

Temple Communities and Religious Life in Rural North China: the Case of Shaanbei and Western Shanxi

Ekaterina Zavidovskaya^{*}

Abstract

The paper focuses on organization and functioning of temple communities in rural areas of Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, it is based on the data collected during field work in 2008-2009. The aim of the study is to discuss what role the temples play in the religious life of the villagers, who are integrated around these temples to perform collective worship of the tutelary deities. The paper provides factual data that reveals the similarities and local specifics of the temples' interaction with rural society in the neighboring areas of western Shanxi 山西 and Shaanbei 陝北. We illustrate specifics of organization and power distribution inside two different temple communities *hui* 會 from Hengshan county 橫山縣 in Shaanbei, one of them has a temple of the Perfected Warrior – Zhenwu 真武 as a center, another community worships Bull King Bodhisattva - Niuwang pusa 牛王菩薩. The paper touches upon modes and structures of intra- and crossvillage self-organization and self-governance spurred by common need to perform worship, role of professional ritual specialists and village administration in the ritual practice is discussed. The conclusions about differences and similarities of worship practices in neighboring areas of Shanxi and Shaanbei are drawn, and reasons of such disposition are suggested.

Keywords: temple community, Shanxi, Shaanbei, self-organization, collective worship.

本文收稿日期：2011/04/11 通過審查日期：2011/06/29

^{*} Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and African Studies, St-Petersburg State University, Russian Federation.

Introduction

Development of the core ideas of my research on present day popular religion of China's Northern provinces Shanxi and Shaanxi has gone through several stages. I took interest in Shanxi's culture during my first visit to the southeastern part of the province called Shangdang 上黨 area in 2006 to attend a conference on rural festival on occasion of Lunar new year called "competing of communities" *saishe* 賽社 (also known as *shehuo* 社火), a type of collective celebration formerly widely spread in many parts of China. Back then I became decisive to come to Shanxi again in order to learn more about local theatrical traditions and their relation to popular religion, in the cause of further field research communal temples occupied the centre of my attention. My field work was spurred by reading Marianne Bujard's monograph *Le Cult de La Dame du Yaoshan* (Cult of the Holy Mother of Yaoshan Mountain and Its Sacred Communities) addressing the historical background and recent situation around worship of Yaoshan Holy mother (Yaoshan shengmu 堯山聖母) in Pucheng 蒲城 country, Weinan 渭南 city prefecture of central Shaanxi (Bujard, Qin 2003). The scope of her monograph is not limited to introspective of temple's and communities' history (great number of luckily survived stone inscriptions was studied for this purpose), it points direction for further research of popular religion in modern village.

I made a number of field trips to rural areas of Shanxi 山西 and northern Shaanxi (below also referred to as Shaanbei 陝北) in 2007-2009, my initial intention was to probe whether temple communities *she* 社 analyzed by M.Bujard and Duan Youwei (Duan, Wei 2005) exist in western Shanxi and learn how are they organized and operate.

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1. The studied geographical area

My field work results proved that system of communities existing around the temple analyzed by M. Bujard is not a singular case, but a rather widely spread phenomena,

besides communities have distinct local specifics. First, I came across three natural villages united around a temple of Huang Feihu (黃飛虎 better known as the Ruler of the Eastern Peak, or Emperor of Taishan mountain - Dongyue dadi 東嶽大帝) located close to Qicun zhen 奇村鎮 township of Xinzhou 忻州 prefecture in central Shanxi. The funds raised at this temple during the festival on the occasion of the deity's birthday are quite considerable. During the festival a newly rebuilt temple hosts tens of thousands of visitors (*xiangke* 香客) with wide geography. Visitors from Inner Mongolia have kinship links with Qicun villagers, their ancestors have moved to Mongolia more than a hundred years ago, but the worship connections remain strong, kinfolds come back and leave donations in the temple built by their ancestors.

During my next visit to the western part of Shanxi, Linxian county 臨縣, Shibai tou xiang 石白頭鄉 administrative unit I have discovered a good number of the similarly organized temple communities. The further enquiry proved that almost all the natural villages of this *xiang* are united around this or that temple under communal management, each such community involves from three to ten and more natural villages.

My next trip was to the northern part of Shaanxi lying across Huanghe river, where I had a chance to attend temple festival of the largest Taoist centre White Cloud Mountain Baiyunshan 白雲山 and witness real large scale activity of popular religion. Baiyushan being the most famous and influential Daoist centre in whole Shaanbei attracts numerous crowds of worshippers from four provinces, many of my informants from western part of Shanxi told that they regularly attend it. During the ritual ceremony of offering incense and paper money starting at 4 a.m. in the morning thousands of pilgrims walk up the central stair-case of the temple with burning incense sticks lead by a group of people with flags and banners and accompanied by a band. Believers strive to pay homage to the main deity worshipped there Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu, also known as the Emperor of Dark Heaven Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝, on this particular occasion in order to gain the utmost of good fortune through that. The procession is making offerings on behalf of "six big congregations" *liudahui* 六大會, one of the largest pilgrim organizations in the area. Notably, up to the recent moment Baiyunshan fund was the main source of income for the

Jiaxian 佳縣 country government, nowadays the fund raised during the festivals amounts to eight million RMB.

Pilgrim association called “six big congregations” deserves special scholarly attention as the largest religious network in the area. Each congregation has a head, and it is divided into sub-congregations with deputy heads, it’s not an easy task to be elected as a head of a congregation, since this position is rather high and honorable, the position became hereditary within some groups. Activists of many community temples located in different parts of Shaanbei are members of “six big congregations”. According to the informants, in their area number of villages uniting for worship in local communal temples often exceeds dozens. I was also told about high concentration of large temple communities in Hengshan 橫山 and neighboring Mizhi 米脂 counties of Yulin city prefecture 榆林市. According to the informants, all the natural villages have more than one village temple and all of them belong to at least one, and sometimes two, community temples. And this is one of important discoveries of my study, below we will concentrate on two cases from Hengshan county.

Subsequent visit to the mentioned area of Yulin city prefecture 榆林市 offered a new astonishing insight into situation of temple community structure and management in Shaanbei, and allowed to surmise that situation there may be considered rather different in comparison with modes of communal management observed in rather underdeveloped and non-prosperous Linxian county in Shanxi province. In case of Shaanbei links between the temple and villages constituting its community appear weakened, while local business elite and administration play visible role in supporting the temple funds.

Situation around temples observed in Shaanbei offers ground for conclusions about developments in the politics of local societies, where temple committee leaders turn out to be influential players on the sub county level. Important aspect is attitude of the county level Party and government authorities and therefore local authorities to the resurgence of popular religion. In Shaanbei village temples were restored beginning in the 1980s, whereas in Shanxi the reconstruction was banned until much later, and this explains why Shanxi seems to lag behind Shaanbei. In the temples of the latter region one may observe slogans

and banners proclaiming importance of reviving popular religion as a facet of culture, while this can hardly be found in Shanxi.

Seen from another prospective, case of western Shanxi and Shaanbei offers fascinating insight into diversity of cultural patterns and varying intensity of cultural accumulation in two neighboring areas divided by Huanghe River.

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2. Current research on temple communities and Chinese popular religion

Research on temple associations and communities in various parts of China counts long history and may be traced back to Republican period sociological surveys in the rural areas of North China carried by the Japanese South Manchuria Railway (Minami Mantetsu tetsudō). It is well known that Japanese scholars attached great importance to village communities and viewed them as basic cell of Han society. Surveys of rural religious beliefs conducted in different parts of China during Republican period by the Chinese and Western scholars prove that almost every natural village used to form an organization to conduct worship in the temple, and all the inhabitants would be members of temple community (Qiao, 2005:121).

The work of M. Bujard mentioned above was proceeded by a good number of studies analyzing organization of local cults mainly in southern eastern parts of China and Taiwan (Wang 1974, Schipper 1977, Sangren 1987). Their data gives ground to suggest that in traditional China almost the whole country area was divided between areas of influence of various temples, in Taiwan this system has been preserved rather well. A temple could be either a venue for worship by population of one village, or be under combined worship and management of several adjacent villages. Taiwan scholars have adopted theories developed earlier by the Japanese scholars about “communal entity” (*kyōdotai* 共同體) and further applied them for analyzing ritual communities and temple networks in Taiwan. Theories of “ritual sphere” (*jisi juan* 祭祀圈) and wider “belief sphere” (*xinyang juan* 信仰圈) developed by Taiwan scholars allow to grasp mechanisms of self-organization and self-

governance evolving around temple in society which remained long time frontier of the empire (Shih 1973, Hsu 1973, Lin 1986). Popular cults and ritual spatiality of southeastern China has been rather extensively explored during recent decades; systematic field work has been carried out in Fujian, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces by Kenneth Dean (Dean, Zheng 2010), John Lagerwey (2010), David Holm (2004), David Faure and others.

On the one hand, Taiwan has its specifics in historical background and recent development, so that theories elaborated in attribution to situation there need to be reconsidered when dealing with cases from mainland areas lying across the Taiwan Strait, not to mention North China. We should not be neglecting common features characteristic of communal worship and omnipresence of temple communities and associations in regions of both “southern” and “northern” China. Keeping these similarities in mind, my interest has, nevertheless, been primarily in **revealing the differences, local specifics** and details about of temples’ interaction with rural society in Shanxi and Shaanbei.

Without doubt, “northern China” appears to be too general a term that tends to erase special features that make Hebei very different from Shanxi and Shaanxi, for instance.¹ If our attention is narrowed down to the area of my study, we would find that very little has been written about temple organizations there. Better explored southern and southeastern Shanxi is best presented in the studies of David Johnston focusing on temple communities, their festivals and theatrical traditions, which had been formerly flourishing in that area (Johnston 1994, Johnston 2009).

