

2010

HARVARD-YENCHING  
INSTITUTE WORKING  
PAPER SERIES

DISPLAYING CHINESE FOLKLORE TO THE  
WORLD: THE 2008 OLYMPIC GAMES  
AND INTERNATIONAL FOLKLORIC  
TOURISM IN GAOBEIDIAN VILLAGE

Yang Lihui | Beijing Normal University

# **Displaying Chinese Folklore to the World**

## **The 2008 Olympic Games and International Folkloric Tourism in Gaobeidian Village, Beijing**

Lihui Yang

Professor of folklore, Institute of Folklore and Cultural Anthropology, Beijing Normal University

The 2008 Olympic Games was undoubtedly one of the biggest events in contemporary Chinese experience. So far research on it has mainly focused on its political and economical influence on China. Based on recent fieldwork, this paper explores the impact of the Olympiad on the transmission and transformation of folk traditions in Gaobeidian, a suburban village of Chaoyang district in Beijing. In 2005, with the help of the District Tourism Bureau, an “International Folkloric Tourism” project formally started in this village. Especially designed to attract foreign tourists who came to Beijing before and during the Olympic games, the project aimed to provide work opportunities for farmers who lost their lands because of Beijing’s modernization, and at the same time, to represent multiple images to the world: the village itself, Beijing, and China. The author tries to answer questions seldom studied to date: how did the 2008 Olympic Games influence the transmission and transformation of folk traditions in a village? How did it influence local people’s attitudes towards folklore? What kind of roles did folk traditions play in international tourism? What forms of folklore were chosen to be displayed to foreigners? And, what has happened to the folk traditions after the Olympics?

# 向世界展示民俗

## ——2008年奥运会与北京高碑店村的国际民俗旅游

杨利慧（教授，北京师范大学文学院民俗学与文化人类学研究所）

本文以田野作业为基础，力图考察奥运会对北京郊区的一个村落——高碑店——的民俗传承和变迁的影响。高碑店村的“国际民俗旅游项目”于2005年正式启动，以吸引奥运前以及奥运期间前来观光的外国游客。项目的实施有着突出的双重目的：为在北京现代化建设中失去土地的农民寻找就业机会，并通过民俗展示向世界呈现村落、北京以至中国的多重形象。本文将着力探讨如下问题：2008年奥运会如何影响了高碑店村民间传统的传承和变迁？对村民的民俗观念有何影响？民俗在国际旅游中扮演了什么角色？哪些民俗形式被选择出来加以展示？民俗旅游在组织和运作方面具有什么特点？奥运会之后高碑店的民间传统又面临怎样的境遇？

**Displaying Chinese Folklore to the World:  
The 2008 Olympic Games and International Folkloric Tourism in Gaobeidian  
Village in the Suburbs of Beijing<sup>1</sup>**

Lihui Yang

Institute of Folklore and Cultural Anthropology

Beijing Normal University

At 10:08 P.M. on July 13th, 2001, when Mr. Samaranch, the former president of the International Olympic Committee, announced that the sponsoring city of the 29th Olympiad would be Beijing, great excitement rippled through the Olympic conference room in Beijing, then spread into the city and throughout China. According to a report from Xinhua News Agency, that night more than four hundred thousand people crowded into Tiananmen Square and Shijitan, the political centers of China, to celebrate the success. President Jiang Zemin joined the celebration with all the Politburo members. Excited people cheered and danced, many with tears running down their smiling faces. Others waved banners, threw flowers and banners into the sky, and shouted at the top of their voices: “Beijing succeeded!” “China has won!” “Hooray! Our motherland!”<sup>2</sup>

In many people’s eyes, hosting the Olympics Games is one of the most important events in contemporary China. More than sports and entertainment, the Olympics are significant for political, economical, and cultural reasons. For example, the authors of *The 2005 Research Report on People’s Olympic Games* argue that “2008 Olympic Games has great historical and practical meaning to China, particularly at a crucial time of its development. It will attract Chinese people to become involved and, thus, will greatly solidify the Chinese nation. As an

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<sup>1</sup> The research project on Gaobeidian was directed by me, with assistance of Zhu Pengcheng and Zhang Rong, two graduate students of folklore in Beijing Normal University. This paper benefits much from their fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua News Agency. “Huanle Piaodang zai Zhongguo Shangkong” (“Great Joy Flies Over Sky of China”), July 14 Beijing. <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/kuaixun/44709.htm>

unprecedented display event, it will set up a global platform that will attract the attention of the whole world. It is possible, and it should be, a historical turning-point for China to display its global nature, to rebuild cultural China's contemporary image, and to display China's powerful and peaceful ascent as a major country."<sup>3</sup>

