



## For Whom to Conserve Intangible Cultural Heritage

### The Dislocated Agency of Folk Belief Practitioners and the Reproduction of Local Culture

Folk beliefs about Great Yu and Emperor Shun in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, are of great significance in the local area. Two rituals recently named Reverence for Yu the Great and the Emperor Shun Temple Festival respectively have been recognized by the state as intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This recognition has become another driving force to simultaneously revive and objectify local culture in support of China's rising tourism industry. During this process, when folk beliefs at the grassroots level are transformed into the objects of the state ICH movement, regional governments replace folk groups as the main, official bodies that regulate and represent these folk beliefs. Folk groups lose their rights to the social and economic values of these cultural resources. In this context, the displaced agency of folk groups leads to the redistribution of economic resources and the restructuring of their power relations. Thus, this article aims to explore a fundamental question regarding the ICH-driven process of cultural reconstruction: for whom we should conserve ICH?

KEYWORDS: intangible cultural heritage—folk belief—objectification of folklore—Reverence for Yu the Great—Emperor Shun Temple festival

CHINA has seen a high tide of folk cultural revival since the reform era in the 1980s. However, the twenty-first century has revealed a new driving force to propel this trend, which is the current movement of cultural conservation. UNESCO created The Convention for the Conservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, and China launched its own nationwide intangible cultural heritage (ICH) conservation movement the following year. This movement, along with the rapid development of China's tourism industry since the early 1990s, has promoted the further reconstruction and transformation of folk rituals and beliefs at the grassroots level. These dynamic forces reflect the complexity of official policies and intellectual discourses toward folk beliefs in contemporary China.

Before the reform era, folk beliefs were officially criticized as “feudal superstition.” Since 1979, the state has adopted a relatively lenient attitude toward certain folk beliefs to promote the official policy of religious equality and freedom and to resist the influence of foreign religions (GUO 2009, 72). With the development of China's tourism industry in the 1990s, regional governments have shown increasing enthusiasm for embracing folk beliefs as profitable economic resources for regional development. However, as some scholars have pointed out, folk beliefs cannot completely break away from their illegitimate status (CHAU 2005, 239) and are still regarded as “superstition,” the opposite pole of modernity (ZHOU 2006, 131).

This complexity characterizes China's current ICH conservation movement. In spite of the newly legitimized growth space for folk belief in this movement, among the ten categories of the ICH preservation designated by the state, “folk belief” occupies a small portion of the tenth group named “folk custom.” This minor position reflects the cautious attitude of the Chinese state toward folk belief. In his research, Liu Xicheng points out that the current ICH conservation practices still reflect the entrenched tendency to categorize folk culture, especially the cultural items and practices related to folk beliefs, as “feudal superstition” (LIU 2005, 135). Concerning the role of folklorists in furthering this tendency, Gao Bingzhong calls for a change of terms and practices within the discipline of folklore itself. He discusses how folklore research can engage ICH conservation practices theoretically and methodologically and better transform folk beliefs into “a component of the positive public consciousness” (*gonggong yishi* 公共意识; GAO 2007, 147, 153). Therefore, on the one hand folk belief practices in contemporary China are strug-

gling with their questionable status; but on the other, they are thriving among folk groups at the grassroots level and enjoy a limited and selective recognition and support within state and intellectual discourses.

This complex context has also shaped the direction of recent scholarly research on the revival of folk beliefs. For example, by focusing on the agency of local religious elites (for example, the temple managers), CHAU (2005) and GAO (2006) study these elites' strategic collaboration with local governmental officials as they strive for the legitimate status of folk beliefs. HAN (1998) and YAN and BRAMWELL (2008) pay direct attention to the significant role of the state and regional governments in the process of commodifying folk beliefs, given that land in China belongs to the state and that tourism development is guided and even directly operated by regional governments rather than the private tourism sector.

As with touristic development, China's ICH conservation movement is also a government-guided enterprise reflecting the great intervention of political behavior into folk belief. For example, during the application process, it is often the regional governments who apply for ICH recognition on behalf of tradition bearers.<sup>1</sup> CHEN (2010, 35–36) argues that this system provides a convenient venue for regional governments to exert power over folk practices. Meanwhile, regional governments often issue administrative regulations to implement the “registration” (*denglu hua* 登录化) of folk beliefs, to “organize” (*zhengxuhua* 整序化) the temples, and to govern the functions of folk beliefs inside a community (SAKURAI 2010, 121, 123). OTA points out that tourism is one of the social factors that promote the objectification of culture (1993, 383).<sup>2</sup> As the ICH movement takes off within China's current political and social climate, culture folklore, space, and the people who create and practice culture all become objects of the political operation to continuously reinvent and reproduce folk belief.<sup>3</sup> This process also complicates the power relations and interactions between regional governments and folk groups.