A joint Sino-French research team has been exploring connections between grass root self-organization, formation of multi-village alliances, communal governing of irrigation system and water distribution in central part of Shanxi: Hongdong 洪洞, Zhaocheng 趙成

¹ Valuable materials were collected by Willem Grootaers and his Chinese students during the thorough survey of the temples in Chahar area (North Hebei) in 1948-1948 (Grootaers 1995). Considerable results on current local cults in Baoding 保定, Gu'an 固安 and Handan 邯鄲 counties of Hebei province, have been accumulated in three volumes edited by D.Ovemayer in cooperation with Chinese scholars (Ou, Fan 2006; 2007, 2007(1)). Study of Thomas DoBois concentrating on religious life of a village from Cangzhou 滄州 county, located between Tianjin 天津 and Ji'nan 濟南, touches largely upon present day practices of sectarian teachings (DuBois 2005). Sectarian and millenarian teachings widely spread in many parts of North China (Hebei, in particular) have been well studied, but it is largely a separate phenomenon, their presence is not so obvious in the area of my study, but further enquiry is pending.

and Huoxian 霍縣 counties (Lamoureux, Dong 2003). Stephen Jones has been doing extensive field work to trace history and recent developments of rural folk bands, which are hired by villagers to perform music at life-cycle rituals and celebrations, he is also interested in tracing state of Taoist ritual practice in the areas of Hebei, northern Shanxi (Datong 大同 area) and most recently Shaanbei (Jones 1999, 2007). David Holm had been writing on extinction of ritual opera/performance “leaping play of spirits” performed in central part of Shaanxi, Heyang 合陽 county, laying across Huang River from southern Shanxi (Holm 2003). He had also explored ritual Taoist origins of a lantern maze called ‘Going Round the Nine Bends’ (*zhuan jiu qu* 轉九曲), very popular in areas of central and northern Shanxi and Shaanbei (Holm 1994), he mentions a liturgical Lantern Maze connected with purification ritual *jiao* 醮 observed in Baiyunshan 白雲山 temple, a venue which also became a subject of my research.

Adam Chau’s esteemed study of Zhenchuan township’s 鎮川 Black Dragon Pond temple Heilong tan 黑龍潭 revival and management (where I also paid a visit) contains detailed account of traditions and social customs related to popular religion in the region (Chau 2006). A group of Japanese scholars some of who have been staying in Yulin city of Shaanbei for a number of years to promote tree planting program initiated by the Japanese side and got quite familiar with local cultural workers and populace (Ms. Yoko Fukao was mentioned to me by the informants many times there), have produced a book on local folklore and village culture (Fukao, Iguchi, Kurihara 2000).

Chinese scholars focused on Shanxi have been extensively searching for new historical sources mostly stone inscriptions dispersed in rural area (referred to as “folk sources” *minjian wenxian* 民間文獻) in order to trace history of local self-governance and interaction between village powers and state bodies. Some works focus on evolution of village community *she* 社, which is also seminal for my study (Du 2007), abundant material on history of communities *she* is included in the index of Shanxi’s written sources (Liu 1998). Another scope of studies has been dealing with specifics of lineage organization and temple worship in the upper and central flow of Huanghe River (Duan 2007), or revealing connections between ritual organizations *she* and “village alliances”

xiangyue 鄉約 which were propagated by state starting from Ming dynasty (Duan 2006). Recent monograph series “Xibu renwen ziyuan yanjiu congshu” 西部人文資源研究叢書 features publications with interesting field data on Shaanxi folk arts and popular religion based on case study from a village in central Shaanxi (Wang, Dang 2010).

Institute of Traditional Drama based in Shanxi Normal University (Linfen 臨汾 city) has collected considerable data on once flourishing local theatrical traditions and exorcist ritual plays in Shanxi, excavated and registered a good number of old local stages located inside temples. As can be seen, not that many studies address problem of rural religion and cults directly (a number of important reports on related issues has been published in Taiwan journal *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝). This brief introduction of recent Chinese scholarship is far from exhausting.

Succinct review of previous secondary scholarship allows surmising that religious life of villages occupying large territories of northern China remains under explored. My study is based on considerable amount of first hand data and aims to reveal specifics of the temple organization and management, ties of temples with village community, highlights the role and importance of communal worship for preserving peace and well-being of inhabitants. It has become a truism that in rural China religion has been a seminal channel of defining and expressing community, this paper may add to our knowledge of modes and structures of intra- and crossvillage self-organization and self-governance spurred by common need to perform worship.

Map of the field research area. Religious centers and temple communities of the western Shanxi and northern Shaanxi provinces.



-  Baiyunshan Taoist temple (Shaanxi);
  Zhengjue si Buddhist Taoist temple (Shanxi);
-  Areas of temple communities' location in administrative units of Shibai tou *xiang* and
-  Baiwen *zhen* township (Shanxi);
-  Quyu township temple (Shanxi);
  Congluo yu township temple (Shanxi);
-  Area of spreading town street and village street communities (Shanxi);
-  Locations of Hengshan country large community temples (Shaanxi).

3. Cross-village temple communities of the western Shanxi and northern Shaanxi areas.

3.1. Defining temple communities of the rural Shanxi and Shaanbei

When visiting country area of Shanxi I came across proliferation of local network centered on temple communities integrating large proportion of villages. In the studied area (see the Map) ties between villages belonging to one temple coexist with kinship networks. Lineage ties were not a subject of this study, since no interviewing was done to reveal lineage patterns in the studied areas. Lineage power is probably not as noteworthy here as in southeast China, it has different forms of existence and expression in the North, just to mention absence of ancestral halls in the studied area. I did not come across any of them, and peasants denied having them in their villages, yet an informant from Hengshan county (Chen Zhenghe 陳政和, 58 years old.) presented me their newly edited family genealogy book and mentioned that his family wants to built a “family temple”.

In Shanxi and Shaanxi temple associations are called either *she* 社 or *hui* 會. The smallest unit in this organization is one natural village *cun* 村, structure of community may be rather complicated and multi-layered, sometimes one member of a large community may encompass several natural villages, below I refer to cases of cluster type communities of Hengshan county, Shaanbei to support my argument.

Life of temple communities can be observed both on spatial (geographic) and temporal axis. Geographic location of the temple, topography of the surrounding area, transportation network are key factors that determine which villages are to join this or that community. We gain much information about the mechanism which underlies formation of the communities if we have a precise area map at hand, pay visits to a number of villages and temples, get familiar with lifestyle of the inhabitants of the yellow earth plateau and surely spend time talking to these people about their temples. A network of contiguous temple organizations may be represented as a number of circles embracing member villages surrounding communal temple as a center. Geographically the temple is not necessarily located in the center of a circle, but always on the high spot outside the borders of any

village. Drawing circles may cause delusion, since no procession or ritual action is marking boundaries of these circles, processions do not walk along supposed circular boundary, but rather move between village and temple along the county roads, and they may be imagined as closed lines. Communities are not circular per se, I resort to the chart with circles in order to provide a better visual representation of idea of villages affiliated with this or that particular temple.

Upon close examination I came to conclusion that rural area temples of Shanxi and Shaanbei can be diversified as the following three types: 1) Intra-village temples (devoted to tutelary deities of one village); 2) Community temples integrating up to dozens of villages around them; 3) Large temples, whose influence is spreading over several counties and even provinces. The status and organization of the latter two types of temples is different from the communal ones.

If taking a look at temple community from the prospective of temporality, it is easily noticeable that participation of farmers in their temple's activities is periodic and takes no more than a week or two per year, number of festivals in one temple is not exceeding 2 (rarely 3) per a year. Organizers and temple activists spend more time dealing with temple affairs than regular visitors. After mass celebrations are over active members of community go back to their normal life and occupations. Some of them may perform additional roles in their village, e.g. that of a geomancer *yinyang xiansheng* 陰陽先生, or be among the experts on wedding and burial ceremonies, in other words work as "nonprofessional" ritual specialists. Once the festive period is over, life of the temple enters a quiet phase and is not visible to the outsider, period of activity is followed by a longer period of tranquility. My informants told that during temple festival a lot more can be captured and sensed.

3.2. Origins of temple communities in the studied area

Exploring history of temples in the studied area during imperial period is not exactly a purpose of this paper, since I'm focusing on the situation since early 1980s, yet it is crucial to at least outline when presence of temple associations in the area was first recorded. M.Bujard's study indicates that worship of Yaoshan Holy mother by eleven or more

communities in central Shaanxi started during Song dynasty. Scholars dealing with history of traditional opera discovered the Yuan dynasty stage in the Bull King (Niu wang 牛王) temple of Wei cun village 魏村, Linfen 臨汾 city prefecture in the south-west of Shanxi. The temple had a large network of villages; Yan Baoquan argues that formation of communal worship started here during Song dynasty, his assumptions are based on historical records and memories of remaining activists of the temple committee (Yan 2002).

The history of temple communities organized by rural population needs to be clearly differentiated from the altars *sheji tan* 社稷壇 which were erected to worship God of Earth and Crops twice a year within a system of state ritual. This archaic ritual propagated by Ming court required participation of the village heads. According to Qin Yan's data on Shaanbei, worship of *she* altars was important official ritual on the level of county and *xiang* 縣鄉 (Qin 2000: 150). Her study indicates that according to written sources from Shaanbei each county held a ritual of worshipping Earth altar during periods of Qianlong 乾隆 and Jiaqing 嘉慶 reign, this tradition declined in late Qing, and was gradually substituted by community celebrations *saihui* 賽會, a suggestion which is not fully supported by the data of other scholars who prove much earlier emergence of *saihui*.