Did this remarkable event also impact folklore in China? If so, how and why? Up to this point, research on the 2008 Olympics has primarily been approached from perspectives of politics and economics, with only a few articles written from a folkloristic perspective.<sup>4</sup> Based on my recent fieldwork, this paper will explore the 2008 Olympic Games and its impact on the transmission and transformation of folklore in Gaobeidian, a village in the suburbs of Beijing. This paper will explore the impact of the 2008 Olympic Games on the transformation of folklore in the village of Gaobeidian, including its influence on local people's attitudes and conceptions of folklore. I will analyze the ways that various agents used the Olympic Games as an opportunity to pursue their own agendas, particularly in relation to the promotion new economic initiatives, including the on-going development of Gaobeidian's program of international touristic folklore. I also will describe the types of folklore and aspects of traditional culture that were selected to be displayed as "characteristically Chinese," along with the organizational structures that guided the development and interpretation of folkloric tourism.

As a suburb of Beijing, in the city's eastern Chaoyang district, Gaobeidian's situation has been tied to that of Beijing, both historically and today. For instance, during imperial times, serving as Beijing's port on the Grand Canal served to strengthen Gaobeidian's economic position and status. After 1949 and in close vicinity to the center of national politics, the village became a site for a variety of economic and political experiments, ranging from the communes of the 1950s and 60s to the post-1978 economic reforms. By the beginning of the new century, new governmental officials, working with private enterprises began a series of entrepreneurial efforts to improve the economic situation in the village, efforts that included the development of touristic folklore. Thus, when Beijing was chosen to host the 2008

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<sup>3</sup> Jin Yuanpu, ed. *Renwen Aoyun Yanjiu Baogao 2005 (The 2005 Research Report on the People's Olympic Games)*, Beijing: Tongxin Publishing House, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Yue Yongyi,

Olympic Games, these leaders were presented with a high-profile opportunity to build upon pre-existing activities as well as to create new organizational structures.

Gaobeidian caught my attention at the beginning of 2008, and I organized a research project, involving two graduate students at Beijing Normal University. At that time, the Beijing government already had designated Gaobeidian as an official “reception village” for the 2008 Olympic Games. Advertisements and articles were appearing in newspapers and on the web. Many of the articles explained that, beginning in 2005, the village had implemented a successful program of “international folkloric tourism” and already had revived some local customs. Now the village was sparing no effort to build itself into “the window of Beijing Old Folk Customs” (*lao Beijing minjian fengsu de chuankou*) and a “folk palace for temporarily stay” (*minjian xinggong*) for the 2008 Olympics.”<sup>5</sup> The village also had received several awards, including those that named it as a Model Village of New Socialism (*shehui zhuyi xin nongcun jianshe*) and an Enterprise Established Independently (*zizhu Chuanye*).

When I first walked down the streets of Gaobeidian, it did not seem to me to be a “typical” northern Chinese village at all. I saw no farmland nor any farmers watering or planting crops. Instead, high tension lines covered the village sky. A large highway ran passed the east of the village, and a railway line cut the village into two parts (the East Area and West Area), with passengers and freight trains that kept passing by from the village into or out of Beijing. Cars and trucks were crowded on the main road, with their horns blaring loudly. Later, as I learned about the history of the village, I gradually began to understand its dramatic social changes in the past century and its efforts to industrialize (*chanyehua*) folklore by seizing upon various opportunities, including the 2008 Olympics.

### **From an Important Canal Dock to a Village of “Three Withouts”:**

#### **History of Gaobeidian**

Gaobeidian’s efforts to industrialize folklore and establish folkloric tourism must be understood within the context of a longer history of development, its relationship with Beijing, and the dramatic social changes in China in the last hundred years. Gaobeidian

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<sup>5</sup> “Chongfang Aoyun *Minjian Xinggong*” (“Re-Visiting the *minjian xinggong*” for the 2008 Olympics). People’s Daily Overseas Edition, March 14, 2008.