In recent years, Chinese voices have become increasingly reflective about the government-guided ICH conservation movement. After extensively referring to ICH research abroad, AN (2008, 18–19) argued that many practices in China's ICH conservation movement will result in not only new bureaucratic systems but also the hegemony of the official discourses that may cause conflict among different cultural groups. He emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural diversity and respecting the will and rights of tradition bearers. In his report on the development of China's ICH conservation from 2001 to 2010, KANG (2011, 22) explicitly points out that the disadvantage of this government-guided movement lies in the lack of power equalization between the government and other social forces. Due to the overriding influence of the government, officials who act as the operators of ICH practices will likely abuse their power and consequently damage public welfare when they determine public interests based on their own will. However, similar to many other studies that are more engaged in exploring the methods of ICH practices from governmental perspectives, the “disadvantage” is discussed only as a kind of possibility in this report, which indicates that it has not been thought

through in depth even though this kind of discussion is crucial to the theorization of the relationship between ICH conservation and the reproduction of culture.<sup>4</sup>

Through the case study of two recently recognized ICH folk belief practices in Zhejiang 浙江 province, namely Reverence for Yu the Great (da Yu jidian 大禹祭典) and the Emperor Shun Temple Festival (ji Shun dadian 祭舜大典), the following sections analyze the transformation of folk beliefs into ICH, during which regional governments replace folk groups as the main, official bodies to regulate and to represent meaning and practice. The analysis explores the issue of the cultural rights of these folk groups. Through studying their displaced agency as tradition bearers and their lost rights of claiming social and economic values of these cultural resources, the article dwells on the question of for whom to conserve ICH, in order to further reflect the relationship between the purpose of ICH conservation practices and the reproduction of local culture.

#### REVERENCE FOR YU THE GREAT: REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AS THE OFFICIAL BODY TO REPRESENT FOLK BELIEF

Yu the Great (Da Yu 大禹), also called Xia Yu 夏禹, is considered the founding emperor of the first Chinese dynasty, Xia 夏. As Yu the Great is the founder of the first Chinese state, later dynasties all paid particular reverence to him. In my previous study on Reverence for Yu the Great (CHEN 2010, 30–34), I explored how regional governments reconstruct this folk belief as China's national ICH through three aspects: the reconstruction of name and time, the thickening of the traditional flavor of the ceremony format, and the strengthening of nationalistic awareness through the ceremony. The following analysis continues this study by addressing how the structure of the belief practitioners has changed when this ceremony is recognized as China's national ICH.

Yu the Great, a legendary figure in Chinese mythology who is believed to have successfully tamed a great flood in ancient times, is of great significance in Shaoxing 绍兴, Zhejiang province, China. The current architectural complex consisting of the tomb, temple, and ancestral hall of Yu the Great is located in the foothills of Kuaiji 会稽 Mountain, in the southeast of Shaoxing city. Claiming to be the descendants of Yu the Great, the people of Yuling 禹陵 village at the foot of the mountain believe that they are the 144th generation of the Yu lineage and belong to the Si clan (姒姓). According to *Sishi shipu* 姒氏世谱 (1875) [The genealogy book of the Si clan], “the sixth generation named Shaokang [少康] sent his son Wuyu [无馀] to Kuaiji Mountain to guard Yu the Great's tomb.”

In addition to those practiced by clans and non-clan villagers, officially organized public ceremonies of reverence for Yu were also observed in both imperial and Republican China (1911–1949). The clan worship (*zuji* 族祭) discussed in this article is organized, operated, and participated in by the Si clan. Before the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Si clan in Yuling village held the ceremony on the Chinese New Year and Yu's birthday every year. The Si clan regarded the Yu temple as



FIGURE 1. Yu the Great tomb in Shaoxing (2010). All photos by author.



FIGURE 2. The Yu statue in the Yu the Great temple (2006).

their ancestral temple. When the ceremony took place on the first day of the New Year, the Si clansmen who had migrated out of the village also came back to participate. People gathered in the main hall of the temple in the early morning and the ceremony was presided over by the clan chief, also called “family headman” (*touren* 头人) in Yuling village. The ceremony started with the sound of gunpowder (*chong* 銃) and firecrackers. The chief then led clansmen in order of seniority to pay homage to Yu’s statue. Before leaving the hall, the clansmen wished each other a happy new year, a custom called “mass greetings” (*tuanbai* 团拜). Many rules were observed during the ceremony. To encourage and enable the clansmen to attend the ceremony, food such as pork and steamed buns was distributed to all in attendance. Each participant received a bamboo slip before entering the temple and exchanged it for food after the ceremony. While women were prohibited from attending the ceremony, brides could participate in the ceremony in the first year of their marriage. They would be seated in a sedan chair and lifted into the temple to worship Yu as a rite of identification.

