self-organized and with the pursuit of themselves, was ruled cleverly by the rulers.

Huanghui were declined both in numbers and scales with the decline of Qing dynasty, but they were also symbols and tools for thinking for people to record and identify the past. And nowadays, under the circumstances that traditional cultures and folk culture were given more positive meanings, Huanghui are still proud of having been granted. These Huanghui now want to become different levels of ICH and get corresponding benefit. To some extent, “traditional” Huanghui seem to change to “modern” Huanghui, namely ICH, enjoying the privileges and making new hierarchy.

The temples in Miaofeng Mountain had been destroyed and the temple festival had declined gradually because of the Anti-Japanese War. Actually, Laoniangniang belief and Miaofeng Mountain temple festival had been classified as superstition and ignorance before 1949. During 1950-1970, not only the sacrifice activities were forbidden but also the name of “incense organization” which was recognized as dark, reactionary, backward and ignorant was replaced forcibly by Flower Organization (*Huahui*, 花会) which emphasized the nature of folk art and performance. This context continued until 1990s and became the main reason why the renaissances of Wuhui was better than that of Wenhui in Miaofeng Mountain temple festival recovery in early 1990s.

The renaissance of Beijing incense organizations was mainly the renaissance of Wuhui in fact in 1983. People got full use of the name *Huahui* which had gotten rid of the religious meaning, praying to the gods for help and expanding living space for themselves carefully by dazzling performances. Because of the needsben of tourism, the local government has gradually restored the temples in Miaofeng Mountain since 1989. In 1990, Shaofu Sui, the old leader of the Laohui of Wanli Yuncheng Tache 万里云程踏车老会, organized and went up Miaofeng Mountain with ten *Huahui*. Earlier, he tried to pilgrimage Miaofeng Mountain twice but all were considered by some departments as doing the feudal superstition and suffered some troubles. To his surprise, this time their activities were approved by one officer of the Beijing city government, and then the Mentougou disdriect government recognized the Miaofeng Mountain temple festival as folk culture which was conducive to the tourism development and should be recovered and developed in a planned way. Consequently, under the government's

support and lead, Miaofeng Mountain temple festival began to be on the path of revival and rebirth and changed under the background of the tourism economy.

Compared with the changes of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival in late Qing dynasty, these changes are more intense. The whole orientation of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival has changed, and the reshaping and recovery of it was for the economic purpose and the local government methodically recovered and improved the landscape and temple festival tradition of Miaofeng Mountain in the form of tourism and cultural industry chain:

Miaofeng Mountain township government realizes that Miaofeng Mountain, as a center of Beijing traditional religious beliefs, will bring enormous economic benefits in the future if its tradition would be resumed. For this purpose, they make effort to increase the input to Miaofeng Mountain both in software and hardware, and expect that Miaofeng Mountain will become the strong point of the local economy development. The Chinese Communist Party committee of the township government was fully responsible for all the affairs of Miaofeng Mountain and make further input constantly to Miaofeng Mountain tourism development. The entire town has great expectations with economic benefits that would brought by the traditional folk culture of Miaofeng Mountain. (Wu 2006, 235)

Indeed, the orientation that relying on traditional culture to develop tourism economy brought more space for people's life of their like, and gave the past incense organizations some possibilities and chances to keep alive. At the same time, Miaofeng Mountain temple festival which organized by pilgrims themselves in the past became a part of the tourism industry and tools for economic proliferation. Just like most folk cultures which were "renaissance" under the agreement publicly or acquiescence privately by the government, the folklore, folk culture, traditional culture, and ICH which are blindly emphasized in expression have no meaning in essence (Yue 2008).