Information about dates when temples were founded in the villages of Linxian county, Shanxi is scarce and mostly lost along with destruction of the temples and steles. Most likely the temples started appearing in this area no earlier than Ming dynasty (1368-1644), several counties of western Shanxi (Linxian 臨縣, Xingxian 興縣 and Lanxian 嵐縣) seem to be lagging in behind culturally advanced center and south of the province. New stele erected near the restored temple of Quyu zhen 曲峪鎮 dates its foundation by 1368, temple in Congluoyu zhen 叢羅峪鎮 was founded during Ming Yongle reign (1403-1425). Linxian county gazetteer mentions that the majority of villages emerged in this area during Ming dynasty (Linxian zhi 1994). Cult of Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu prevailing in this area became so widely spread probably after the deity was granted official status of state cult and protectorate of the court during Ming period, Ming emperors considered Zhen-wu to be their patron, but he had been granted titles earlier by Song emperors, the title of the "Emperor" *dadi* 大帝 was conferred on him by Yuan emperor in 1303.

When talking to peasants from Shibai tou *xiang* 石白頭鄉 administrative unit about history of their *she* communities, we find that memories of 70-80 year old informants only cover the period no earlier than 1920-1930s. Historical records inscribed on steles were lost along with destruction of the temples in 1940-1950s. Consequently interview becomes the only available source of information. According to recollections of the elders from temple committees, in some cases foundation of the temple was a result of the initiative of the imperial county seat legislator, who had been passing through the area and found this spot suitable for the temple. The similar legend is told about foundation of the temple for Immortal Lü-zu and Great Saint of All Heavens Qitian dasheng 齊天大聖 Sun Wukong nearby Shibai tou village. Informants claim that this small two room temple was founded in the end of Qing dynasty. A similar legend has it that county *yamen* official erected a temple for Dragon king Long-wang close to Buddhist - Taoist Temple of True Revelation Zhengjue si 正覺寺 to express gratitude for sending rain, different versions of the legend date this story either by Ming or Qing periods. I did not come across written evidence of why there was sudden demand for building of these temples. High concentration of temples of various Dragon kings in Shibai tou gives ground to date them by 70-80s of the XIXth century as a consequence of disastrous continuous draught that afflicted the entire province between 1872-1880². It is difficult to verify the dates named by informants, yet some secondary signs may point at the age of the temple. Informants from Wuling 務嶺 village belonging to Heilong-wang 黑龍王 temple recall that the yard of the former temple used to have two old cypress trees, each of them could be embraced by two people, so they were probably more than 50 years old by then.

Shibai tou communal temples emerged comparatively late. I assume it was a new generation of temples with small scale communities around them, which might have been preceded by now demised network of the largest Buddhist-Daoist temple in the area Zhengjue si 正覺寺.

² Chen Cungong mentions that this disastrous draught was qualified by imperial authorities as calamity of the highest rank (*da jin* 大祲) that happened once in two hundred fifty years (Chen 1989:618). Long-wang temples may be a living memory of those years of draught and famine.

3.3 Functions of temple community and interaction between its member villages

Temple community *she* 社 in Shanxi and *hui* 會 in Shaanxi villages are engaged in the settling the affairs of the temple, its functions and responsibilities do not visibly intrude with administrating the village. Upon a closer look we find that heads of the temple committee and members of village administration are actually one group of people with their posts sometimes overlapping. According to my informants, any respected villager may become the member of the temple committee, to represent his village in a committee, or be elected as its head or deputy. The level of person's wealth is not relevant. In many cases I observed that the role of the head is hereditary and passed down the generations of men from one family, some families have been accumulating and preserving memory about the rules and organization of worship, members of such families are normally called "people with culture". Each village dispatches one or several representatives to hold membership in the committee, according to the informants of Shibai tou village, the organizers are not chosen by means of divination, but through voting, same is attributed to the election of the temple community head.

Members of temple community often play other roles in the public life of the village. Facts from Shanxi province prove that committees maintain tight connections with official administration of a village or a township *zhen*. In some cases temple and village committees are two independent bodies, or temple committee appears to be enclosed in official administration. I have not heard of conflicts between these two organizations in struggle over power. Some reasons explain such peaceful coexistence. Firstly, village cadres are normally respectable people with authority and temple committee representatives are selected among them. Basically, they come from the same group. For instance, my informant (Song Huangtian 宋黃田, 46 y.o.), is long term member of Dai-yue dian 岱嶽殿 temple committee (Xinzhou city prefecture), and he has been a village committee head for more than twenty years, besides he is a member of a group in charge of arranging wedding and burial rituals *hongbai lishi hui* 紅白理事會, which is probably affiliated with the temple committee. In Wuling 務嶺 village of Shibai tou *xiang* belonging to Heilong wang temple affairs are tackled by retired village cadres, who left their official posts but did not

loose connections with authorities. Theoretically village cadres, and party secretary in particular, are supposed to promote anti-superstition ideology proclaimed by the center. But rooted in their native soil and keeping strong ties with community, do they not create obstacles on the way of temple restoration, but, on the contrary, offer utmost support. Their peasant background, religious feelings, “superstitions” and fear to insult gods may be the reason for them to do so. Normally a disposition of real power in a village is not at once obvious to an outsider, in most of cases party secretary is not the most influential player and is expected to follow instructions of non-visible leaders, who may be reluctant to deal with state. And these real leaders may be among temple heads. Secondly, functions of two village authorities do not overlap, since obligations of the temple community are limited to temple affairs only³.

We did not have an opportunity to observe the preparatory stages in organising a temple fair, members of a temple committee are most likely each responsible for a certain job, the voice of a head may be decisive in case of difficult choice or disputes. Younger relatives of committee members act as helping hands in preparatory work, they gain understanding of the rules by doing that, this is how knowledge is passed down the generations.

In the examined areas all the organizers are men, but impressive numbers of women attend temple fairs, but we cannot claim that they outnumber men. Women are responsible for cooking food offered as donations to the divinities. For instance, they actively participate in the procession carrying trays with food donations and banners on behalf of “six big congregations” during temple fair in honor of the Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu in Baiyun shan mountain of Jiaxian county.

North China is characterised by a high level of internal migration, in this study we do not expand on how long villagers have been in any of the localities, this important aspect

³ Tasks of community *she* in the south-western area of Shanxi include settling minor disputes between villagers, organization of wedding and burial rituals, they fill a gap in the functions of the modern state administration (village committee) and deal with traditional aspects of the peasants' life, their religious activities and spiritual concerns (Duan, Wei 2005: 56).

needs further enquiry in order to trace premises for one village to be aligned in community with other villages.

Below I take a closer look at main tasks and functions of temple communities under study. The strongest impulse for communities' renaissance was collective aspiration to restore the temple. Their mass rebuilding has started in the early middle of the 1980s, in some areas of Shaanbei it took place earlier - during final years of the Cultural Revolution. Temple restoration was a result of cooperative effort by member villages, the same that were formerly integrated around the temple. Restoration works could be possible provided enough primary capital had been accumulated. All of my informants recall precisely the year when joyous occasion of first temple festival finally took place after a long break, in most cases the temple had been partially or fully restored by then.

After the first stage of village cooperation gave its fruit and temples were restored, temple committee had to face new tasks of managing temple funds. To form a community villages have to codify mutual relations. Modern temple community's prime concern is raising money for hiring opera troupe and distribution of temple fund (*bushi qian* 布施錢) for various needs of the temple, such as repairing, further restoration and enlargement. Funds are used to pay wages to the construction workers and purchase the materials. Negotiations concerning all the expenditure of the temple fund are held at presence of all representatives of the committee in the temple, the discussion is going under invisible supervision of gods. Temple fund coffer *bushi xiang* 布施箱 is locked and kept inside of the temple, which is normally being looked after by one or two elder villagers.

Donations for the temple fund can be collected through several channels. On the outset of temple restoration money would be donated both by common villagers, as well as by wealthy or influential figures in the area. Sums and names of sponsors from the latter group are normally inscribed on the stone stele. Another important source of *bushi* money are private donations collected during the temple festival, a high period for donation inflow. Individuals who come to the temple for regular worship on the 1st and the 15th day of each lunar month also put money in the coffer. Donations going to the fund coffer on this occasion are normally small sums and sponsors remain anonymous. In case a considerable

sum of several thousand or even tens of thousand of RMB is to be donated, sponsor's name is recorded in the book and later inscribed on the stele, if he\she gives consent.

Revenues of Shanxi community temples vary drastically, fund of the temple is seen as a main indicator of its popularity, prosperity and influence.

Community temples of Linxian county	Annual revenue
Black Dragon king temple 黑龍王廟, Shibai tou <i>xiang</i> 石白頭鄉	2200 RMB
Great king temple 大王廟, Shibai tou <i>xiang</i>	Several hundred RMB
Lü-zu temple 呂祖廟, Shibai tou <i>xiang</i>	Several hundred RMB
Perfected warrior Zhen-wu temple 真武廟, Congluo <i>yu zhen</i> 叢羅峪鎮	100 000 RMB

Funds of the Shaanbei community temples are considerably higher, I offer just several figures for comparison:

Cave of Ten thousand Buddhas 萬佛洞, Zhenchuan township 鎮川鎮, Mizhi 米脂 county	250 thousand RMB per year
Temple of Immortal Lü Dongbing 呂洞賓廟, Hengshan county town 橫山縣城	400-500 thousand RMB during Lunar new year month celebrations
Cheng-huang 城隍 temple of Yuhe 魚河 township, Yuyang district 魚陽區	Over 300 thousand RMB during two temple festivals
Three Emperors Sanhuang 三皇 Temple, Mizhi county town 米脂縣城	Over 200 thousand RMB per year
Black Dragon King Pond* (Heilong tan 黑龍潭), Mizhi county 米脂縣	Over 10 million RMB per year

* The richest temple in Yulin city prefecture, it is no longer relying on donations from neighboring villages (see Chau 2006).