The Si clan also celebrated Yu’s birthday, which was the sixth day of the sixth lunar month. A similar but smaller scale ceremony was held the day before. The attendees were mostly those who resided in Yuling village. The ceremony procedure was the same as the one at New Year except this ceremony started with drums and music instead of lighting gunpowder (SI and SI 2003, 198).

After 1949, the Yu temple came under the jurisdiction of local governments and the clan ceremony in the temple was forced to discontinue. However, the clan chiefs continued to host the ceremony in their homes privately and preserved the Yu-worship tradition. My fieldwork in contemporary Yuling village indicates that clan worship has functioned as a rite of boundary demarcation to distinguish the Si clansmen from other residents of the same village. Given that non-clan villagers are not included in Yu worship, a strong sense of belonging and identification is constructed and reinforced among the Si clansmen through their clan ceremony. Consistently, when a Yu worship ceremony is held by the non-Si groups, members of the Si clan do not participate. Nor do they seem to care that Yu the Great is given a different birthday by these groups.

There are no historical records about the origin of the folk worship for Yu the Great. Among Shaoxing residents, it is believed that Yu’s birthday is on the fifth day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar. This day is also named “[the day of] entertainment in the Yu Temple” (*xi Yu miao* 嬉禹庙). According to ZHANG Guanda (1997, 264), this saying actually refers to the practice of “going to the temple to worship Yu” (*ji Yu* 祭禹); *xi* 嬉 means to “play or have fun.” The usage of *xi* rather than *ji* 祭 (worship) is accounted for by the folk idea that Yu was an emperor and only the officials of the *futai* 府台 (equivalent of a city mayor) rank or higher were qualified to attend this ceremony. The common folk could only call their ceremony “play,” not worship.

Officially organized public worship can be traced back to the first emperor of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). These rituals continued through the



FIGURE 3. The preparation for the clan ceremony the day before Yu's birthday (2009).



FIGURE 4. Sacrifice for Yu the Great at the clan ceremony on the Chinese New Year Day, 2011.



FIGURE 5. The clan flag used at the clan ceremony in 2011.



FIGURE 6. Marching toward Yu the Great temple on the Chinese New Year Day, 2011.





FIGURE 7. The clan ceremony at Yu the Great temple on the Chinese New Year Day, 2011.

following centuries, and included rituals in which the emperors of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) participated. During the republic, two official Yu worship ceremonies took place. After a large-scale renovation of the Yu temple in 1933 and 1934, the Zhejiang provincial government organized a special ceremony on 16 October 1935. The other was hosted by the Shaoxing county government on 19 September 1936 (SHEN 1995, 200–12). An officially organized worship was not revived until about sixty years later when the Shaoxing municipal government in socialist China offered another ceremony in 1995, during which time the word “public worship” (*gongji* 公祭) began to circulate in the official discourse.

On 20 April 1995, under the auspices of the Zhejiang provincial government and operated by the Shaoxing municipal government, the grand ceremony entitled the 1995 Public Yu worship ceremony by Zhejiang province and all circles of Shaoxing city (1995 Nian Zhejiang sheng ji Shaoxing shi gejie gongji da Yu shengdian 1995年浙江省暨绍兴市各界公祭大禹盛典) took place. Wan Xuyuan 万学远, the then-governor of Zhejiang province, presided over the ceremony and read out a “worship text” as the chief ritual master. This ceremony was conducted in a way to follow and to imitate imperial Yu worship, and the officials from the Ministry of Water Resources (Shuili bu 水利部, a reference to Yu’s role as a tamer of floods) were invited to participate as the representatives of the central government.

Between 1995 and 2006, the officially organized worshipping practices were held according to the principle of “a small-scale ceremony annually, public worship

every five years, and a grand ceremony every ten years.” While the grand ceremony was under the auspices of the Zhejiang provincial government, it was still operated by the Shaoxing municipal government, as was the once-every-five-years public worship. For the annual small-scale ceremony, the Shaoxing municipal government encouraged nongovernmental social groups like the regional federation of literature and arts to operate with the intention of reviving the Yu worshipping tradition at the grassroots level. However, on 2 April 2006, the Shaoxing municipal government organized a ceremony to replace the grand and nongovernmental small-scale ceremonies. It has since been regularized as the only officially organized and sanctioned public ceremony of Yu worship in the local area. The Shaoxing municipal government has set up The Office of Festivals and Fairs (*Jie hui bangongshi* 节会办公室) to manage this public ceremony as one of its main responsibilities. A special committee for the ceremony at the Yu tomb is also organized every year.

