

Globalizing community festivals: the case of the community festival in Wanwei, Guangxi, China

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to concern the community festival of a Jing minority village in the China–Vietnam border area. Since it was designated as a national-level Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, the festival has undergone many changes. The festival has steadily expanded and evolved, assuming characteristics of globalization. How is the globalized character of the Wanwei festival manifested? What are the forces behind the elevation of this local festival onto the register of national events and how did it turn into an event organized by the township?

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on the results of the author's research on the culture of Kinh people in Wanwei from 2000 to the present. From the anthropological approach, the author mainly uses method of participant observation and in-depth interviews. The author has observed the Wanwei communal festival from 2000 to the present, interviewing about 40 villagers in Wanwei in depth, they can be leaders, intellectuals, civil servants, officials or working people.

Findings – The paper is a case study of the new aspect of globalization of a village festival. The author argues that globalization can lead to a spread of global flows but in this process of globalization, villagers also want to define the local identity, they reinvent the tradition, rewrite history, create new nuances for the gods with many different purposes. Practicing the current Wanwei village festival is a vivid example of globalization from below and the politics of tradition.

Originality/value – The paper adds a theoretical dimension to current globalization research. The paper also points out the political, economic and social dynamics that govern the transformation of a village festival in particular and the village culture in general in the border areas. The paper is a testament to the dynamism and flexibility of villagers when participating in the current globalization process.

Keywords China, Globalization, Cultural change, Community festival, Wanwei village, Jing ethnic in Guangxi

Paper type Research paper

This paper concerns the community festival of a Jing minority village in the China–Vietnam border area. The Wanwei festival was designated a national-level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2006 and recognized as an event manifesting the culture of the Jing minority in China. Since it was designated as an ICH, the festival has undergone many changes. The festival has steadily expanded and evolved, assuming characteristics of globalization. How is the globalized character of the Wanwei festival manifested? What are the forces behind the elevation of this local festival onto the register of national events and how did it turn into an event organized by the township?

Based on my decades of empirical field research, I will answer these questions with reference to Vietnamese, Chinese and international literature on globalization as a process of flows and closure (Appadurai, 1997; Geschiere and Meyer, 1998; Sivaramakrishnan and



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Agrawal, 2003), and the politics of tradition against the backdrop of such globalization (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2000). In contrast to early writings about the impacts of globalization, recent scholars of cultural globalization assert that it is difficult to see globalization simply as a process of integration and homogenization. Globalization process, rather, often “goes hand – in hand with a closure of identities which often used to be more fuzzy and permeable” (Geschiere and Meyer, 1998, p. 602). In many place, the articulation of global flows with local contexts may appear in the forms of cultural differences and even violent identity politics, but also in the form of an assertion of locality against the backdrop of constant change (Appadurai, 1997).

Contextualizing the setting: Wanwei village

Wanwei is a village in the Jiangping prefecture. The town of Dongxing belongs to the Port City of Fancheng in Guangxi, China. Together with Wutou and Shanxin, Wanwei constitutes the Three Islands (Sandao) region (also known as Jingdao) – this is the area where Jing people (as a minority in China) are most heavily concentrated. As mentioned in Fū Dasheng *et al.* (1993) and Editorial Team (1984), these Jing people originally came from Đô Sơn, Hải Phòng and a few other areas in northern and northern central Vietnam. They settled in the Jingdao area in the sixteenth century. They only use Vietnamese at home with Jing people, communicate by Chinese with others. Wanwei occupies an area of 14 km², and has 4,400 residents. It is located 25 km from the Móng Cái-Dongxing harbor and 180 km from Nanning, the capital of Guangxi.

The most noteworthy monuments in Wanwei are the communal house, which was designated a national-level cultural site in 2006. According to local informants, the communal house was an imposing structure erected by the early Jing settlers; however, like the rest of the village, it experienced many vicissitudes. By the end of the 1950s, it had been completely destroyed. A new communal house was built in 1984 on the old site and was regularly maintained. In 2001, the communal house was totally re-built on a site measuring 1,000 square meters. It has become the symbol of the villagers’ religious beliefs.