boasts a reputation of “the first village in East Beijing” or “the historical village closest to Beijing.” It is located next to the Tonghui River, 8 kilometers away from Tiananmen Square. An old proverbial saying states: “Taking a boat, with a donkey towing it, you can come to Gaobeidian from Beijing city in just a moment.” Now the village has an area of 2.7 square kilometers, a permanent population of 5,970 people, and a floating population of more than 10 thousand.<sup>6</sup>

As a suburban village, changes in Gaobeidian’s economic situation are closely related to those of Beijing. From the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368) to the end of Qing dynasty (1616-1911), when Beijing became the imperial capital and the Great Canal was built to transport rice and other necessities from the south to the capital, Gaobeidian became an important dock and distribution center on the canal. Apart from farming, many villagers also worked on the docks or owned small businesses selling rice or other goods transported up the canal. At the end of Qing dynasty, with the decline of the imperial system and canal transportation, Gaobeidian lost its importance as a dock. Villagers began to make their living by diverse jobs. Some continued to be farmers, while others sold goldfish or learned handicrafts in Beijing city. Today, however, Gaobeidian draws upon this historical legacy as a canal town as one of its tourist attractions. Similarly, tourism projects also highlight selected aspects of the folklore, performance traditions, and material culture from village history.

Before 1949, particular folk traditions were significant in the village life and contributed to Gaobeidian’s reputation and status as a market town.<sup>7</sup> Some of them were so important to the village that they are frequently talked about even today by the proud villagers and become important part of the collective memory of this village. Gaobeidian was the site of five temples: Niangniang Temple was for worshiping the three goddesses; the Dragon King’s Temple was for worshiping the Dragon King and for praying for rain and safety on canal; the General’s temple was devoted to a general in charge of canal transportation; the Five Spirits’ Temple was for the five spirits who mainly took charge of people’s death; and the Chaoyang

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<sup>6</sup> Gaobeidian’s Communist Party. “Taking the Olympics as a Opportunity, Accelerating the New Village Construction Swiftly and Effectively.” September 7, 2008, unpublished.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about folk traditions and their transforming history in Gaobeidian, please see the book, *Gaobeidian Cun Minsu Wenhua Zhi* (An Ethnography of Gaobeidian’s Folk Culture), Beijing Folklore Museum, ed. Beijing: Minzu Publishing House, 2007.

Temple was the main site for monks who chanted sutras for the village's public ceremonies and for villagers' personal needs. Among the five temples, Niangniang Temple was the most prominent and the site of a large festival and temple fair that was held annually from May 1 to 5<sup>th</sup> (lunar calendar). Pilgrims from Gaobeidian and other nearby villages came to worship the goddesses. Gaobeidian thus became the religious, economical, and cultural center of the suburban area of eastern Beijing. Pilgrims came to thank the goddess for their blessings or to buy and sell goods, including farming tools, daily necessities, and local foods were most popular at the fair. Folk art performances always attracted crowds of people, particularly the stilt-walking performances given by Gaobeidian's troupe. The performers dressed up as characters from local opera, walked on high stilts, sometimes rolled and jumped. During our fieldwork, many villagers and local government officials frequently talked proudly of Gaobeidian's stilt-walking troupe. They often told anecdotes narrated about its history and how the troupe won reputation (*mianzi*, or "face") for the village again and again through its performances.

Between 1949 and 1976, Gaobeidian also gained some attention as a socialist village. It became a part of Happiness People's Commune (*xinfu renmin gongshe*); its villagers all became commune's farmers, and the commune was awarded a prize by Zhou Enlai for its agricultural production. During this same period, however, many traditional customs and activities (especially those relating to folk belief) were discontinued or forbidden, having been labeled as "old thoughts, old habits, old customs" and obstacles to socialist construction. Most of the temples were demolished in the 1950s and 1960s (except for the General's Temple; it is said that the statue was destroyed by the French army at the end of Qing dynasty), and temple festivals and folk art performances were banned. In the village's public life, traditional folklore and religious practices had almost no place. Within the private sphere, however, knowledge about these prior folk traditions remained alive in some villagers' minds. Folklore relating to farming and foodways was especially persevered although also influenced by the new lifestyle and practices characteristic of the people's communes. Ms. Zhang, a woman in her 60s, told me at Duanwu Festival in 2009 that during 1960s and 1970s, she was so busy working for the People's Commune (popularly called by local people *dadui*) during the daytime and taking care of her little son in the evening that she had no time at all

to make traditional food. “I was so busy, how could I find time to make *zongzi* (dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves, usually made for Duanwu festival) for Duanwu Festival?!”