The 2006 practice can be seen as the turning point at which folk worship practiced by non-clan social groups was formally integrated into government-conducted public worship. All the nongovernmental social groups are still invited to participate, but for the sake of convenience, since 2007 the date of the ceremony has been set for 19, 20, and 21 April in the Western calendar, rather than the traditional observance of Yu’s birthday on the fifth day of the third lunar month. This change shows the ways that officially-conducted public worship departs from folk tradition. Currently, the two ceremonies annually held by the Si clan in Yuling village still exist independent of the official worship, but as will be discussed later, their request to hold their ceremonies in the temple has met with an unfavorable response. At the same time, the local government invites the clan members to appear in the officially conducted public worship as a special group every year, thus showing a tendency to integrate the clan ceremony into the official ritual.



FIGURE 8. Public worship ceremony of the Yu tomb in 2010.

The integration and assimilation of folk and clan traditions into the officially conducted public worship is closely related to the ICH application scheme that was conducted by the Shaoxing municipal government. Resonating with the central governments' ICH movement, Shaoxing decided to apply for the state recognition of Yu worship as China's national ICH. As mentioned earlier, during the application process, the local government often applied for the ICH status of a tradition on behalf of tradition bearers. The Shaoxing municipal government played the same role in this case by managing the application as a governmental project. Rather than recognizing the richness and complexity of the local Yu worship traditions, this application included only officially-conducted public worship, which it renamed Reverence for Yu the Great in order to elevate this ceremony to the status of a state ritual. In May 2006, Reverence for Yu the Great appeared on the list of national ICH issued by the State Council. In 2007, officials from the Ministry of Culture, which governs China's ICH conservation practices, began participating in Shaoxing's annual official public ceremony. In the view of the local government, their presence formally signified the recognition of this ceremony as a state ritual, similar to the way that local deities in imperial China were recognized and standardized by the court. The local government compared the Yu ceremonies with those of the Tomb of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi ling 黄帝陵) in Shanxi 陕西, broadcasting the slogan: "Tomb of the Yellow Emperor in the north, and tomb of Yu the Great in the south" in the mass media, arguing for the national representation of ancestor reverence by Chinese people.

During this process of transformation, the meaning of Yu as a cultural symbol has changed greatly. As shown by the commemoration scripts written in different historical eras, imperial-era ceremonies praised Yu for his virtues, merits, and achievements as a great ruler and a deity. But Shaoxing's official public worship essentially represents Yu as a national flood-taming hero (SHEN 1996). Moreover, government efforts to standardize and to elevate Yu worship to China's ICH and a state ritual are also greatly determined by the goal of developing local tourism (CHEN 2010, 32; MCNEAL 2012, 700–703). Thus the transformation can be seen as a process of politicizing and commercializing cultural resources, during which the local government does not hesitate to assume authority and ownership.

Furthermore, China's ICH conservation movement provides a legitimized arena for the local government to exercise its power over folk tradition. Though Reverence for Yu the Great is documented under the category of "folklore" on China's national ICH list, the Shaoxing municipal government acts as the official body to present and practice the tradition. The reshaping of government practice into "folklore" raises the question of cultural ownership that has been seen in other regions in the context of China's ICH movement.<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon asks us to look critically at the transference of cultural ownership and the changes to the cultural rights of tradition bearers (IWAMOTO 2007, 4–5), especially to the dislocated agency of the Si clan members in Yuling village.

In 2003, the Kuaiji Mountain Tourism Resort Management Committee (Kuaiji shan lüyou dujia qu guanwei hui 会稽山旅游度假区管委会, hereafter KMTRMC),

an organization affiliated with the Shaoxing municipal government, commenced development planning in Yuling village. Si Chengjia 姒承家, a vice secretary of the party committee at a local university, donated the only existing Ming-Qing ancestral house in the village to KMTRMC on behalf of the whole clan. The only request was that the ancient style of the village would be kept intact and that the 300-square-meter house would be used as an exhibition hall to publicize the clan history (Si 2008, 182–92). However, this request was not honored. The ancestral house, named “the Hall of the Yu Descendants” (*Yu yi guan* 禹裔馆), never exhibited any history of the clan except a display of eighteen statues of Yu’s descendants. Further, due to landscape construction surrounding the Yu tomb complex, the entire village was dismantled and the villagers relocated.

Under the pressure of public opinion, the Shaoxing municipal government eventually built a pseudo-archaic village on the original site named Shouling 守陵 (tomb-guarding) village. With no residents, this newly-built village had no connection with the original villagers. When the government attempted to repurpose this empty village for other uses, the original Yuling villagers strongly objected to the plan. The villagers insisted that it could not be commercialized. Nevertheless, Shouling village is currently leased to a hotel management group as a tourism resort, with no profit returned to the original villagers.