Surveys of the late 1920s carried out in Ting Hsien of Hebei province recognised that there are two bases on which household contributions can be made: on the basis of acreage

of arable land, and on the basis of the number of taxable males in the household (*ding* 丁) (Li 1933). Methods of collecting the contributions vary in Shanxi and Shaanbei. In the studied areas of Shanxi the contributions made on a household basis, and they are in cash. In Shibaitou *xiang* the fee paid by each household for hiring opera troupe is fixed, additional fees collected for other items of temple fair expenditure were not mentioned by informants. We have detected contribution collection from each family only in the non-prosperous villages of western Shanxi, in Shaanbei areas payment of such a fee is voluntary.

Seminal function of the temple committee is to select opera troupe, pick up the repertoire of «traditional costumed plays» *guzhuang xi* 古裝戲 and, most importantly, settle budget for the opera. The main factor determining the cost of the opera performance is status of the troupe. State run troupe offers higher quality of performance, private one is normally of worse quality. If a troupe has actors who are winners of all state competition “Meihua jiang” 梅花獎, or they were granted any of three professional grades awarded by the state committee, then the status of the troupe goes up considerably. The more famous actors play in the troupe the more expansive is its service. Wealthy temples of Shaanbei normally invite two troupes for one festival, from Shanxi and Shaanxi (especially in case of worshipping deities like Guanyu 關羽 or Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, natives of Shanxi). Cost of province level (top rank) troupe amounts to 150-160 thousand RMB and can only be afforded by wealthiest temples (e.g. Baiyun shan, Heilong tan in Shaanbei). Rank and cost of the hired troupe is one of central indicators of the temple’s wealth and influence, level and status of the particular religious activity.

Money for opera performance is collected from each village member of the temple community, the sum to be collected is varying and depends on the population of each village. In Linxian county each inhabitant pays around 5-10 *yuan* for performing of so called “opera for protecting population” *renkou xi* 人口戲. Everyone pays opera fee and thus secures protection on behalf of the gods. People are welcome to donate more money if they wish. Unlike in Shanxi, most of Shaanbei temples no longer resort to fee collection to pay for opera performance, temple fund is resorted to for that. In case a village refuses to hand money for opera to be performed in community temple, it is a serious sign of its

unwillingness to further participate in communal procedures and worship. Disputes over opera fee often arise between members of the community. In case the village is not paying for the opera it may be expelled from community, or it withdraws willingly. In some cases a village may keep membership, but it is looked down at by other villages.

In the extremely arid area of western Shanxi villages often organize temporary alliances for the purpose of hiring a troupe to perform “praying for rain opera” *qiuyu xi* 求雨戲. The reason for several villages to form such alliance is lack of rain on their territory, and willingness to put together limited finances in order to hire a better troupe (or whatever level troupe, since it is not affordable for a single village). “Rain opera” is not performed in a stable venue, each year it may be performed in different village. Tablets with names of gods are relocated from the temple to this or that village.

3.4 Factors determining extension and shrinking of the community area

Historically participation of a village in a temple community used to put certain financial burden on each member, which was not affordable for all of them. It would be incorrect to tell that choice of temple’s geographic position was determined only by convenience of its location. Yet temple’s incontinent location for some member village could result in its withdrawal from community with alliance area hence shrinking. Having difficulties with donating money to the temple fund a village would also have to withdraw and thus loose protection of the deity, population would become vulnerable to misfortunes, epidemics and dangers. In other words, a village (or a cluster *she*) with its inhabitants would be safe only if they belonged to some temple.

Territorial proximity with the temple is an important factor. Villages under study are located on Huanghe river loess plateau, which mountainous area is broken by up by deep valleys as a cause of serious erosion. Therefore villages which are seemingly close may in fact be mutually inaccessible. A question thus arises what are the principles underlying decision of the village joining this or that community? A head of Shibai tou village committee (Zhang Shengfu 張繩福, 44 y.o.) told about reasons for villages to integrate around certain temple. In his opinion an urge to put together limited economic resources of

dispersed villages used to be an important impulse. Before 1949 population of one village was not exceeding 50-100 people, now it is several hundred. With the increase of the population some large villages and townships *zhen* can now afford to run their own temple. Villages of Shibai tou *xiang* are considered poor, therefore there is abundance of communities on its territory. Conclusion follows that population factor is crucial, and village needs to maintain a certain level of population to be able to support economically its own temple. Taking careful look at the maps of population distribution and community borders we find a straight link between overall population and ability of community to conduct worship and hire opera. In this sense community of Lü-zu and Heilong-wang temples are better off, then those of Balong and Lao long-wang, which were mentioned by informant as barely alive.

Important point made by Zhang Shengfu (a village head of Shibai tou village) is that choice of the temple depends on personal preferences of the village leadership, as he described “upon feelings” *ping ganqing* 憑感情. It means, that other than just geographic factors pull villages together, they are similarity in dialect, customs, habits and, of course, kinship play important role as well. Closely located villages form a small scale community of neighbors are tied together by bonds of strong intimacy. Good relations and lack of reasons for conflict are necessary premises to start up communal worship.

Zhang Shengfu also mentioned such criterion as quality of temple management. A temple might count long history, but eventually come to decline and suffer from lack of financial infusions from the wealthy and powerful natives of this area. In other words, insufficient economic resources of the temple and lack of people actively involved into its management and fund raising are premises for its decline. Wealth and splendor of the temple's interior is a sound indicator of its popularity and influence. For instance, the temple of Lü-zu and Sun Wukong close to Shibai tou village is obviously not prospering, no one is looking after the temple on a regular basis either. Walls are empty, no offerings are put in front of name tablets (the statues were demolished in 1937-38 and not restored since then). Zhang Shengfu and elders from Shibai tou village stressed that villages in their *xiang* are poor and lack “people with culture” *you wenhua de ren* 有文化的人, who have

knowledge of tradition and would take efforts to run a temple. In traditional society wealthy lineages and local gentry were first to sponsor and manage community temple, back then one or two influential families would be in charge of larger part of expenses, naturally they occupied the position of a temple head in most of cases. In my opinion this succession was probably broken in Shibai tou villages. As for Congluo yu township 叢羅峪鎮, such people sprang up and inherited concern about the temple. Their volunteering and substantial back up from local authority starting from the late 1980s provided ground for the temple's prosperity.

3.5 Models of temple community organization in Shaanbei

During field trips I was making straight enquiries about what villages are intergraded around what temple, and what are their obligations as members. Abundant factual data makes possible to outline several models of temple community organization and management in Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, but due to space limits they are not all explicated here in detail. We limit ourselves to communities from Hengshan county in Shaanbei.

Organization of temple communities in Shaanbei has some peculiarities, they are in many ways different from bordering Shanxi. What I saw was obvious dominance of individual initiative and effort over a collective one, villages do participate in the worship of the temple like it takes place in western Shanxi, but temples are associated more closely with a group of 20-30 people forming the committee rather than with inhabitants of the entire village. The "weakening" of links with neighboring villages might be a result of the fact that temples in Shaanbei are rebuilt in a grandiose scale, necessary investment to do that could only be provided by the local rich and powerful, and this could have made common folks emotionally distanced from the temple, since people would think that temple would be protecting only those, who invested it in. I came across a number of cases when such group of activists would come up with an initiative of restoring a temple and rely on funds coming from influential and wealthy people from the area (them also becoming

members of temple committee)⁴, such temple would not maintain immediate relations with neighboring villages or town precincts.

For example, Temple of child giving mother Niang-niang located on Feng-xiang Mountain 鳳翔娘娘廟 of Mizhi 米脂 county seat has been recently restored in a new spot. Its board of founders consists of 20 people, 10 persons form the temple managing committee. Temples previously dispersed in different parts of the town were rebuilt in this one venue. I estimate this private venture to be a good display of inclination for temple building among well-to-do Shaanbei people, and even as a way of maintaining comfortably located religious service centre, where locals can come and pray for an offspring, luck and prosperity. This temple is in the process of accumulating fame and its fund is rather small for this area.

Temple of Three Emperors (Sanhuang miao 三皇廟) on Celestial Heaven Mountain *Tiansheng shan* 天聖山 is built by a group of 20 elders of Jijia mao 姬家峁 village, Mizhi county upon their initiative, start up donations were collected from families of this single village, therefore the restoration has been going for over nine years and is far from completion, which means that financial means of this venture are limited.

In Shaanbei a temple community is called *shejia* 社家, but more frequently *hui* 會. It is noteworthy, that correlation between *hui* and worship of Buddhist deities seems to be preserved in Shaanbei, this area in general has a high concentration of communities of varying territory worshipping Old Ancestor Buddha (*laozu fo* 老祖佛).