Five deities are worshiped in the communal house: the Great Sea-Taming White Dragon King (Bạch Long thần hải đại vương), who is the main deity; the Great High Mountain King (Cao Sơn đại vương); the Great Swamp King (Quảng Trach đại vương); Saint Tran Hung Đạo (Đức thánh Trần) and the Diem Tuoc deity (thần Điểm Tước). Additionally, the communal house serves as the site of worship of the Jing hero, Đỗ Quang Huy, who (allegedly) led both Jing and Han in the Jingdao region against the French in the mid-nineteenth century; the ancestors of the 12 lineages who were the original settlers in Wanwei; and the Nguyễn leader and his brothers who built the first communal house. The Wanwei communal house is also known as the Singing Communal House (đình hát) because of the distinctive singing activities that are the main feature of the community festival.

Besides the communal house, Wanwei has seven shrines: one dedicated to the god of the soil who is the tutelary deity of the village; one to the six female attendants of the Lady (Bà); one to the Lord (Ông); the shrine of the Lady faces the sea; the High Mountain shrine is the site of worship of the high deities of the High Mountain; the shrines of the southern harbor and of the eastern harbor are used to worship the officials who guard the eastern and southern approaches to the sea.

It can be argued that the communal house, shrines and festival have created a space for the display of the culture of the Jing community, including legends and myths about the objects of worship; the history of the village, folklore, rituals and ritual objects, foodways, clothing styles, language, liturgical texts, performing styles, dances, ritual decorations, processions and participants. In order to gather all the elements represented in the current heritage context, the Jing community in Wanwei has undergone a constant process of collecting, preserving, exploiting the cultural heritage of the village with the view to always

create and renew – in line with “invention of tradition” argument proposed by Hobsbawn and Ranger (2000).

The responsibility for preserving the cultural heritage lies with a communal house management committee elected by villagers. It is in charge of everything pertaining to the communal house, including tangible and intangible heritage. At the head of the committee is the head of the communal house (*đình trưởng*), followed by an assistant and the representatives of larger lineages, brigade heads, professionals, and representatives of the local companies and donors to the communal house.

This committee is hard-working and is motivated by the idea of “participating in village affairs and doing religious work to receive blessings” as the assistant head of the communal house said on the occasion of the 2011 festival. The committee holds regular meetings to discuss village affairs and they always reiterates the need to preserve cultural relics and to request contributions from as many sources as possible, including local authorities, companies and brigades, people involved in cultural activities and tourists. The committee has evolved strategies to achieve this goal. According to Tô Xuân Hào[1], the head of the Wanwei communal house, members of the committee pride themselves that they have succeeded, while other villages encounter difficulties.

Globalizing and (re)inventing the gods

By this, I mean the rewriting of history so as to worship gods in a context of multi-directional globalization involving diverse objectives and interest groups. This is the case of the Great Sea-Taming King who occupies the highest position in the communal house and the Jing hero Đổ Quang Huy. Stories associated with these figures have been created to highlight transnational connections and kinship networks in order to advertise and expand the festival. The promotion and expansion of the festival is considered ways of “bringing more and more Vietnamese, Chinese and Westerners to their festivals as well as letting them know our culture and knowing our history” as stated by Mr Đổ Phúc Đăng, an primary school teacher in Wanwei. It also reflects Wanwei villagers’ desire to construct a new identity and new boundary through rewriting their history and (re)inventing their gods.