After the Yu temple was named a protected historical relic unit and a tourist site, Si clan members were also deprived of their right to hold their worship ceremony in the temple. The villagers had to buy tickets in order to enter the temple. After a few years’ negotiation and communication with the local historical relic and tourism bureaus, villagers were eventually allowed to hold their worship ceremony in the temple on the morning of the New Year without any admission fee.

Yet, the most urgent issue that the villagers currently desire to solve is the reconstruction of the west-wing room in front of the main hall of the Yu temple. Before it was destroyed by a fire in November 2007, this room held the exhibition of deeds of Yu the Great while the east-wing room exhibited the history of flood control in Shaoxing. The villagers’ request to reconstruct the west-wing room has been ignored by the local government. Now, a row of pine trees stands in the empty place.

The difficult situation of giving up homes and cultural memory that these villages have to face, as well as their dislocated agency in this process, raises the question of who should claim the authority as the main body of tradition carriers—the local government, or the people? To the Si clan members who have been eager to benefit from the cultural and economic values of their tradition during China’s ICH movement, the situation is far from satisfactory. Nor do they feel that they have been given any respect as bearers of tradition.

#### THE EMPEROR SHUN TEMPLE FESTIVAL

According to GU (1935),<sup>6</sup> there were two grand temples in Zhejiang province. One is the Yu the Great temple mentioned above, and the other is Emperor Shun 舜 temple (also known as da Shun miao 大舜庙 [the Great Shun



FIGURES 9 and 10. The empty Shouling village (2009).





FIGURE 11. The west-wing room before the fire (2006).



FIGURE 12. The planted pine trees after the fire (2010).

temple.] in the mountainous area of southern Shaoxing. Although Shun (roughly 2277 BCE–2178 BCE) was an emperor, there was no tradition of imperial ritual for him in Shaoxing—only folk worship. Historically, there were six Shun Temples in the area of Wangtan 王坛 town, of which three remain. What are referred to in this case are the Shun temples in Shuangjiangxi 双江溪 village and Hudun 湖墩 village. Shuangjiangxi Shun temple, the largest in the local area, served as the main temple for all important ceremonies before 1949. Today the temple is well preserved as a historical site. In contrast, the Shun temple in Hudun village is simple and crude and the Hudun villagers still attend the temple fair held at Shuangjiangxi Shun temple on the twenty-seventh of the ninth lunar month, celebrated as the birthday of Emperor Shun. Local legend said that even the fish in Shuangjiangxi River would raise their heads and face the Shun temple on this day. The consecration of Shun in this legend reinforces the popularity of Shun worship among the villagers (CHEN 2007, 153–54).

Before 1949, the three-day Shuangjiangxi temple fair consisted of two significant events: greeting the god (*yingshen saihui* 迎神赛会) and the ceremony of worship. The former, also called the ceremony of procession (*xunhui* 巡会) or welcome (*yinghui* 迎会), started with a ritual invitation to Emperor Shun on the twenty-sixth day.<sup>7</sup> The statue of Emperor Shun was then lifted on a divine sedan chair and taken on a circular route around each village. It ended on the twenty-eighth when the villagers returned to the temple to show their gratitude to the deity (*xieshen* 谢神).

Before 1949, the Emperor Shun temple fair had its own liturgical organizations called “union” (*she* 社) and “society” (*hui* 会). Each organization usually contained several natural villages, which had a ritual rather than administrative function during the temple festival. At its height, the temple fair was believed to have had between thirty-two to thirty-six such organizations. By the early republic, only thirteen were left. The head of each union organized and operated the temple fair every year, deciding the time and route of the “greeting the god” event. Liturgical societies were also organized by each village to serve the temple fair. An affluent village could establish several liturgical societies while several poor villages could together have only one. For example, Hudun village had a “dragon society” before 1949. The dragon was colored red and eighteen people took part in the dragon dance. At their height, there were over one hundred liturgical societies, such as the “dragon society,” “lion society,” “blunderbuss society,” “fireworks [*pao* 砲] society,” “stilts [*gaoqiao* 高跷] society,” “flag society,” and “broadsword [*dadao* 大刀] society.” On the twenty-sixth, these groups followed the divine sedan chair of Emperor Shun on his inspection tour. They gave performances to entertain the god at noon or in evenings in different villages. During the temple fair, many believers came to the Emperor Shun temple to burn incense and pray in front of the god. Operas were performed on the stages built both inside and outside the temple. Nearby, numerous peddlers and merchants converged for business.

In the early 1950s, the organizations were disbanded and the temple fair activities were discontinued. During the time of the establishment of people’s communes

in the late 1950s, the local government replaced the temple fair with trade fairs from the twenty-sixth to the twenty-eighth of the ninth lunar month. The worship was not revived until 2005.