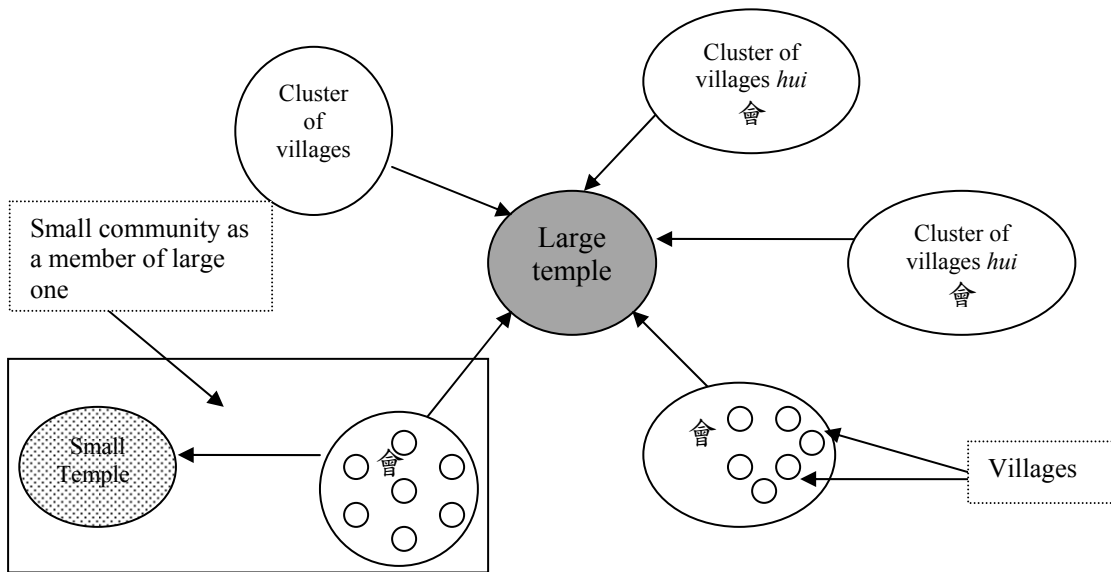
One *hui* may include a cluster of several villages. Among Shanxi cases only no longer existing large community of Zhengjue si 正覺寺 was divided into six sectors and looked similar to Shaanxi models. I introduce terms “large” and “small” community in attribution

⁴ Facts about southern style of running temple as an enterprise (*gongsi* 公司) came to my memory, I refer to the practice when the annual right to raise and manage/own temple funds and donations was sold at the auction, a case of Longmu miao 龍母廟 in Yuecheng 悅城, Deqing 德慶 county, Guangdong province has been analyzed by ethnographer of the Republican period (Huang 1935: 297). Similar practice of referring to the temple as “a company” is also observed in modern Taiwan.

to Shaanxi model. Large community encompasses a good number of clusters, and these clusters may hold membership in small community of another temple⁵.

Below I will explicate two cases from Hengshan county 橫山, Yulin city prefecture 榆林市.

Case 1. Zushi shan 祖師山 community, Wuzhen township 武鎮, Hengshan county 橫山.



Large temple in the honor of Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu is located on the top of Zushi shan 祖師山 mountain, a locality where two counties Hengshan 橫山 and Zizhou 子洲 are bordering, some member villages of this community are located in another county - Mizhi 米脂, which is not bordering territorially with the temple mountain⁶. On the outset of community formation around late Ming - early Qing dynasty 3-4 villages formed a core community. Later it extended to nine clusters *hui* belonging to large temple, the tenth

⁵ Data offered by K. Dean suggests presence of similar cluster system in Fujian: one village first holds a procession within its borders, then each village joins in a larger procession as a member of ritual alliance (I suppose, between members of one cluster). Several alliances join into a still larger processions that can involve over 100 villages and last up to a week (Dean 2003:342). Author does not provide detail whether each of three processions is hosted by three different temples of different status.

⁶ The details on this community were delivered by a pilgrim Mr. Zhou at Baiyun shan temple fair (May, 2008), who is an active member of temple committee in his native village Qianjiu gou 前九溝 close to Wuzhen township.

cluster joined in later. Each cluster encompasses three to ten villages, with total number of 60-70 villages. One of the clusters *hui* performs the role of the community head within one year. Each cluster receives a notice issued by the committee how much money it should donate to the temple fund. Tribute system that connected villages with the temple and amount of obligatory donation could determine number of members in each cluster, if villages were not wealthy, more of them would integrate, better off villages would form a smaller cluster ⁷.

Ten clusters of Zushi shan meet only once a year during temple festival. Each cluster has its own temple and deities, who are not connected to large temple. My informant Mr. Zhou was a representative of the sixth cluster of large temple community on Zushi shan mountain. This cluster has its own temple in honor of Guan-yin, located in the village of the informant Qianjiu gou 前九溝. Small community of Guan-yin temple includes six villages (cross-county group as well), each of them in turn has its own intra-village temple(s). Mr. Zhou mentioned that structure of all clusters of large temple is similar.

Zushi shan case illustrates the process of formation of large cluster community, when a small group of villages was organized for communal worship on the outset, and new clusters joined in later. When asked about factors that brought to formation of such large clusters informants say that traditionally the greater number of people participated the more money they brought to the temple, this granted temple's fame and prosperity. Most likely, each cluster first became integrated around its own small temple, villages could be pulled together due to territorial proximity and social factors like kinship ties. The core villages belonging to the founding cluster preserve special status reflected in its name, e.g. "old community" *lao hui* 老會, or "head community" *tou hui* 頭會. I term relations between clusters as entity and their large temple as first level of "nested hierarchy" (I borrow a term from S. Sangren (Sangren 1987)).

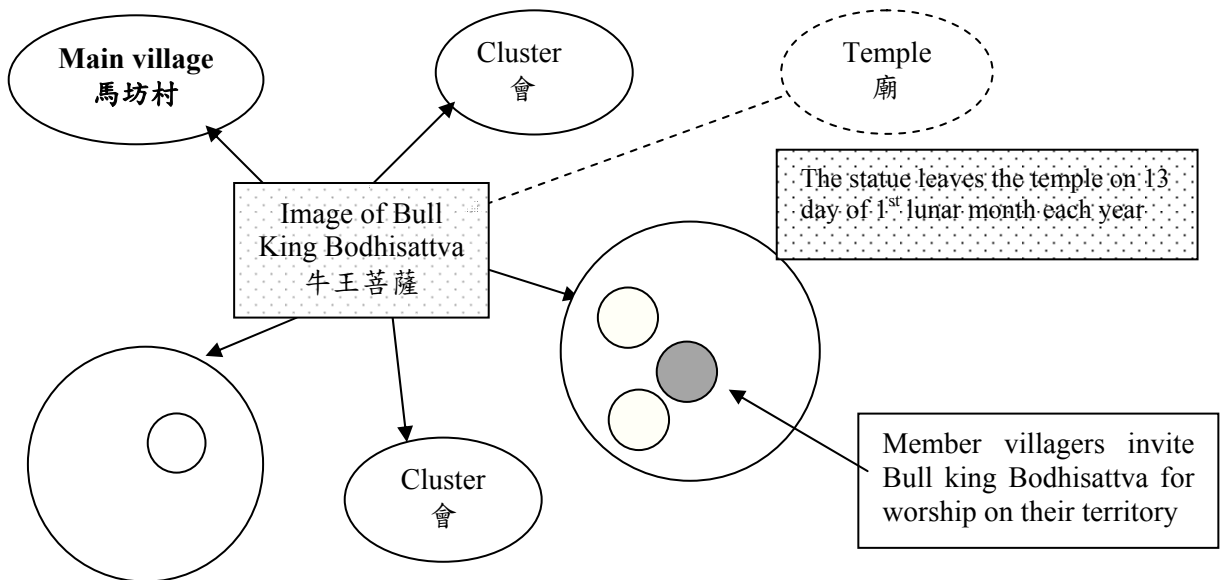
⁷ Data on Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu temples highly concentrated in Datong 大同 area of Northern Shanxi and neighboring counties of Wanquan 萬全, Huai-an 懷安, Xuanhua 宣化 (Hebei province) in 1940s collected by Willem Grootaers comes as support of my idea that wealth of participants and their donations could determine the size of community. He mentions that "because of the rather high cost of [temple] building ..., it is rarely found in very small communities of less than fifty families" (Grootaers 1952:163).

Structural specifics of Shaanxi temple communities provide a good example of better preserved traditional inter-village relations. As was mentioned above, within this archaic model the size of the community is much larger than that found in Shanxi, its basic unit *hui* 會 would encompass good number of natural villages, while in Shaanbei I detected a number of small scale communities integrating only 4-5 villages. Each village in turn is divided into small sectors, called *zhuang* 莊 (case of Zushi shan community). Each sector has a head, whose status is inferior to that of a whole village head. I term relations between villages within a cluster as second level of nested hierarchy, and whole village versus its sector *zhuang* relations as third level of nested hierarchy. I assume that borders of current sectors *zhuang* are drawn along former borders of small production units *xiaodui* 小隊, a leftover of a production communes' *gongshe* 公社 period, the term *xiaodui* is still widely used in our days. One of the village sectors is responsible for arranging a temple festival on the year when it receives a status of a head.

Above mentioned multi-level subordination between a large temple and its clusters can be found in case of Yaoshan Holy mother worship studied by Marianne. Bujard. According to her observations, formerly one *she* 社 cluster used to be divided into smaller units called "head" *tou* 頭, it could be equal to one natural village, sometimes its borders were not set according to the borders of one village, but according to lineage group settling lines, or according to a certain number of households, so that a large village could be divided into several *tou*. After the restoration of communal worship in the 1990s new *tou* became equal to former "small brigades", or other small administrative units of the modern type like "village group" *cunzu* 村組 (Bujard, Qin 2003:63).

From what my Shaanbei informants told me I made conclusion that their temple communities vary in structure as well. A model of Zushi shan 祖師山 temple near Wuzhen township 武鎮 discussed above does not suggest hierarchy between large temple and small temple despite the fact that the same cluster of villages is conducting worship in both of them. Community of small temple and large temple differ by their area, number of participating villages and influence of the temple.

Case 2. Bull King association 牛王會, Mafang village 馬坊村, Dangcha zhen township 黨岔鎮, Hengshan county 橫山縣 (8 clusters 會, 40 member villages).