The Great Sea-Taming King is a maritime god who assists fishermen. According to legend, once upon a time, the coast of Wanwei was thrown into turmoil by the appearance of a magic centipede that ate people. It lived in a cave and whenever a sampan sailed by the mouth of the cave, a sacrifice of one passenger had to be made. He disguised himself as a beggar, asking passage on the sampan of a fisherman. When the sampan passed by the mouth of the cave, he threw a gourd and a grilled ear of corn into the cave. The magic centipede thought it was human flesh and swallowed it. It burned inside him and he died. The corpse of the centipede broke into three and floated to the regions where there lived Jing people: the head became Wutou, the middle became Shanxin and the tail end became Wanwei. As for its teeth, it floated to Vietnam and became the village of Wanshui, the name that Wanwei villagers still use for Trà Cố (Móng Cái, Việt Nam). This story symbolizes the connection between Wanwei and the other two Jing villages with their land of origin. Although now located in China, they originated in Vietnam and are just an extension of Trà Cố.

Interestingly, this story was not recorded in earlier studies in Jing people in Wanwei by Chinese scholars (cf. Editorial Team, 1984; Fu Dasheng *et al.*, 1993; Wu Manyu and Xian Shaohua, 2006), but only became popular after village scholars wrote it down in poetic form in the beginning of 1990s. This may be connected to the normalization of relations between China and Vietnam in early 1990s with the reopening of Vietnam–China border gates[2], making cross-border flows of goods, information and people better possible. The normalization made Wanwei villagers more direct participants in the process of globalization and thus made more aware of their identity and position as Kinh people in China[3]. They rewrote their own history and invented their gods based on the traditions they thought they had before the closure of the

border and normalization. Their new identity not only serves their cross-border trade but also impacts on other cultural and social connections. For ordinary people in the village, they use this story to legitimize their traveling across the border to do business. For those who are called “bosses” or big businesspeople by the villagers, rewriting the village history and the detailed emphasis on cross-border, inter-ethnic connections in the past makes them more confident when expanding investment in the Móng Cái area of Vietnam and doing business with Vietnamese people. Some leaders and intellectuals in Wanwei village emphasized the “distance” between Wanwei and Vietnam before the normalization and the rewriting of history and inventing new gods, thus not only creating a connection between villagers from the two sides of the border but also affording them a “hybrid identity” which helps them to have a stronger moral support through “standing on two feet”: one in Vietnam and one in China (the words of the Secretary of Wanwei) against the backdrop of globalization.

Nowadays, this story circulates not only in poetic form but has also been rewritten in prose in Nôm, Chinese and in (Romanized) Vietnamese and disseminated widely in China and Vietnam. These versions emphasize that Wanwei and the two other Jing villages Wutou and Shanxin are kin to Trà Cổ. As a result, since the last five years, representatives from Trà Cổ and Wanwei usually participate in each other’s festivals; they believe that they must manifest their spirit of kinship solidarity by such participation.

The story of Đổ Quang Huy represents another aspect of the internationalization of history. As also mentioned in Nguyễn Duy Bình (2005) and Ngô Vĩnh Chính and Vương Miện Quý (1994), the story takes place in the context of first British then French imperialism in the nineteenth century, and the multiple changes in policy toward minorities and culture since 1949. The Jing people of Wanwei[4] created the figure of Đổ Quang Huy as a Black Flags leader at the head of a troop that combined Chinese and Vietnamese fighting the French on the Sino-Vietnamese border. However, there is no record of Đổ Quang Huy in Chinese historical documents or in any other materials pertaining to the Jing until 1958 when a research group from Guangxi University (China) told the story of this hero for the first time (Ruan *et al.*, 1987, p. 21). Since then, many other works have referenced Prof. Yuan’s tale. Following many old people in Wanwei, this story also appears in the 1950s, for example, Mr Nguyễn Chiên Trường, an intellectual of the village born in 1912, told me: “When I was a youth I didn’t hear anything about him. When I was middle-aged, my child more than ten years old, I heard stories about him but at that time the Temples and the Communal House no longer existed, villagers didn’t know where to worship.” Recently, the story of this hero has also been written down in various genres and languages. His deeds are recorded in a plaque hung in the communal house. The plaque emphasizes that he led both Han and Jing against the French in Jiangping and praises the friendship and unity between the two peoples.