## 6.2 Between faith and leisure

**Changes of the institutions and ways of management.** Miaofeng Mountain temple festival was organized by common people spontaneously, and individual pilgrims were responsible for their own spending and the incense organizations were responsible for group activities by the way of fund-raising or the leaders of the organizations. Now, the whole Miaofeng Mountain temple festival has unified management institutions and methods. Leading by the government department, the Mentougou district government made of an overall tourism development strategy named "*three mountains and a river driving the whole district*" (*Sanshan yihe dai quanqu*, 三山一河带全区) in 1998 and Miaofeng Mountain was also a member of the "*three mountains*". The government takes the lead in supporting the reconstruction of the folk activities, such as tourism propaganda, building web sites, development of tourism and cultural

products, and holding academic symposium associated with Miaofeng Mountain together with academia etc.

Then, under the leadership of the government, a semi-official institution named committee of Miaofeng Mountain management which was a subordinate of Jingxi Tourism Company was established and in the charge of the whole management of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival. For the needs of work, there are frequent interaction between the members of the semi-official institutions and the leaders of Huahui which have great influences, and then, reciprocal relationships have been formed especially in their families' weddings and funerals.

The ticket fees during Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, RMB 30 yuan in 2008 and 40 yuan in 2012, was too high to common believer. Moreover, the new fixed Lingquan Dian also needed RMB 15 yuan tickets in 2008, made it essentially a way only for incense organizations which could enjoy free treatment and VIPS.

**Changes of the time of the temple festival.** The traditional time of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival was the first to the fifteens in the fourth lunar month every year before. Now, Miaofeng Mountain is open all the year as a tourist attraction. And now according to people's life rhythm, the number of people to Miaofeng Mountain gets its peak in the modern holidays stipulated by the country, especially on Saturday and Sunday during the temple festival. This suggests that the time setting of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival has changed from a divine timing which is aimed to return to the origin to a secular timing of holiday tourism and leisure consumption.

**Changes of the ways up to the mountain.** Now, the roads up to the Miaofeng Mountain have been completed. People can easily get to the Golden Summit by public transportation such as bus etc., or driving straight to the Golden Summit, no longer have to climb hard for a long time. The sanctity which was strengthened by the tough roads and pilgrims' own practices in the past has been declined greatly and climbing has become a fashion, healthy and environmental fitness behaviour for citizens. The improvement of traffic conditions changes the degree of divine of the pilgrimage quietly, but to some extent matches the current rhythm of city life, meets the needs of urban white-collar consumer life and also provides some departments more profitable possibilities.

**Changes of the temples.** As the road unimpeded, the Golden Summit has become the center of Miaofeng Mountain and temples on the mountain top have been embedded by many tourism settings. The Guandi Dian 关帝殿 has now been changed to the Miaofeng Mountain hostel. The brand, statues and Buddhist scriptures, tourism souvenirs, etc. are sold in the main temple. To cater to the interests of many tourists who are not familiar with the tradition of Miaofeng Mountain, people built the Yuhuang Ding. At present, there are public facilities such as the office of the management committee, ticket office, shops, restaurants, guest houses, public toilets, electric doors, safety warning signs etc., and also Buddhist scripture CDs for sale. The *Lianxin* 连心 pavilion constructed to take young visitors' fancy in 1990s has been teared down for the new needs of the management department.



In addition, some tourism projects also have been added such as locking on the "heart-to-heart" lock, knocking at the eye of money and so on. The Jiangou village also has developed service programs like farmyard, farmhouse meal in a large scale and good quality. In this way, a set of relatively complete system of tourism services have ensured the needs of the tourists, enriched the tourists' leisure life and infiltrated into the belief tradition of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival.

**Changes of the mind of the pilgrims.** Pilgrims in the past were mainly the devout pilgrims who regarded Miaofeng Mountain temple festival as a necessary part of daily life and Laoniangniang as the refuge of life. Now people come to the mountain with different purposes, some for pilgrimaging, and some for doing tourism business, traveling, climbing, joining in the fun, and investigating. The number of people who are for the purpose of traveling increased according to the survey recent year, and they are more interested in the mountain itself but not Laoniangniang in Linggan Gong.

**Changes of the incense organizations.** As an important part of traditional Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, incense organizations have changed in new environment nowadays. The first is the change of the name from Xianghui to Huahui as we discussed above (also see Sui & Wang 2004, 4).