After 1983, with Deng Xiaoping’s policy of “Reform and Opening”--along with the rapid social, economic, and infrastructural changes in Beijing--Gaobeidian underwent another dramatic change. To cooperate with Beijing’s construction, it contributed almost all of its land for building the Jingtong Highway, the Fifth Ring Road, the Beijing-Shenyang Railway, and a large waste water treatment facility. A portion of the villagers became workers in the water factory; some remained farmers; and some were transformed from farmers into “citizens of Beijing city,” but citizens without jobs. Now nearly 800 people are officially registered as farmers, and 800 as citizens without jobs. Before 1983, the village had 2300 *mu* (one *mu* equals to 667 square meters) of farmland, with an average of 1.1 *mu* per person. But now it only has 80 *mu* of land for factory use with an average of 0.05 *mu* for each person. The Gaobeidianers described this situation as the “three withouts” (*san wu*), referring to “a village without agriculture, farmers without land, and citizens without jobs.” Many villagers had economic difficulties, and the local government faced a great pressure to solve the problem. In 2003, Ms. Zhi Fen became the new leader of the local Communist Party, and she quickened the pace of economic development in an effort to solve the problem. Commodifying and industrializing traditional Chinese culture was among Zhi Fen’s main strategies. For instance, based on an old furniture collection and distribution center that has taken shape in the 1990s, in 2004 the village government built a new classical furniture street to attract more business people and visitors. This furniture street won Gaobeidian the reputation of “the biggest classical furniture center in east Beijing.” But, commercializing furniture culture was not enough. Zhi Fen told us: “We can’t just rely on the furniture street. It is just one color. We hope there are more colors in our village so that we can attract more people to come.” The 2008 Olympics provided them with another opportunity and motivated the emergence of “international folkloric tourism” (*guoji minxu luyou*) in Gaobeidian.

## **Multiple Motivations: The 2008 Olympics and the Emergence of International Folkloric Tourism**

When asked why the village began to engage in international folkloric tourism, Zhi Fen told me very concisely: “We developed the cultural industry and folkloric tourism, and revived the stilt-walking performance, basically speaking as a way to help those farmers who had lost their land. We had to solve the problem and find a way by which they can make a living and can have food to eat. This is actually very simple.”<sup>8</sup> Chu Yueqing, the Vice Secretary of the local government, reinforced Zhi’s remarks, adding more detail: “At the beginning, we just wanted to find more jobs for the landless farmers. This is a village with ‘three withouts’, do you know? What will these farmers eat? It is especially difficult for women who are older than 40 year old to find job. They don’t know any technology, they don’t have marketable skill, and they have to take care of old parents and children at the same time. How to solve this problem? With the suggestions and help of the Chaoyang District Tourism Bureau, we began to experiment with folkloric tourism. We are the first international folkloric tourism organization in the whole Beijing area.”<sup>9</sup>

The Olympics was considered as a great opportunity to realize their some of hopes for development. Gaobeidian is part of the Chaoyang District--which was the site of the Olympic Park, the embassies of many countries, and the headquarters of the Chinese contingent of the top 500 enterprises in the world, and is close to the Bird’s Nest Stadium and many other sports locations--became a primary center of the Olympics and, thus, for many, a window into China. In 2005, when the municipal government announced that there was a shortage of 150,000 beds for the upcoming Olympics and encouraged the participation of homestay hotels, Gaobeidian applied. It was chosen by the Chaoyang District and, thus, formally became a designated reception village for the Olympiad. Lao Lu, a homestay provider in Gaobeidian told us, “We are close to the capital, so the government hopes us to prepare for the Olympic reception.” It was popularly believed that once the village became the designated reception village, more than 2000 foreign guests would come to this village during

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Zhi Fen, May 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Chu Yueqing, May 2009.

the games.<sup>10</sup> Later, however, they were disappointed to find that no more than 300 foreign visitors came to visit Gaobeidian during the Olympic Games, and only 28 of them stayed over night. In 2005, 10 families were chosen to be the first group of “folklore reception households” (*minsu jiedaihu*, or briefly, *minsuhu*), that were intended to provide homestays for foreign guests; 20 families as alternates.