The deities worshiped in the communal house have also assumed new guises. Until 2010, the gods were worshiped only with a tablet; afterward, according to an 86-year old villager, it was decided to make them beautiful. With donations from a “boss” (Wanwei-speak for a successful company head) from Guangdong who had many trade connections in Wanwei and in particular with the head of the communal house, the communal house has acquired five statues on five pedestals sitting on the main altar. These statues were made to order in Fangcheng at a cost of 140,000 yuan. They bear the clear characteristics of Chinese statuary. Explaining the sudden appearance of the statues, a village elder said: “All the temples, pagodas and shrines around here have statues. So we decided to have statues as well in order to look good.” The desire to keep up with other places of worship has resulted in the erection of Chinese style statues to worship Vietnamese deities.

The Wanwei festival takes place from the 9th to the 15th day of the sixth month and comprises four principal ceremonies: welcoming the gods (*Nghinh thần*), worshiping the gods (*Tế thần*), banquet (*Ngôi mâm*) and bidding farewell to the gods (*Tống thần*). On the morning of the 9th day of the sixth month, the gods are brought in procession to take part in

the ceremonies and festival. The two gods are the god of the sea (the sea-taming great prince) who is brought in from the sea and the god of the mountain who is brought in from the High Mountain shrine. On the morning of the 10th day, the rituals are held. The banquet is usually held on the next two days; villagers hold the banquet in the communal house to thank the tutelary deities and to renew bonds of kinship and friendship among themselves. Each adult male is seated according to a carefully devised list of precedence. In the evening of the last day of the festival, a ceremony is held to thank the gods for attending the festival and to escort them back to the otherworld so that the villagers can close the festival and return to normal life. During the entire festival, singing is the most essential activity, in both rituals and other activities.

It can be said that Wanwei communal house, shrine and festival have created space for cultural performances of Kinh people here to create new traditions and identities.

Participants

The Wanwei festival has morphed from a village festival to a regional event that is recognized as a national-level cultural heritage; as a result, the number of attendants at the festival has greatly increased. According to statistics maintained by the Festival Organizing Committee, nearly 40,000 attended the festival in 2009. In 2010 and 2012 the number had risen to 50,000. The highest number was reached in 2011 with 60,000 people attending the festival when it was organized by Fangcheng township to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jing settlers in Jingdao[5].

The attendees include not only Wanwei villagers and other Jing residents of Jingdao, but also many officials from the towns and surrounding areas, staff of commercial enterprises, the sons of Wanwei residents returning specifically for the celebrations, visitor groups from Vietnam, journalists, scholars, and tourists. At the 2011 festival, I accompanied a group of overseas Vietnamese originally from Móng Cái and Wanwei but now living in the USA and Canada.

In Wanwei today, there is a Vietnamese–American who has built a resort that includes a stage for the performance of folk music, an exhibition space for musical instruments, clothes and traditional implements of the Jing people of Wanwei. Many emigrants have made return trips to Wanwei to take part in the festival. Those who cannot travel to Wanwei participate through their lineage associations. For example, the Tô lineage has members in Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, USA and Vietnam. Every year, these overseas members send contributions to their lineage association to contribute to lineage affairs and to the festival.

The commercial enterprises in Wanwei and Jingdao contribute significantly to the festival, seeing it as an opportunity to conduct business, make contacts, etc. Journalists and scholars are also well represented. I have observed the festival since 2001 and noticed that only in the last five years have participants come from China, Canada, Australia, Thailand, Korea, Russia, etc. as researchers, journalists, businessmen or as acquaintances of Wanwei residents. Only since the festival expanded in scope and number of attendees did they learn of it and become interested in seeing it.