Many incense organizations have already disappeared because they had no use in today's life. Some Chapeng which still exist have been arranged as modern rest place and traditional rules have been declined gradually. The rigorous institutional framework has been gradually simplified under the planning management by the Miaofeng Mountain scenic area management committee. Wuhui still exist, but the overall operation mode is very different. Members of Wuhui in the past had great enthusiasm to Laoniangniang, and they regarded the training and sacrificing performances as the most important thing in their life, but now most of them regard it as a mean of making a living. Now they perform up to the mountain just because of the arrangement by the leaders of the organization and can also get more or less personal income. In the past, Wuhui organized and arranged their activities by themselves and the order of the performances had strict traditional rules. But now Huahui are managed by the management committee of the Miaofeng Mountain and the time and order of the performances must obey the arrangement of the committee.

Wuhui in the past performed for Laoniangniang and gained reputation by splendid skills. As a spontaneous organization, performances of Wuhui in the past prepared everything by themselves without secular reward. Now, as a performance unit, Wuhui accept various invitations like celebrations of various groups or institutions, individual birthdays, weddings and funerals, and obtain remuneration, and even more the head of the organization will send out the name card to scramble for customers and gain profile during the temple festival.

With the changes of the incense organizations, the interaction between incense organizations also has dwindled, and even the main ceremony of god rewarding has been greatly simplified.

Of course, just like the double-edged sword, the tourism industry's profit model also objectively stimulated the revival and prosperity of Huahui. And together with the government's emphasis on folk culture, the traditional craftsmanship and knowledge and so on, Huahui will also gradually attract more attention in different degrees. However, many incense organizations are still faced with severe challenges in funding and skill inheritance. Therefore, on the back of their name cards, many heads of the organizations have typed up the words such as “to undertake weddings, funerals, shop opening, festival celebration. The phone number is .....”

**Changes of Jianguo village.** In the past, the Jianguo village, which was the interchange of several pilgrimage roads, was very poor relying on the farming as villagers' basic mode of production. Although there were thousands of people came into the mountain, Chapeng along the way basically solved the eating, drinking and rest problems of pilgrims or tourists, so there had no fundamental decisive influence on Jianguo villagers' life.

Since Miaofeng Mountain temple festival changed to tourism culture industry, Jianguo villagers have been on their way to get rich. Jianguo villagers, who formerly depended mainly on farming, have devoted themselves to tourism services. Jianguo village plays an important role in Miaofeng Mountain temple festival tourism and villagers are responsible for selling stalls, keeping security, managing parking lots, providing food and accommodation, building public settings, being commentators and transporting and so on. During the temple festival, Jianguo villagers also perform on the Golden Summit and can get paid for losing of work time. The external form of Jianguo village, therefore, has also gradually changed from “*rustic*” to “*fashion*”.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In a word, different with the flourish of incense in early last century, the temples, pilgrimage roads, pilgrims, incense organizations of Miaofeng Mountain temple festival and Jianguo village have changed under the encompassing of the tourism development in the recent twenty years. Objectively speaking, the modern changes are not only the decline of the sanctity of Laoniangniang belief, but also the aftermath and contemporary reappear of the leisure life of old Beijing. Meanwhile, the transformation and combination of the space, not only provides a place for pilgrims to sacrificing and tourists to travelling, but also creates possibilities for the development of incense organizations and stimulates them to reform in another sense.

Along with the constantly developments and changes of the society, Miaofeng Mountain traditional temple festival always changes. We would rather regard this kind of change as a kind of metabolism of tradition. Change is a kind of adjustment, and the tradition also being forward in the change and also has a strong vitality. The new cultural force is powerful and the ancient cultural logic still keeps balance, and this makes Miaofeng Mountain temple festival still charming today.

Influenced by the movement of declaring and assessing ICH, both the officer and people emphasize Miaofeng Mountain temple festival as an ICH. What influences and possibilities will be brought by these expressions and the corresponding practices to Miaofeng Mountain temple festival will be a very interesting new topic.

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