While some folkloric tourism projects near Beijing primarily target Chinese tourists, Gaobeidian targeted foreign tourists and, thus, its proponents considered this to be a form of international folkloric tourism. Chu Yueqing explained the main reasons why they established an international folkloric tourism: “Our village has a one-thousand-year old history and is close to Beijing. When foreigners want to come here to see the classical furniture, where can they stay? They could stay with our *minsuhu* and directly experience how farmers in the suburbs of Beijing live their everyday lives. They are interested in these types of things. We have nothing to attract domestic tourists from China’s cities. We don’t have beautiful natural scenery like the more remote villages do; and since we don’t have land, tourists can’t do things such as pick fruit. If we locate ourselves in the sphere of domestic tourism, no one will come. So, I think international tourism fits us.”<sup>11</sup>

Although the folkloric tourism was directly expected to attract foreign guests and to create more job opportunities for the landless farmers, it carried multiple expectations and motivations beyond only economic issues. One of the most important motivations was to display images of the village itself, Beijing, and even China to the world. As mentioned above, the Olympic Games were thought to be a global platform that would attract the attention of the whole world. One of Beijing Organizing Committee’s goals was to present a “People’s Olympics.” It aimed to “display splendid Chinese culture, exhibit Beijing’s historical and cultural heritage and its citizens’ positive attitudes; to advance cultural exchange; and to deepen understanding and friendship between the peoples of the world.”<sup>12</sup>

An official in the Chaoyang District Tourism Bureau told us that “The Olympics bring a

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<sup>10</sup> Gaobeidian Village Government: “Aozuwei Lai Gaobeidian Cun Kaocha”(Olympic Organization Committee Inspected Gaobeidian Village).

<http://www.bjgbd.com/adminsys/news/readnews.asp?newsid=379&classname=2>, July 9, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Chu Yueqing, May 2009.

<sup>12</sup> *Manual for Beijing Olympic Volunteers*, chap. 3.

positive opportunity for our traditions. Tourists come from different counties from all over the world. Except for those famous royal palaces, they want to see something else, to see something cultural and folkloric. Therefore, the Olympics is a good chance to display folk culture.”<sup>13</sup> As a designated reception village, Gaobeidian’s folkloric tourism was designed to assume the duty of displaying itself, Beijing and China’s history and culture; and to “let the foreigners experience our old Beijing’s folk culture” as well as “China’s folk culture.”<sup>14</sup> Liu Xin, a member of the local government taking in charge of promotion, remarked, “The Olympics is a great event in the last 100 years. This is a great chance for our village to display our old traditions, old folklore. This is a good chance to be connected with the market as well as the best chance to represent an image of China.”<sup>15</sup> These multiple motivations were clearly expressed by numerous slogans and signs in both English and Chinese on the walls along the village streets. For example, “Establishing Beijing’s Civilized Image, Represent an Excellent People’s Olympics,” “Gaobeidian Is Spreading the Base of Beijing Folk Culture,” “Love Gaobeidian, Build the Troupe System, Establish a Big Brand.” Walking on the streets, I was amazed by the ways that so many different motivations--political, cultural, and economical--and identities--of the village, the capital of Beijing, and the nation--overlapped and mixed in this suburb village’s preparation for the Olympics.

The Olympics also provided the village government an important opportunity to secure and strengthen its legitimacy and power. As Liu Xin told us, “In the name of Olympics, we can carry out our policies more smoothly now.” For some ordinary villagers, however, the Olympics was a different phenomenon. It was something far removed from their everyday lives. An old man walking with his dog beside the Tonghui River told us, “This is just a problem of the government’s face. It is not for us.” Another old man said ironically that “it is a wind. We will see what can be left after the wind gone.”

To be consistent with the international folkloric tourism, in the name of “making a successful Olympics” and displaying a “civilized” (*wenming*) Chinese image” to foreign visitors, the village government took a series of actions. An Olympic Culture Square was