Preparations for the festival must begin well in advance and include organizing food and lodging, parking, welcome and guidance. Many organizations, both official and private, as well as villagers are mobilized. Yet, every year, cars and buses are parked over several kilometers along the road leading to the communal house. The huge parking lots are crowded. It is clear that Wanwei is no longer a village festival but has become a regional one; it also displays a global dimension since attendees come from all over China, Vietnam and other countries. Wanwei villagers are very pleased with the variety of participants in the festival because they think “village festivals are a good opportunity to get to know Wanwei everywhere and know the Jing ethnic group in Dongxing, Guangxi of China” as stated by the Wanwei Secretary in his opening speech in 2013 festival. In this context, the need to create a new identity of Jing in Wanwei is even more motivated.

Performing rituals and other festival activities

From my discussions with village elders and from my personal observations in the period 2001–2005, I have learned that in recent years, the festival has altered significantly from traditional practices. Among these were the custom that banquet leaders raised pigs and chose the biggest one to offer to the gods; the custom of selecting a medicine man (*ōng mo*) in front of the whole village; of officially recording the names of those who had done meritorious deeds and reading the names out loud on the day of worshiping the gods while the families of the honorees performed ceremonies of thanks in the communal house. These customs have not been preserved. However, the four principal and most orthodox ceremonies of the festival listed above are maintained and lend a traditional air to the festival. Nonetheless, the format of these traditional ceremonies includes several modernized and globalized elements.

According to tradition, the ceremony to welcome the gods is very important and must proceed according to the schedule established by the best medicine men and ritual masters of the village and approved by the organizing committee. However, since 2009, after the government erected a large stage on the beach in order to expand the space for performances, rituals are no longer performed in the courtyard of the communal house; both rituals and performances now take place on the stage, in the presence of more attendees, in particular of government officials. As a result, the ceremony to welcome the gods no longer unfolds according to the traditionally established schedule. The welcoming procession begins at the communal house but does not proceed straight to the sea; it stops by the stage in order to open the festival. In 2011, on the occasion of commemorating the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Jing people in Jingdao, it was the city of Fangcheng that organized the festival, with the participation of many town officials and outside officials invited by the Fangcheng government. Since these officials could not be relied on to arrive on time, the welcoming procession had to be altered to await their arrival. When the gods had been placed on the stage to begin the ceremony, another whole hour passed so that the invited officials could take their seats. Many official speeches were pronounced before the palanquins of the gods could be brought to the sea and for the gods to be invited to come and participate in the festival. A scholar from Wanwei commented humorously to me: “The gods must wait on the officials before they can attend the festival with the people, they must listen to official speeches before they can enjoy themselves.”

Ordinarily, the ritual of worship of the gods would be observed most rigorously; the people performing the ritual would be selected for their ability to preserve the solemn character of the ceremony. From my own observation, between 2009 and 2013, the ceremony has undergone a fair number of changes. The performers no longer wear the traditional ceremonial tunics; instead, some wear long tunics, others short ones; some wear blue, others wear red. Most wear modern style ceremonial clothing and wear western shoes. Some wear tunics over their jeans or even over trendy stovepipe trousers. Then there are those members of the rituals committee who have not memorized the proper steps and are unable to synchronize the steps with the men in the ritual procession. While female singers sing to the gods in front of the altar, some of the men involved in the ritual service are busy chatting, conducting personal business or even listening to their cell phones and so forth, thus destroying the solemn character of the ceremony. A number of elders have expressed displeasure at this turn of affairs. “Young people nowadays are ignorant and unwilling to learn; they don’t know how to do holy business. If they continue to act like this, how could the gods tolerate it?” Many visitors from both China and abroad take part in the ceremony and dilute its sacred character. Some villagers wearing casual summer clothing advance to light joss-sticks while the ritual is still being performed. Offerings have also changed. They no longer consist simply of glutinous rice, chicken and

flowers and fruits, but now include more luxurious goods and various kinds of foods from China and Vietnam.