On 26 October 2005 (the twenty-fourth day of the ninth lunar month), the Wangtan township government held the Shaoxing Shun and Yue Cultural Tourism Festival and the Shun Temple Worship Ceremony (Shaoxing Shun Yue wenhua lüyou jie kaimushi ji ji Shunwang miao dianli 绍兴舜越文化旅游节开幕式暨祭舜王庙典礼). Over 150 officials and people from all walks of life in Shaoxing county and Wangtan town participated in the event. Meanwhile, several economic and trade fairs, such as a forum for economic development, an investment fair for leisure, sightseeing, and tourism, and a trade fair for agricultural production and local goods, were organized. Because Emperor Shun was also recorded as the first and greatest of the classical twenty-four filial exemplars, the township government also endeavored to highlight the theme of filial piety. Over the following years, the worship ceremonies were also presided over by the township government. The mayor read the worship text and led all the participants to bow three times to the statue of Emperor Shun. The ceremony ended with the offering of wine and five grains to the god by people of all circles in Wangtan town.

During the 2005 event, the township party secretary raised the interesting question of legitimacy to preside over such a ceremony. As mentioned above, in the case of the Yu ritual, the common people termed their “worship” as “play” due to the folk idea that only officials of the *futai* rank or higher were qualified to attend the emperor worship ceremony. In the same vein, the party secretary of Wangtan township government raised this question during the 2005 event: was it appropriate for the township government to host and preside over this ceremony? After consulting local culture specialists<sup>8</sup> the officials decided to change the name King Shun worship (*ji Shun wang* 祭舜王) to King Shun temple worship (*ji Shun wang miao* 祭舜王庙). From the viewpoint of the township officials, this ceremony created an unprecedented model in the history of worshipping Emperor Shun. This shows that the township government as a local authority started to construct its distinctive identity as a performer of folk belief.

In June 2007, the folk tradition of worshipping Emperor Shun was recognized as the provincial ICH of Zhejiang but under the name of the Shaoxing Emperor Shun Temple Fair (Shaoxing Shun wang miaohui 绍兴舜王庙会). However, the important component of “greeting the god” was not officially practiced. Rather, with the gradual revival of Emperor Shun belief, it was the villagers in Hudun village who first reestablished two “dragon societies”—“yellow dragon” and “black dragon”—and in December 2007 held the greeting ceremonies for the first time in fifty years. Later on, the neighboring villages reestablished some of the original “societies.”

The leading role of Hudun village in this process can be attributed to the existence of their well-preserved Emperor Shun temple, and also because the village preserved the old statue of Emperor Shun. In Shaoxing, temple fairs usually have two statues present at the greeting ceremonies: one is called *zuo gong* 坐宫, which





FIGURE 13. The statue of Emperor Shun (2005).



FIGURE 14. The opera stage (2007) in Shuangjiangxi Emperor Shun temple.

is placed in the hall and receives worship from the believers. The other is called *xing gong* 行宮, which is placed behind the hall and cannot be seen except at the time of that ceremony. This statue is lifted on a divine sedan chair to patrol or inspect the villages. Intended to be moved around, *xing gong* is usually a wooden statue in a sitting posture and built with movable limbs. Although the Shuangjiangxi Emperor Shun temple had lost their *xing gong* statue during the Maoist years, the Hudun villagers had preserved theirs.

In recent years, while the Wangtan township government held the Emperor Shun worship ceremony in the Shuangjiangxi temple, the Hudun villagers independently performed their greeting ceremonies at the same time. However, Hudun's "god-greeting fair" has been recruited into the official ceremony since 2010. And it is through this integration practice that the Shaoxing Emperor Shun Temple Fair (Shaoxing Shun wang miaohui 绍兴舜王庙会), which was recognized as Zhejiang's provincial ICH in 2007, can be said to live up to its name. The officially recognized temple fair would not be complete without performing the greeting ceremonies.

The Wangtan township government held the Shaoxing Yu Shun Cultural Tourism Festival (Shaoxing Yu Shun wenhua lüyou jie 绍兴虞舜文化旅游节) on 31 October 2010, which included the grand Shun Worship Ceremony (Ji Shun dadian 祭舜大典), the greeting Emperor Shun Fair (Shun di yinghui 舜帝迎会), the Seminar on Yu-Shun Culture (Yu Shun wenhua yantaohui 虞舜文化研讨会), and a Trade Fair of Agricultural Goods (Nong te chanpin zhanxiao 农特产品展销). The worship ritual in this event was for the first time formally titled "the grand Shun worship ceremony," which laid the ground for the township government's future plan to apply for the national ICH status of this tradition under this name. This name was viewed by governmental officials as more refined than the "Shun Temple Fair." Meanwhile, this resonates with the trend that emperor-related worshipping temple fairs are usually crowned with the title of "the grand ceremonies" on the national ICH list.