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ms Liu, April 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewed with Liu Xin, May 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

built beside the Tonghui River, and a huge LED screen was installed at the square to spread news about the Olympics and folkloric tourism. Villagers were required to move all the groceries they stored outside their houses into their rooms, and to put out garbage bags only at a certain time. Running water, mirrors, air circulation, and signs in both Chinese and English languages were installed in several public toilets in the vicinity of the tourism reception area. More importantly, to cater to the needs of folkloric tourism and to demonstrate the village's long history and rich folklore resources, the local government decided to revive some folklore that had disappeared from the public sphere decades ago. For instance, the custom of floating lanterns on the Tonghui River on July 15<sup>th</sup> (lunar calendar) was restored; folk art performances, such as the stilt-walking (*gaoqiao*) and the popular folk art performance forms of *xiaochehui* and *yangge* were revived. A new "Chinese Folklore Park" (*huaxia minsu yuan*) street was constructed to which folk artists from various places in China were invited to produce, perform, and sell arts such as paper-cutting, kite-making, mud dolls making for tourists. A series of festivals that prominently displayed folklore were organized, such as the First Chinese Folk Culture Festival and the 2004 Beijing International Tourism Culture Festival. The local government began establishing the "Tribune on the People's Olympics" and publishing a local newspaper titled "Voice of Tonghui" to propagate knowledge about Olympics, folklore, and local news. As Liu Xin concluded, "the Olympics brings an opportunity for developing our village. It brings prosperity. Our villagers all agree that Gaobeidian benefits from its association with the Olympics. So we will make use of this opportunity to recover our history, revive these folk customs, and further develop an industry and make money from foreigners."

To manage tourism, a new company was established, within the village government. The Gaobeidian tourist company also has established close relationships with larger travel agencies in order to attract foreign guests. The company provides tourists with tours of the village and makes arrangements for them to live with one or more of the *minsuhu* homestay families. They also explain the village's history and related folk customs, inspect the lodging and hygienic conditions in home-stay facilities, and even suggest proper menus of food to be served to the tourists.

In 2005, ten families were chosen to be the first group of *minsuhu* in this village. 30

families took part in the folkloric reception activities in 2007. Initially, it was expected that 500 families would be able to participate in this business during the 2008 Olympics,<sup>16</sup> although this estimate proved much higher than would actually be the case. To be a *minsuhu*, a family had to meet the following conditions: have one or more surplus room that could be used for the guests; be unemployed middle aged or older couples who would have time to host guests; be a big family of three generations, which was thought by the villagers to be an important “Chinese characteristic” (*zhongguo tese*); and, ideally, the host or the hostess should be able to cook good, ordinary Chinese dishes. Many of the *minsuhu* family members were able to make or perform traditional Chinese folk arts, such paper-cutting, kite-making, and playing Chinese yo-yo (*kongzhu*).

On March 3 of 2005, the first international folkloric tourism was formally started in Gaobeidian. March 7, the first 14 guests from the United State were brought to Gaobeidian to experienced China though folkloric tourism in this suburban village.

### **Displaying Chinese Folklore to the World**

During our fieldwork, we repeatedly asked village officials and *minsuhu* what was meant by the term “folklore” (*minsu*) in “folkloric tourism,” as well as what folklore they displayed to the foreign visitors, and why they made those choices. Their answers were usually quite simple and general: folklore refers to what common people do in their everyday lives. Zhang Wenxiu, the host of a *minsuhu* and the current leader of the village’s stilt-walking troupe, told us that “folkloric reception” means “you should show your hospitality and thoughtfulness during the reception. Besides, your reception can represent Chinese characteristics through, for example, dishes of the countryside, farmer’s entertainment, and the like. And last, you can help the foreigners experience Chinese culture and traditions.” Xu Minqing, hostess of another *minsuhu*, told us that “folkloric reception means the old living habits in Beijing. For those foreigners, our tourism is just to display traditional eating, living, and playing in Beijing.”

What was to be displayed through tourism was quite flexible. Hao Zhiying, the director

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<sup>16</sup> The Tourism Company of Gaobeidian: “The Cultural Industry of International Folkloric Tourism in Gaobeidian.” 2007. Unpublished.

of the village's tourism company, explained that "what we display to the guests really depends on what the guests are interested and how long he or she is going to stay." On printed advertisements sheet, two tourism projects were listed. For "One Day Tour," the activities were:

1. Visit the Gaobeidian Classical Furniture Street;
2. Make and have dinner with the host family, learn how to cook Chinese cuisine and make dumplings;
3. Enjoy local customary activities, watch the folk arts and handcraft exhibition, and participate in folk art performances, such as stilt-walking, *yangge*, drum dance, fan dance, etc.
4. One night accommodation with the host family.
5. Have a traditional Chinese breakfast.

For the half day tour, the activities were:

1. Visit the Gaobeidian Classical Furniture Street;
2. Make and have dinner with the host family, learn how to cook Chinese cuisine and make dumplings;
3. Enjoy local customary activities, watch the folk arts and handcraft exhibition, and participate in folk art performances, such as stilt-walking, *yangge*, drum dance, fan dance, etc.