Another large scale community is centered around Buddhist-Daoist Huayan si (Sanskrit - Avataṃsa) 華嚴寺 temple in Mafang village 馬坊村, Dangcha zhen township 黨岔鎮, called Community of Bull King *niuwang hui* 牛王會. Temple hosts two committees – one is representing the temple and consists of several Mafang cun villagers, another large community is organized for worship of Bull King Bodhisattva⁸ *niuwang pusa* 牛王菩薩 and Old Buddha *gufo* 古佛 who are stationed in Huayan si temple. Two statues leave the main temple during temple festival and arrive to the hosting village for the period from 13 to 16th of the 1st Lunar month and then travel back to the temple, this ceremony is called “rotation of Buddha” *zhuan shifo* 轉世佛. A number of participating villages exceeds forty and encompasses around thirty thousand inhabitants. This congregation, largest in

⁸ Niu wang was originally a deity patron of bulls that used to plough the fields, he later has evolved into a protector of both livestock and humans from misfortunes, bad harvest and disease, his cult is rather wide spread in the studied area, and it is often linked with Buddhist liturgy for Water and Earth spirits (*shuilu hui* 水陸會) represented by icons of the deities hung in the Buddha hall. Niuwang *hui* in this area is also associated with Teaching of Primordial Chaos (*hunyuan jiao* 混元教), but this aspect needs further enquiry.

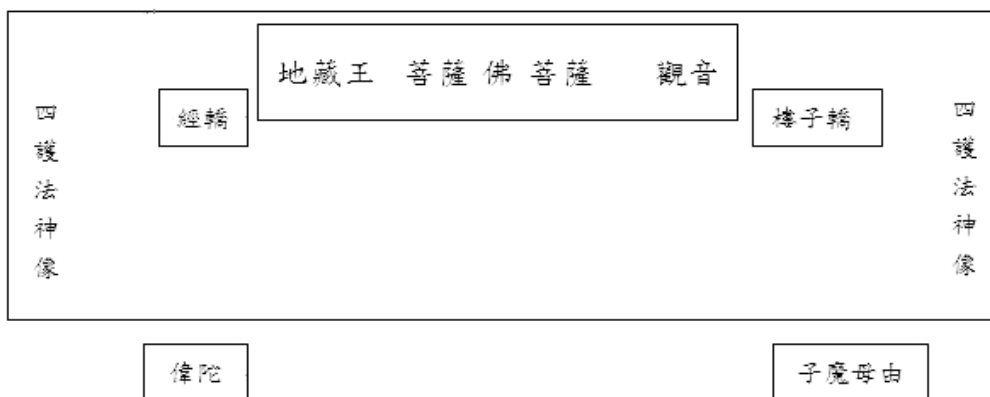
Dangcha township area, has division into eight clusters, recently one of them withdrew because of financial disputes. The *Niuwang hui* that I observed in Feb, 2009 was hosted by Qiao yan 喬塢 village about 10 km away from Mafang cun village.

The head cluster equals to one Mafang cun village, it hosts the temple, it is called the Head residence *shoufu* 首府. Its status is privileged, for instance a group of *yangge* 秧歌 dancers from Mafang cun is always sent to meet and see off deity statue, the dancers of the hosting village walk behind them. The large circle of rotation of the right to be a hosting cluster *zhujia* 主家 is eight (now seven) years, so Mafang cun is in charge of organizing a festival once in eight years. As for other clusters they may include 4 - 8 villages. There is also a circle of rotation inside each cluster. In case a cluster consists of four villages, each village gets a right to be *zhujia* once in 32 years. Each village has division into smaller units inside each village, former “small brigades” lead by heads *jiushou* (糾首, or brigade head *duizhang* 隊長), one of them is selected to be an organizer.

The head of each cluster is reelected every year. One senior head *da huizhang* 大會長 is permanently in charge of the whole community, his name is Liu Bingcheng (劉丙成, 60 years old), his predecessor Liu Qicheng (劉起成, 77-80 years old) is still taking part in the governing of the community as an advisor. Temple has an accountant, treasurer and cooks, all of them a working voluntarily believing that serving the temple will bring them good fortune *jili* 吉利.

Temple celebration taking place from 12th until 16th day of 1st Lunar month includes the following religious activities, as they were observed by the author in February, 2009.

Statues of the Bull King bodhisattva, Old Buddha and the Buddhist scriptures are taken from Hua yan si temple (in Mafang cun village). The walking procession brings them to the temporary altar erected in the hosting village. The chart of the temporary Buddha altar is provided below:



Outside the altar stand two tents, one of them holds an image of Buddhist warrior Wei Tuo 偉陀 and several name tablets. The opposite altar is supposedly devoted to 子魔母由, who might be the Demon's mother 魔子母, but more likely a Demon King Gui wang 鬼王, or Gui tou 鬼頭. It contains name tablets of Infernal Charges 三曹六案掌判, Demon King with inflamed throat 面然大士焰口鬼王, all the orphan souls 此方界內無祀孤魂等眾, and three generations of ancestors belonging to this community 合會門中先遂三代親戚.

The ceremony has the following sequence. Two groups of *yangge* dance performers – from Ma fang village and hosting village first go to fetch statues from Hua yan temple and then escort them to the hosting village, where they cruise several localities of the hosting village in the following sequence: temporary Buddha altar 佛堂, village temple, house of the family in charge of the celebration *shejia* 社家, house of the community head 會長, house of the families in charge of preparing offerings made of dough. The area is proud of their authentic *yangge* troupes consisting only of males, whose performance is connected with ritual purpose of opening the road for the deity and performing *koutou* in front of the temple on behalf of community members (for more details on ritual Shaanxi *yangge* see Holm 1991).

Shejia 社家 is a person (or a household) selected in the hosting village one year prior to the celebration. He is obliged to abstain from meat and follows other restrictions during a year. The objects needed for the liturgy are kept in his house. On the 14th day of 1st month a monk is writing a Repentance memorial 放赦名單 in *shejia* house, and the *shejia* is

supposed to kneel during these two-three hours. A week after the celebration next hosting village selects its *shejia*.

After the Repentance memorial is written at night time it is being taken to the Buddha altar on the 15th of the 1st month, during the transportation it is pinned on the monk's back. The memorial *bangwen* 榜文 has the names of people from eight villages constituting the hosting cluster written on it. On the noon of the 15th day a ceremony of horse riding and shooting arrow *paoma fangshe* 跑馬放矢 (implying *fang she* 放赦 'pardoning sins') takes place in the vicinity of the altar, a monk is riding on the horseback carrying a bundle with a memorial inside, he uses a bow and arrow to shoot the memorial out to some distance, after that it is picked up and recited to the audience. After this ritual the Repentance memorial is burned and sent to heaven.

Monks conduct canon chanting inside the Buddha altar, only monks and male believers are allowed to enter inside. A series of rituals are performed for the salvation of orphan souls. In the studied area Pudu salvation ritual often takes place during Shang yuan 上元 period in the 1st month. Two spots on the hills where orphan souls are summoned for food distribution are marked by Banners (Banner area 幡場, and Banner pagoda 幡塔). The name plates placed underneath the banner have the following names written on them: 1) for the envoys with banners going in five directions 五方五地守幡使者; 2) ten kinds of orphan souls 邊境內外十類孤魂等眾; 3) Venerable Danzhi 淡痴尊者 who traveled to hell as an envoy of Jade Emperor 三界淡魔送交使 (a prototype of Buddhist Kṣitigarbha - Dizang wang pusa 地藏王菩薩). The banner the pagoda the banners are pulled down after finishing the ceremony of pardoning sins.

Another important activity attended by all villagers is walking through a lantern maze called 'Going Round the Nine Bends' *zhuan jiu qu* 轉九曲 or 'watching lanterns' *guan deng* 觀燈, this ceremony is very popular in Shaanbei. The maze consists of 365 lights supposedly by the number of day in the year, name tablets of Three Celestial Governors 三官牌位 are placed at the entrance. The statue of Bull King Bodhisattva is taken through the maze by the procession before it is placed in temporary altar. In the evening of the first festival day the *yangge* dancer holding an umbrella who marches first invites all deities and

souls proceed through the maze, afterwards folks are allowed to walk through it. People first *koutou* at the entrance and burn firecrackers to clear out the way. Walking in the wrong direction may bring bad luck, people prefer to walk in groups. All of them are supposed to walk through it five times: once on 13th day of 1st month, twice on 14th day of 1st month, and twice on the 15th day.

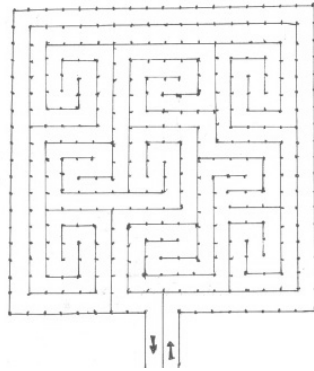


Chart of the ‘the Nine Bends of Huanghe’ from Hengshan county (橫山縣黃河九曲陣圖).

From what was observed during three days of festive activities one assumes that temple festival of Dangcha township Bull King bodhisattva is designated to conduct salvation ritual for the orphan souls and ancestors during the Shang Yuan 上元 period and secure luck and well-being for the living by walking through the lantern maze, the Pudu ritual matches with important date of Lantern festival *yuanxiao jie* 元宵節 marking the end of the New Year celebrations. Opera performance is also an obligatory entertainment and offering to the deities.