Unlike the official ceremony when the Wangtan township government first revived the temple fair in 2005, the 2010 event adopted rituals that were performed by Hudun villagers in addition to existing practices, such as the reading of eulogistic texts by the governmental officials, bowing, and the offering of ritual wine and five grains by all the participants. The newly adopted rituals included the shows of different "societies" and Taoist musical performances. It is said that these ritual practices were reconstructed by some culture specialists based on the villagers' memories. Although the current Emperor Shun temple fairs cannot revive former folk ritual organizations, some of their functions have been absorbed by the township government.

Thus, like the Reverence for Yu the Great, the officially sanctioned Shun ceremony has separated itself from traditional practices of Shun worship. In this transformation of folk worship into official practice, Hudun villagers experienced the loss of authority and rights as tradition bearers to an even greater degree. Given the unique history and status of Yuling village in the Yu worshipping tradition, the representatives of the Si clan were still invited to be the major ritual masters at the event organized by the Shaoxing municipal government. But Hudun villagers



FIGURE 15. The statue of Emperor Shun in the Hudun Emperor Shun temple (2009).



FIGURE 16. The Shun Worshipping Ceremony Held by Hudun villagers (2009).



FIGURE 17. The lantern society (*denghui* 灯会) and flag society (*qihui* 旗会) “greeting the god” at the Hudun Shun worship ceremony in 2009.



FIGURE 18. The sacrifice platform set up by Hudun villagers “greeting the god” at the Hudun Shun worship ceremony in 2009.



FIGURES 19 and 20. The green dragon society (top) and the yellow dragon society (bottom) “greeting the god” at the Hudun Shun worship ceremony in 2009.





FIGURES 21 and 22. The grand Shun worship ceremony held by the Wangtan township government in 2010.



never enjoyed such special treatment even as the village-owned statue of Emperor Shun and the two dragon “societies” were recruited without compensation by the township government for its official ceremony. Hudun villagers’ experiences reflect another example of local governments replacing tradition bearers to represent and to perform folk beliefs before the public.

In addition to the issue of cultural ownership, Hudun villagers also lose the opportunity to financially benefit from their tradition. The reestablishment of the societies and the revival of the greeting ceremony by the villagers greatly contributed to the success of the township government’s ICH application project. But Hudun village did not receive any ICH preservation funds after the provincial ICH recognition was granted. According to the villagers, during the application process, the ICH bureau of Shaoxing county came only once to the village to do investigation and research; there was no subsequent communication or connection. The villagers thought the application had been made under the name of the Hudun Emperor Shun Temple (Hudun Shun wang miao 湖墩舜王庙), and were deeply disappointed when it was recognized as the Shaoxing Emperor Shun Temple Festival (Shaoxing Shun wang miaohui 绍兴舜王庙会). Moreover, during the temple fair, the appearance of the villagers was limited only to the dragon dance performance. The few villagers who had played a major role in reviving the temple fair were also invited to join the official ceremony, but, unlike the Yuling representatives, their presence was not given any significance compared to that of government officials. Currently, the cost of the annual “god-greeting fair” is still paid through donations by villagers and some cultural groups. Hudun villagers tried in vain to apply for preservation funds from the ICH preservation bureaus.

#### THE REPRODUCTION OF LOCAL CULTURE AND THE PURPOSE OF THE ICH CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

The two cases discussed above unfold the transformation processes of the Yu and Shun worshipping traditions in contemporary Shaoxing, Zhejiang province. In the context of tourism development and China’s ICH preservation movement, the local governments reconstruct these folk traditions into a profitable tourism resource (McNEAL 2012, 700, 703) and regulate them into something that is officially recognized and standardized. This process changes the cultural meaning and functions of folk traditions and sets in motion a process of repackaging and reproducing of local cultures. In the official ceremonies, clan-based Yu worship is now tinged with nationalism and heroism, and Shun rituals are colored with the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

Both cases reveal a tendency to integrate folk beliefs into official practices, thus changing the structure and meaning of the ritual body. The parallel structural relationship among clan-based worship, non-clan folk worship, and the official, public worship has been shifted to a pyramid structure with the government as its main base. The Si clan, Yuling villagers, and Hudun villagers as well as other nongovernmental social groups are all positioned on the periphery of this structure. This

change shows not only the authority of local governments to regulate folk belief but also their power to selectively promote certain folk beliefs as ICH.