A video of one of the successful receptions often mentioned by the *minsuhu* and local government was made into a DVD to advertise Gaobeidian's tourism folklore. On March 7, 2005, 14 tourists from the United States became the first guests of the international folkloric tourism. The theme of that tourism activity was "Being a Beijing citizen for one day, sharing the happiness with common Chinese people." The purpose of this activity was "to help the foreign guests learn more about ordinary Chinese people's daily life, promote understanding and friendship between these two countries, and additionally, to positively explore a new way to develop the Olympics Economy."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Preface from the film *The International Folkloric Tourism* made by , 2005. The whole process was made into a DVD.

As soon as the guests got off the bus, they received warm welcome by the villagers with their basic “Gaobeidian English.” *Minsuhu* gave each visitor a red Chinese knot to welcome them. Many host families showed up with all three generations. Several guests were directed to Zhang Jie’s home. One of the main activities the guests did in the home was to learn how to make Chinese dumplings from the hostess. Then they sat together with the whole family to enjoy the dinner. Because the family members spoke only a few English words, the hosts and guests seldom communicated. The hostess kept offering dishes by using a pair of public chopsticks. She asked another family member “why didn’t she eat Doufu? Has she eaten doufu before? Do they have doufu?” “I don’t think they have doufu.” After dinner, Zhang’s son showed the guests pictures of his family, especially those of the stilt-walking performance in London. Next the guests were dressed up in a Chinese-style costume (*tangzhuang*) and took pictures with the hostess. Then they went to see the exhibition of handicrafts made by villagers. The crafts include tiger pillows, embroidered innersoles, small houses and bags made by beads, and so on. One of the prominent exhibitions featured introductions to and pictures of the stilt-walking performance in London. As a special treat, the visitors were then taken to the village’s playground to watch the folk art performances. They were invited to participate in the drum dance. And finally, as the peak of the performance, the stilt-walking troupe performed. The film stopped with foreign guests’ smiling, nodding, and photographing.

Throughout the process, “Chinese characteristics” were consciously emphasized. Chinese knots and *Tangzhuang*, which are already popularly used in China and overseas Chinese as symbols of Chinese culture in recent years, were adopted. Foodways and folk art performances were obviously the most significant forms to be displayed to the foreigners, and they always are in the folkloric tourism in this village.

### **Foodways**

Foodways refers to the procurement, preparation, and consumption of food. Researchers interested in foodways believe that food “plays a defining role in local and national cultures. What people eat and how they eat it reflects numerous factors, such as landscape, societal,

spiritual, artistic, psychological, political, economic, and other conditions".<sup>18</sup> Food plays a primary role in Gaobeidian's folkloric tourism. Its advertisements are always full of pictures showing foreigners making dumplings or noodles and dining with host families. Whenever we talked about tourism with the *minsuhu*, food was always the main topic of the conversation. Hosts and hostesses talked about their skills, creations, or generosity in making a meal, or complained how tired they were in preparing such a meal.

What kinds of dishes were considered proper and, thus, were chosen to be displayed? Basically, there are two rules. First, the food be prepared must be "traditional" and "of countryside style." Xu Mingqing said: "Folkloric tourism is the old living habits in Beijing. Eating means having old Beijing's *Zhaijiangmian* (a noodle dish with a special flour sauce), making dumplings, so on and so forth." Hao Zhiying told us that at first the menu was made by the district tourism bureau and the village tourism company together. Chinese characteristics were especially emphasized. *Gongbao Jiding* (stir-fried chicken with chili sauce and peanuts) and *Jingjiang Rousi* (stir-fried shredded pork with chili) were chosen as the basic main dishes and must be made every time. These two dishes did not necessarily originate in Beijing, but since their names are related with "capital" and "palace" (*jing* and *gong*), they are chosen as representatives of Beijing. Additionally, many foreigners like these dishes. A local leader explained that "according to a report, among all Chinese dishes, *Gongbao Jiding* and *Jingjiang Rousi* were the two favorites of foreigners, and they also represented the traditional cuisine of Beijing; therefore we require every *minsuhu* to cook them every time."<sup>19</sup> Fish, mushrooms, and beans are not allowed to be served at the dining table because the fish bones and improperly-cooked beans and mushrooms can be dangerous and bring trouble to the guests and hosts. As for the staple food, *minsuhu* must choose two from three types that are "full of Chinese characteristics": rice, noodles, and dumplings.