The model of Yaoshan Holy mother cult described by M.Bujard has similar features with Huayan si case in a sense that a statue of a female deity of Yaoshan is rotated between members of community. M.Bujard’s model also has similarities with case of Zushi shan (Case 1) with community consisting of eleven clusters *she*, each of them is divided into smaller units *tou* 頭. Each *tou* may be equal to one village, or a part of township *zhen* 鎮 (where *xinggong* 行宮 “temporary imperial palace” of the deity is located). But “logistics” of Yaoshan cult are quite different from cases I illustrate here, since the statue of Yaoshan

mother is staying outside of her temple almost all the time. “Temporary imperial palace” used to have a third level temples subordinate to them (for 3d, 4th, 7th, 10th and 11th community members), or there were cases as with 9th and 11th communities when one *she* used to build two “temporary” temples, and rotation of the statue would be conducted between two of them, rotation cycle for each of these temples would be twice longer (Bujard, Qin 2003:19), this aspect is similar with organization of rotation in Huayan si.

Several models of community management from Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces indicate cases when one person is holding long term leadership, his organizational skills, cultural upbringing and ability to maintain good relations with all the members and official authorities grant him a post. The leader is replaced by a new one upon reaching high age, position may be hereditary as well. A widely spread “democratic” model, when position of the head is passed from one village to another, may be viewed as a comparatively recent model, a result of social changes in the XXth century. On the other hand, some records indicate that rotation of responsibility used to be practiced during Qing period (e.g. case of Niuwang temple of Wei cun (Yan 2002)) and was very common during Republican period (Gamble 1963).

4. Collective rites performed by temple communities

How can we summarize the basic mechanisms underlying interaction between individual and a deity? Through kneeling, taking bows and donating money a person strives to secure balance and ensure non-intrusion on the part of unfavorable forces, believer is not a fatalist, he strives to be a master of his own life. One aims to enlist support of supernatural forces or at least keep away negative interference. So the core idea of individual worship is to display utmost reverence and respect *jing shen* 敬神, the biggest fear is to offend the deity. Important concept of fulfilling a vow *huan yuan* 還願 springs from this emotional state, it is seen as the main manifestation of religiosity. In most of cases vow fulfilling is expressed materially, donating money is most common practice, believers may also present a banner, a plaque, hire opera troupe, or work at the temple as a volunteer. One can often see layers of banners with standard formula “if heart is sincere, god would

reveal his power” *xin cheng shen ling* 心誠神靈 covering the walls of temples. Important idea suggested by this saying is that gods would be responding to the believer’s entreaties provided religious fervor of the person reaches certain level, if person does believe in gods’ power with all his heart, gods would see it and reveal their magical power. I understand the process of human interaction with gods in Chinese religion as exchange of energies: faith on behalf of the person is necessary in order to invoke active respond of the mighty god. For faith to strengthen in human heart deity often has to prove his magical power. Below I will address a central category of popular religion – magic efficacy, or “manifestation of divine energy” *xian ling* 顯靈.

When analyzing collective forms of expressing religiosity we find that core essence of it remains similar in northern and southern tradition – addressing entreaty to the tutelary god(s) to protect the area and populace. Yet differences can be found in the organization of ritual processions. Deity statue processing around the territory of community is the best marker for boundaries of membership in communal worship, statue is taken around within the borders of the territory upon which divine protection of the deity is bestowed. In the southern provinces widely spread practice is for the deity to travel *xun you* 巡遊 around the protected area and stop in the village temples en route, inhabitants of the village gather for worship, or they install temporary altars on the street and put offerings to greet the passing procession. The deity returns back to the head temple in several days. A ceremony called “going along the boundaries” *raojing* 遶境 is very popular in Taiwan and also quite spread in Fujian (Lagerwey 2002). In Shaanbei I came across a good number of examples when a statue of god or a tablet is taken out of the temple, processes in the vicinity of the temple and then returns back (e.g. procession of Wealth god Cai shen 財神 from Wuliang dian temple 無量殿, Yulin city; temple of Immortal Dong-bin 洞賓廟 in Hengshan county town; Cheng-huang temple of Yu-he township, Yuyang district 魚河鎮, 魚陽區). In northern China deity may be also traveling from one fixed point to another. A case mentioned above is Huayan si 華嚴寺 of Hengshan county. The statue of Bull king Bodhisattva is not just

traveling around a fixed territory but stays in the temporary Buddha altar *fotang* 佛堂 during a period of temple festival and then returns back the host temple.

Tradition for the deity statue processing along a territory of community is comparatively rare in Shanxi⁹. I did not come across traces of processions in the studied Linxian county. The ultimate explanation is that territories of temple communities are not large enough, and there is no need in arranging a procession. But another underlying reason may be the specifics of worship for different deities, some of them may not possess a function of demon and pestilence expeller or do not have to leave the temple. A ritual model characteristic of Shanxi is for the deity to remain in its home temple, while a spirit tablet *shenwei* 神位 and sometimes a miniature statue of the deity are asked to leave the temple and be removed outside the temple to enjoy main offering – opera performance. In Congluo yu zhen 叢羅峪鎮 I witnessed a ceremony of taking a statue and spirit tablet of Perfected Warrior Zhen-wu from the main hall, then placing in a portable altar (palanquin), then the procession of temple activists went down the mountain accompanied by village boys carrying flags, folk musicians, beating drums and extracting loud sounds from *suona* trumpet. A ceremony of sending deity back to the temple after the festival was completed in the reversed order, members of the procession stopped by altars of Jade emperor, Seven disciples of Quanzhen school *quanzhen qi zi* 全真七子 and other deities (halls for them not rebuilt yet), knelt in front of them and took three bows.

⁹ Villages of Yuanqu 垣曲 county, south of Shanxi have a tradition of carrying a statue from one principal temple to another. Goddess Dai-mei niang-niang (岱媚娘娘, a concubine of Cheng-tang 成湯) stays in the temple across Huanghe river (Henan province) during a year, on a fixed date it is carried to Wugen village of Shanxi and stays there for a month. A route of statue procession from the spot by the river where the statue is handed over is varying; route is settled by the community head (*shentou* 神頭). I conclude that membership of villages in this cult worship is not stable, “the statue pays a visit to those who believe, and omits those who do not” (Wang 2000: 25). Revival of the cult in 1981 was preceded by a draught, the elders thought of resuming worship, then a women medium was possessed by a deity, and this gave strong incentive to resume ritual practice (Wang 2000). Another well-known case is from Hongdong 洪洞 county, Linfen 臨汾 city prefecture. A center of the cult of two goddesses is located on Lishan 歷山, or Yingshen shan 英神山 mountain, two deities E-huang 娥皇 and Nü-ying 女英 are spouses of legendary emperor Shun 舜. The tradition is for two goddesses to return to their maternal home for Qing-ming holiday to clean up the tombs. A group of people from Yang-xie 羊獍 village is accepting statues and carries them to their temple, where they stay for two months; afterwards they are escorted back to Lishan temple. Wan-an zhen 萬安鎮 township located 17 *li* away from Lishan had build a “traveling palace” for statues, where they stay over a night, this initiative articulates intention of the village to assert its status of a head among other eleven villages which participate in the procession of welcoming deities.

A question arises, whether this system of ritual has been formed comparatively short time ago. My informants from Shanxi did not mention that tradition of deity procession around a certain area ever existed in their area. One can be sure, that before mass destruction opera used to be performed on the stage in front of the temple hall, and there was not need to taking out of the statue. A number of stages could vary, and there were normally more than one in large temple. New stages were built in the villages in the 1970s, mainly for the purpose of holding meetings and performing “model plays” *yangban xi* 樣板戲, old stages inside temples were destroyed and in most of cases were not rebuilt in the cause of temple restoration. Thus the practice of taking spirit tablet out of the temple appears to represent the way ritual adjusted to new conditions, when stage is located outside the temple. Old stages cannot be used now for reason that larger space is required for plays in modern production. In Shaanbei almost all the temples have richly decorated newly built stages in front of the main hall. Rites performed in the community temples of Linxian are pretty much limited to this kind of ceremony on the occasion of temple festival and Lunar New year; they normally do not employ ritual specialists.

Ritual practice of Taoist centre Baiyunshan 白雲山 is more complicated and diverse than in small communal temples. Ritual specialists from Quanzhen 全真 school are in charge of conducting the following rituals during temple festival of the 4th lunar month, I offer but a sketchy description (more details are in Baiyunshan 2007:40-43).

1st day: “purification of the altar” *xun tan* 熏壇. Purifying the altar (with smoke). Ritual is performed in the evening.

2d day: “opening ritual” *qijing* 起經. Beginning recitation of the Scriptures. Ritual is held early in the morning.

3d day: “elevation of memorial” *shang biao* 上表. Sending up the memorial. The heads of pilgrim congregations put their signatures under a memorial *bangwen* 榜文, which is hung in front of the altar. The memorial states the reason for this purification ritual and date, it calls upon the deities to descend to the altar and exercise their power. Taoist priest performs the ritual of inviting the deities to descend to the altar, five spirit tablets are put around the altar and incense is burned in front of them. Central part of the ritual is sending

a request for the Jade emperor to bestow mercy upon humans and pardon their sins, this part of the ritual is performed by the highest priest in hierarchy. The memorial is being recited and then burned for it to reach the celestial court.

4th day: “purification of paper money” *xun zhi* 熏紙.

5th day: “offering paper money and incense” *ying xiangzhi* 迎香紙.

Ritual starts at 4:30 a.m., a crowded procession of pilgrims and locals is walking up the stairs of the Spirit road *shenlu* 神路, all of them are holding burning incense sticks, procession marching in the darkness resembles a river of lights, a stunningly beautiful view! People with flags, lances and other attributes of Zhen-wu’s power walk in the front row followed by musicians and a group of people with gongs, the names of congregation subdivisions are written on them. Endless flow of people is striving to get inside the main temple on this particular occasion, they kneel, take bows, put money in the coffer, pull out divination sticks and get a note with explanation of the results. Further the procession with flags and gongs proceeds to a newly built temple of the Mother of Big Deeper *doumu gong* 斗姆宮. Men and women carrying offerings enter the hall, place trays on their heads and kneel, offerings on behalf of congregations are placed on the altar in a certain order by two elders, another elder reads prayers addressed to the deity. This solemn ceremony is accompanied by rare strikes of the gongs.