The direct intervention of local governments erodes the agency of tradition bearers. To a great extent, the government-guided and operated ICH practices are conducted on the price of these tradition bearers' rights to the social and economic values of their traditions. As Kang Baocheng points out, due to the lack of transparency, there are many questions about the distribution and usage of the ICH conservation funds. This has become one of the major drawbacks for the government-guided ICH conservation models such as in China (KANG 2011, 28). CHEN Zhiqin argues that, "the public sphere and the folk become only the maneuvered objects of the state's administrative power, especially that of local governments" (2010, 36). If the interests of tradition bearers cannot be guaranteed, the call for respecting their subjectivity and agency is rather an empty promise.

Therefore, although these two cases are only an illustration of China's ICH conservation movement in microcosm, the questions that have been raised here are crucial: does the ICM movement reproduce local cultures at the expense of local people? What is the ultimate goal of this movement, to protect tradition or to protect tradition bearers? As XU and GUO ask, "If a tradition on the government-approved ICH list does not belong to the everyday lives of people, is it still meaningful to talk about ICH conservation?" (2012, 33). These questions—unavoidable to the understanding of the purpose of this movement—are also essential to the continuity of this movement.

The question of for whom to conserve ICH has been explored in scholarly research. AN points out that, "to some extent, it can be said that culture is about people, and people are culture. To take an important measure on one side will certainly exert impact on the other" (2008, 19). According to SUGA, "it makes more sense to say that the value of ICH derives from the relationship and interaction between ICH and people rather than from ICH themselves" (2009, 107). FUKUDA emphasizes that, "compared to material culture, ICH is the kind of cultural heritage that has to be an integrated part of human kind" (2010, 5). These perspectives show that for the ICH, conservation is to protect humankind, and it is for humankind to conserve ICH. Echoing these viewpoints, some research based on case studies has also directed attention to the communication and interaction between tradition bearers and external forces, including local governments, local cultural groups, or researchers (GAO 2006; XU 2010). This approach is concerned with the initiatives of these tradition bearers and the effectiveness of the communication and collaboration on this meeting ground.

However, in contrast to theoretical conversations, China's ICH conservation practices in reality are often conducted in contravention to these mentioned perspectives. Under government-guided principles, the subjectivity and agency of tradition bearers are greatly constrained, as local governments enthusiastically engage in the reproduction of local cultures through administrative behaviors rather than truly considering the subjectivity and agency of tradition bearers.



## NOTES

1. This situation has changed in recent years. The policy now emphasizes the importance for tradition bearers to act for themselves during the ICH application process.

2. “The objectification of culture,” according to Ota Yoshinobu, does not necessarily mean the damage of tradition or the loss of authenticity in the tourism process. OTA points out that the displayed culture can be a result of the self-choice of tradition bearers or a creation of their own will (1993, 391; 1998, 72). Similarly, Cohen also points out that that commercialization may cause changes to the meaning of the reconstructed culture or give it new meaning in tourism—without necessarily damaging the meaning. CHEN calls for the scholarly attention to the process of cultural reconstruction (1988, 371, 374).

3. In his research on the reconstruction of Chinese foodways, Tamura Kazuhiko argues that the ICH conservation movement stands as a typical phenomenon of the objectification of culture. It contributes to the rising popularity of the foodways of the peasants (*nongjiale* 农家乐, literally meaning “the happiness in a peasant’s household”) as one of the underlying forces (TAMURA 2012, 82).

4. SHI points out that the questions raised in many ICH conservation seminars do not belong to the scope of scholarly research (2009, 11). This phenomenon indicates a tendency to confuse the research on ICH with the conservation practices in reality.

5. The recognition of folk culture as ICH also transforms it into part of public culture. In the past few years, disputes and lawsuits on the cultural ownership or usage rights of ICH has sometimes surfaced. Based on a report on ICH conservation practices from 2001 to 2010, dozens of such cases have been documented, including director Zhang Yimou 张艺谋’s infringement lawsuit on *Anshun Dixi* 安顺地戏 (local opera in Anshun, Guizhou 贵州 province) (KANG 2011, 15–22).

6. *Shundi miaozhi xu* 舜帝庙志序 (GU 1935) comprises three volumes and is currently in the collection of the Shangyu 上虞 Library, Shaoxing, Zhejiang province.

7. In Shaoxing, memorial ceremonies on Bodhisattvas’ birthdays all hold these kinds of welcome fairs to greet the god. Those who lift the god sedan chair on ships are known as the water society (*shui hui* 水会), while those who lift the god sedan chair on the road in the mountains or plains are known as the land society (*lu hui* 陆会).

8. “Local culture specialists” refers to the group of activists who were born in this area and are actively engaged in popularizing and publicizing local traditions. They not only compile and publish documents or books on these traditions but also participate in the activities that directly influence the current presence of these traditions, such as the ICH preservation movement and the local tourism industry. They play an important role in the reproduction of local cultures.

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