The banquet ceremony traditionally was reserved for men aged 19 or above and each setting had only six people. However, with the influx of important guests, the settings must now accommodate eight to ten people. Noteworthy is the inclusion of women at the banquet as they are honored guests with positions of authority. I personally have been invited to a seating of honor, something that traditionally would have been prohibited. Foreign guests are particularly honored with a seat at the high table. Food served at the banquet is increasingly abundant and *recherché*. The families whose turn it is to prepare food want to leave a good impression so they serve exotic, complicated dishes. Because the number of visitors to the festival has become so large, especially on opening day, since 2009 the organizing committee has set up a “meal for ten thousand people.” The largest such meal took place in 2011 when 240 tables, serving about 2,500 guests, were set up in the courtyard of the communal house in the space ordinarily reserved for the performance of rituals. Commenting on the meals thus organized over the last five years, a committee member said that it was “to earn the goodwill of the guests” and that the festival was no longer a village-wide affair but had become a regional one. The ceremony of bidding farewell to the gods has similarly been modernized with many cultural activities, including fireworks to close the festival.

Besides the performance of the rituals, the festival also gives rise to numerous associated activities designed to expand knowledge about the communal house and the culture of the Jing of Wanwei: DVDs and CDs, pamphlets introducing the festival and the traditions of the Jing of Wanwei, or recounting the story of *Đỗ Quang Huy*; presentations of songs and poems, folk-tales under glass; publications; a large monochord (*đàn bầu*) in the communal house; organizing call and response songs. With funding from the government and private enterprises, the festival also includes many new activities, such as 100 high-school students playing on 100 monochords donated by the government; inviting performing groups from Vietnam, such as a dance group from *Móng Cái*, the *quan họ* singing group from *Bắc Ninh*, etc. together with performing groups from China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Fangcheng and Dongxing).

The size of the festival and number of visitors has given rise to a much greater need for services and provisions from food and lodging to souvenirs. This has motivated not only Wanwei villagers but also others in Jingdao to select local specialties to sell as souvenirs. Conical hats, *áo dài* (Vietnamese long tunics), DVDs and posters commemorating the festival and the culture of the Jing people become objects with special meaning. Jing people in Wanwei also use the festival to promote local products such as the yam contained in a pocket decorated with the picture of a Jing girl wearing a red *áo dài* and a conical hat; Kim Than wine, named after a famous beach in Wanwei, as well as Jing food specialties. A visitor from Shanghai told me: “I have business to do in Dongxing so I come here to enjoy the festival and to bring back some seafood. In town, it is far more expensive and not as fresh.” Local food is thus not consumed exclusively on the spot, but is also taken back home by visitors. The sudden expansion of the festival and the need to cater to more visitors has inspired others to bring specialties from their own locality. Most of these consist of food stuff and craft objects from Vietnam, Fangcheng, Nanning, Yunnan, thus increasing the diverse character of the festival, the circulation of commodities as well as highlighting the local characteristics of the Wanwei’s foods.

Expanding the festival beyond Wanwei

The festival is the most outstanding feature of the cultural life of the Jing community in Wanwei. Not only because the communal house and the festival have been designated national level cultural heritage sites but also because of the rapid development of this border

area, the festival has become better known. Expansion of the festival has been accompanied by greater expenses and more complex organization.

The expansion of the Wanwei festival began immediately after the rebuilding of the communal house in 2001, but it became a strategic and effective plan beginning in 2009. This strategic plan was implemented by personnel from the village to the district and township levels. Since 2009, the festival has been the highlight of campaigns advertising tourism and commercial opportunities in the border area. Ordinary villagers want to advertise their festival to attract investment and to express their pride in their heritage; they also see the tangible benefits in tourism and the sale of seafood.