6th day: “offering money and crops” *ying qianliang* 迎錢糧 is a ceremony less crowded than the previous one, it starts at 9 a.m in the morning. The procession of pilgrims, who are also called “believers” *xinshi* 信士, is lead by the “head” and second congregations (representatives of Suide 綏德 and Mizhi 米脂 counties). Offerings are made on behalf of congregations. The purpose of the ritual is to display to “land, heaven and people” offerings and donations made for the deity as a proof of people’s faith, to display large membership and number of devoted believers of Zhen-wu, whose piety contributes to the wide fame of the temple. Taoists carry out divination with sticks in front of Zhen-wu’s statue, they make enquiry, if there will be good harvest and peace in the whole Shaanbei area, afterwards congregation heads perform divination asking questions about harvest and well-being in their native areas.

7th day: “presenting offerings” *ying gong* 迎供. On this day pilgrims of the third congregation from Yulin city organize a procession paying visits to all of Baiyunshan temples and presenting offerings to them. Members of all “six big congregations” have their scheduled time for offerings, order and sequence of visiting temples is strictly regulated. Delegates of congregation holding trays with offerings normally take off from the central Zhen-wu hall, afterwards march downhill to the temple of Five Dragons (in the XIXth century it was a venue of worship by followers of Primordial chaos teaching *hunyuán jiao* 混元教) and leaves offerings, then accompanied by music ascends up the central staircase and pays visits to other temples in established order.

Common opinion is that the most abundant and beautifully decorated offerings are made by the third congregation of Yulin city. Ornate and colorful offerings made of dough, fruit, rice and *doufu* are first placed in trays, and each tray has a tag with the name of the deity. A huge pie with *ying-yang* symbol is prepared for Zhen-wu. Painstaking effort taken by this congregation in preparing of the offerings might be estimated as its pursuit to become a leader among six congregations. But informants and representatives of Daoist associations claimed that all of congregations enjoy equal status. Some pilgrims bring with them offerings made in the shape of high intricately cut paper columns.

Above I have outlined the basic features of the communal festivals organized by Shaanbei villagers and the purification ritual *jiao* performed by Taoist priests of Baiyunshan on the occasion of the 8th day of the 4th lunar month, a date of temple foundation (or consecration)¹⁰. The former type of religious activity normally does not involve ritual specialists, in some cases devoted laymen are asked to chant canons (case of worship in Chenghuang 城隍 temple in Yuhe township, Yulin city prefecture).

The rough logic of the rituals performed by the professional Daoists of Baiyunshan temple is to plead deities to descend to the mundane world, cast their ear to human entreaties and offer assistance to the faithful, the central activity is sending a memorial to

¹⁰ Here I briefly mention the system of rituals of the so-called *yang shi* 陽事 type, praying for peace and prosperity of the living held on the 4th month; while Baiyunshan used to also hold *pudu* 普渡, or *youshi* 幽事 type ritual for salvation the souls of the deceased. I have not heard of latter type of ritual to have been held recently.

the Jade emperor. It is believed that gods become closer to the human world during the festivals, and chance of them hearing your request is better. Pilgrims seek to demonstrate their piety which gets material manifestation in offerings and donations. Ritual specialists and numerous consultants from among the pilgrims act as mediators between common visitors and deities, they normally assist the believers in stick divination. Daoist purification rituals *dajiao* 打醮 and canon intoning *nian jing* 念經 are conducted in a number of Shaanbei temples festivals confirming much better preservation of liturgical tradition there in comparison with western Shanxi, where I only came across few self-proclaimed Buddhist monks and nuns.

5. Conclusion

A convincing number of villages integrated around temple for communal worship was discovered by the author during field trips to Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces. One of my informants, Chen Zhenghe (陳政和, 58 years old) from Hengshan county, Shaanbei confirmed that all the villages in his home area have at least one village temple and all of them integrate around communal temple, his words struck me as a proof of my hypothesis that in traditional society almost all individuals in the village used to belong to a certain temple. A person used to associate him/herself with this religious center and identify oneself through that. The notion of “culture bearing unit” introduced by G.W. Skinner as spurring from a “standard market community” may be reinterpreted as an area around a temple, inhabitants of which identify themselves with through worship and participating in temple activities (Skinner 1964, 1965). Steven Sangren and some other anthropologists were critical about key role of standard market community in the establishing of culture unit formation. They suggest that religious, symbolic and cultural spatial systems determine regional or local cultural conceptions, rather than marketing systems (Sangren 1987). Susan Naquin mentions that temples are often located on the peripheries of economic regions, but their “cachement areas” could be much greater (Naquin, Yu 1992). I suppose a factor

explaining emergence of temples in such inconvenient spots has to do with deity revealing his efficacy *xian ling* 顯靈 there.

Multiple examples from Republican period surveys illustrate that religious life of rural population took shape of the organized communal worship and pilgrimages, this assumption may be applicable to all parts of China (Li 2005a; Li 2005b; Huang 1935). Detailed studies on popular religion and cults by PRC scholars also make conclusion about wide spread of this system feasible. A question pending further research are historical premises for integration of villages around temples in the past, did *she* 社 communities in the certain area emerge in the result of governmental or administrative policy, or do they present a configuration of both upward and downward vectors of local power distribution? More attention should be paid to the sociological background of the studied villages, their lineage and migration background.

In this study I have been focusing on non-governmental structures formed by active villagers to run the temple and showed varying models of community organization, distribution and delegation of governing right between members, offered account of historical background and current state of affairs as it was observed in the field and articulated by informants.

I put forth a hypothesis about several types of temples (e.g. village temple, community temple and influential temple with organized pilgrimage) catering to different needs of population and meeting demands of social groups involved in religious practice in varying degree. Areas of their influence are rendered as circles embracing territories varying in size and sometimes encompassing one another.

Long established ties between neighboring villages determined their integration in the 1980s to restore temples or conduct prayers for rain on temporary basis. Importantly, temples were restored as a result of collective effort by the same group of villages that ran it before destruction, this fact asserts strength of traditional bonds. Examples of temple sponsorship and organization in western Shanxi and Shaanbei regions offer grounds to suggest that present day Shaanbei is probably what Shanxi might be like in the future, yet

we have to bear in mind intrinsic difference in level accumulation of cultural and historical heritage in each area, as well as different governmental policy.

Organization of temple festival and ordering opera as offering for gods requires financial contribution of all member villages. Economic cooperation between villages in order to run a temple and hire opera troupe works as a factor preserving inter-village relations, which otherwise would slacken due to tendency for distancing and individualization in modern society, tremendous population outflow from the village is another seminal factor. Yet it is striking that ideology of modernization with its priority of science hardly constrained peoples' adherence to their habits and beliefs. I suggest that in believers' understanding these two impulses do not oppose and exclude each other, informants estimate temple restoration as contribution to economic development of their native area. Therefore popular religion should not be viewed as a leftover from old times waiting to be swept away by modernization, such approach is often propagated by Chinese officialdom and still keeps strong hold over Chinese academics (Feuchtwang, Wang 1991).

Religious activities on the occasion of the deity's birthday and calendar festivals present particular interest for our research as they offer abundant material on local specifics and require deeper knowledge of the historical past to explain reasons for these differences. Rural temple has an area under deity's protection surrounding it, inhabitants share a sense of attachment to their temple and form a circle of worship. Interaction of villagers with gods may go along the axis "community vs. gods" and "individual vs. gods". Collective rituals of worship were aiming to beg for divine protection for all members of community, or for settling hardships that concerned all of them, like draught, flood, pests and pestilence. Disasters of this kind did not miss any one, in this case it was logical for believers to resort to the help of the deities in charge of managing natural disasters and sicknesses. In the process of such goal oriented ritual individuals perceive themselves as particles of collective body when all members are united in the face of calamities and address common entreaty. Members of community select respected men whom they delegate a right to perform a ritual on behalf of them all. Cases from Shaanbei reveal on what occasions and in

which venues ritual Daoist specialists and so-called Buddhist canon chanters take part in the festivities.

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當代華北廟宇組織及民間宗教活動： 陝北及晉西為例

葉可佳^{*}

摘 要

筆者於 2008-2009 年在華北的晉陝兩省進行了民間宗教田野調查，調查主體為晉陝地區不同模式的廟宇組織，其結構、運行方式、宗教活動等。經過調查本人發現廟宇組織在該區的普遍存在，山西省一般稱之為「社」，陝北稱為「會」。華北的「社」或「會」是幾個到幾十個鄰居自然村組織來供奉一個公廟，就是保佑整個「社」或「會」的神。本文主要探討陝北及晉西的廟宇組織的特點及異同。筆者應用陝北橫山縣兩個不同模式的「會」來討論民間宗教活動及自治模式的多樣性。其中一個「會」位於橫山縣武真，供奉真武大帝，另外一個「會」位於橫山縣黨岔鎮，供奉牛王菩薩。本文透過大量資料嘗試說明中國農民所追求的集體供奉神的需求如何決定廟宇組織的管理方式、村裏和村外的關係，再討論宗教儀式專業人及地方政府在地方宗教活動中所起的作用。本文嘗試總結陝北及晉西的廟會的異同及其緣故。

關鍵詞：廟宇組織、山西、陝西、民間自治、神的集體供奉

^{*}俄羅斯聖彼得堡大學東方學院助理教授