The confluence of interests by local authorities and villagers led to concrete steps by the Communal House Committee. They use the full policies intended to manage the border area such as “Prosperous Frontier, Rich People” launched in 2000 and targeted at areas with ethnic minorities (see Nguyễn Văn Căn, 2009), the 2011 policy of assistance to minorities with fewer than 300,000 people; the opening of the China–Vietnam Free Economic Zone; the ASEAN–China Economic Zone in the year of 2000 in which Wanwei is an important portal. The strategy also makes use of successful personalities in the village, such as the Party Secretary who is a member of the National Assembly, the Vice-Director of the Central Chinese TV in Beijing, the head of the Religious Affairs Committee, the assistant head of the assembly in Fangcheng, etc. as well as heads of private companies.

This strategy is based on the realization by Wanwei villagers of the value and significance of their cultural heritage and of the need for them to preserve and enrich it. They hold the perspective that “we must take good care of it so that people will look at it and give us funding; if we have good heritage but do not show it no one will know about it.” According to Tô Duy Phúc, the Head of the Center for the preservation and dissemination of the Nôm literary heritage of the Jing People. The Communal House Committee puts together a concrete plan for each of the tasks required for holding the festival, how to present cultural performances, whom to invite, whom to hit for donations and contributions, and how to do so, etc.

According to members of the Communal House Committee, the results of this strategy have been most visible since 2009, with the increasingly active participation of various levels of government, private companies, organizations and individuals. This is clear from the statistics supplied by the head of the Communal House; in 2003, the festival earned RMB230,000; in 2004, RMB510,000 mostly from villagers and outside visitors; in 2008, the festival received RMB20,000 from the government and earned RMB100,000. In 2010, the festival earned RMB310,000, 30,000 of which came from the government and RMB280,000 from visitors. In 2011, the year of the 500th anniversary celebrations, the receipts came to RMB330,000; in 2012 and 2013, the receipts fell to 250,000. With this level of financial resources, funding for the ceremonies and cultural performances is better; these events are bigger, and more contacts are established with other festivals. Despite generously funding the festival activities, there is still enough to fund rituals and other activities of the Communal House Committee throughout the year.

Thanks to this abundant funding, in recent years, members of the Communal House Committee and the Center for the Preservation and Dissemination of the Nôm literary heritage have undertaken trips to other areas in China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and especially Vietnam. Each of these trips allows them to make new connections, to learn new things as a result of which they have significantly altered the communal house and ritual activities conducted in the communal house in ways that they consider good and useful to put into practice. For example, on a trip to Vạn Ninh (Móng Cái), they noticed that song and dance performances were very popular so they invited Vạn Ninh singers to teach Wanwei women how to sing to welcome the gods exactly according to the proper script (for more on such scripting, see Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2000). When they went to Hanoi, they bought some

musical instruments used in ritual performances, ritual clothing, headgear, etc. and took them back to Wanwei. They do the same when they visit other countries, other places.

The expansion and opening up of the Wanwei festival are thus the result of the conscious and sustained efforts of both the local government and ordinary villagers. It is an aspect of the integration of Wanwei in the economic, social and cultural globalization of the border area, where the flows of globalization evoked cultural closures in the guise of invention of tradition and identity formation. These “new” narratives, traditions and identities enabled different actors in this village to forge social connections for different purposes, but resulted in the type of unintended, multi-dimensional and multi-directional processes that are often attributed to globalization (cf. Appadurai, 1997; Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2008; Geschiere and Meyer, 1998).

Conclusion

From community festival of a village that comprises no more than 5,000 residents to a national-level festival attracting up to 60,000 visitors, from performing rituals at the communal house to doing so on a stage, from a festival incorporating traditional rituals to one incorporating many new rituals and performances imported from all corners, the Wanwei festival has become a massive platform for different kinds of activities, including cultural, economic, political, identity and prestige. These multifarious activities create the globalized dimension of the festival, as also documented by Ma Muk Chi (2012) and Cheung Siu Woo. These scholars examined the Community Festival and Singing activities in the Festival in Sandao to survey the social transformation of the border area, and the flexibility of national boundaries in the views of the Jing people here; after all, the border area of China with Southeast Asia (including Vietnam) is a site of lively cultural exchange (Evans *et al.*, 2000). It should be noted, however, that this globalizing process has not been spontaneous but is the result of sustained interventions by political and economic actors, of economic development and the transformation of a cross-border economic area. It is also the result of proactive initiatives by the Wanwei villagers.

The villagers of Wanwei are a minority people living in the border area; in the past, they lived on a coast where “at the head are waves, at the tail is wind” and it was very difficult to preserve their customs. They were despised by the majority population and some even tried to pass as Han to make their lives easier. So when their lives became more stable and they became more affluent, they became eager to assert their identity, to assert that they are Vietnamese speakers and to maintain Vietnamese culture. Moreover, with the normalization of relations between China and Vietnam and the opening of the border they also realized that their festival facilitates cultural exchanges with other populations to create a more peaceful life: the festival raises their status and reputation and creates more business opportunities. The villagers invented new traditions and identities to serve their own different purposes, such as creating ethnic unity and social networks, in the expectation of more material and spiritual safety in life.

While convenient for business, trade and the psychological stability of exile, it also meets the desire of the Chinese state in the policy of “Prosperous Frontier, Rich People.” So, the invention of tradition by Wanwei villagers in the context of globalization could be read as an invention of tradition from below, which, however, was quickly captured by larger political and economic forces beyond their pale (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2000) or a “closure of identities” (Geschiere and Meyer, 1998; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, 2003). In the context of the current rapid development of the Sino-Vietnamese border trade with the dynamics of global flows which create many opportunities but also bring many precariousness for the local, the need to create a new identity that is different and flexible is even more necessary for them.

The transformation of the Wanwei festival over the last five years has involved the participation of different social groups such as high-ranking government cadres, individual donors, enterprises, local intellectuals, journalists, scholars, as well as visitors from all over. The distribution of roles among these various groups has always been subject to agreement by all sides. For example, the governments of the prefecture and town of Fangcheng wanted to hold the festival on a very large scale to implement the policy of “Prosperous Frontier, Rich People” by showcasing the special culture of the region and of the town. This desire fully coincided with the mentality of the Wanwei villagers. Similarly, donors and organizers of the festival were also in agreement about how to proceed; enterprise owners want good relations with the village, and the villagers want their financial support for their own activities. The presence of many journalists and researchers also fits in well with the desire of the villagers to publicize their festival far and wide. The festival is an occasion for meetings, reunions and making contacts. It also creates more demand for various kinds of services and products. The Wanwei villagers are thus proactive in negotiating, transforming, creating in order to have a large stage so as to realize their goals of creating transnational connections while also asserting the status of their community.

This process is not without some drawbacks. Not every villager wants the festival to unfold in the present way, with the participation of so many groups. Observing the festival over many years, I have noted that while most want the festival to be more and more “beautiful,” “fun” and “open,” they also have concerns. They worry about the transformation of the festival in the future as a result of the increased role of the government and private donors. Will the close scrutiny of the festival by journalists and scholars and visitors turn the festival into a theatrical production or be misunderstood as to its tradition? How much more innovation will take place? Will villagers accept these innovations? Will the festival one day be like other festivals, an arena for competition for prestige and power, and for the display of contradictions within the community? These are questions that I will be addressing as I continue to attend the Wanwei festival in the foreseeable future.

Notes

1. All of the informants appearing in this paper have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.
2. Vietnam and China have the normalization of relations in November, 1991 and reopening of border gates with Directive 98-CT on opening 21 border gates on the Vietnam–China border (including Mong Cai-Dongxing) on March 27, 1992.
3. Personal conversations with village scholars at Wanwei village in 2010.
4. “Jing” is the transliteration of what local people call themselves and being called by the Chinese. Like other “Jing” groups in China, the “Jing” of Wanwei are distantly related to the Kinh or Việt, the majority ethnic of Việt Nam, see more Nguyễn Duy Bình (2005) and Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm (2004).
5. These estimates were provided by the Organizing Committee in October 2012.

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