Except for these basic limitations above, *minsuhu* can make any other "traditional and of countryside style" dishes they want, thus creating a big space for them to display their individual or family's taste and talent. Xu Mingqing told us, "My family will host some students from Hongkong soon, and they asked us to make some *Lǔdagun* (a Beijing local

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<sup>18</sup> The website [Foodways of Austin](#)

<sup>19</sup> Special Issues for Olympic Games, in People's Daily Overseas Edition, April 7, 2005.

snack made of glutinous rice), *niangao* (cake made of glutinous rice flour), boiled tough corn, baked sweet potato, etc. For other guests, if they come during the *Duanwu* Festival, then we can make some *zongzi* or if they come during the *Yuanxiao* Festival, we can make some *yuanxiao*. If there is no festival, we mainly make dumplings.” She also cooked fried eggplant with pork filling and fried lotus root with pork filling because she said “these were very good dishes in old Beijing.” She even learned to make fried *huajiao* (a sort of plant) buds with egg when she traveled to another place. Grandma Kang is more flexible. When she found that her foreign guests were not interested in the *baozi* (meat-stuffed buns) she prepared for breakfast, she brought milk and bread from the supermarket the next day instead of a “traditional Chinese breakfast.” “Why should we continue to offer food if they did not like it?”

The second rule for food display is, the *minsuhu* must perform the process of making dumplings and noodles in front of foreign guests, and invite them to participate. Chu Yueqing said “We found that foreigners like to participate, instead of just watching. They are different from us at this point. Therefore, our tourism laid stress on participation.” The performing process did accelerate the tourists’ understanding of Chinese foodways. Zhang Jie told us that a woman from New Zealand was so happy to learn making dumplings, and exclaimed “I finally know how the filling goes into the skin!” But not all of the *minsuhu* like the idea of “do-it-yourself.” Grandma Kang complained that “before 2006, the foreigners just ate and left. But now we had to teach them how to make dumplings. You know how hot it is in the kitchen in August? I am already sweating in the kitchen, but have to teach them slowly. Who has the patience! And the dumplings they made are so ugly and un-tasty, nobody wants to have them, so I never boil them.” Other *minsuhu* complained about the inconveniences created by the designated menu. A *minsuhu* told me that in 2005, many guests came to her home and they had to eat *Gongbao Jiding* everyday. “My grandson would not even touch his chopsticks when he saw it.”

There also were rules concerning the conduct of the meal. For instance, when serving the meal, relevant courtesy were stressed. All family members of *minsuhu* should sit together with the guests. Guests and parents received more respect by sitting on the most important seats. And the hostess often kept distributing dishes into the guests’ plates.

Why did the international folkloric tourism often display such foodways? What kind of

images it hopes to represent by displaying those foodways? When we asked Xu Mingqing why she cooked those dishes for her foreign guests, she replied: “We did it to let them understand China.” Hao Zhiying explained more professionally: “Today’s tourism really focuses on experience. When a foreign tourist comes to Beijing, you can tell him that Chinese people are very nice and hospitable, and China has a long and profound history, but where is the embodiment? How could you help him experience it himself? That’s why we arranged for them to stay with our *minsuhu*. They can chat together, making dumplings together, stir-fry Chinese dishes together. This is a spiritual experience. In this way they can really experience how everyday life is going on in an ordinary Chinese farmer’s home.” Obviously, foodways here was used as an important medium to represent Beijing and China’s images of being historical, hospitable, and harmonious and as a medium through which foreign tourists could experience Beijing and China.

Some visitors’ responses reveal that the display was successful in some way. Two of the visitors, Betty Karulla and Joyce Howard agreed: “It was a wonderful experience during our first visit to China, and we were deeply impressed by the warm-hearted people and the history here. China is undergoing great changes, and the middle-class seems to be the main force of society, so we wanted to know about their real lives. We think the Olympic Games will be just great for China.”

### **Folk Art Performance**

Cultural performances are commonly used in tourism throughout the world. They “tend to be the most prominent performance contexts within a community. They are, as a rule, scheduled, events, restricted in setting, clearly bounded, and widely public, involving the most highly formalized performance forms and accomplished performers of the community.”<sup>20</sup> Because they are public and elaborate, in which “values, beliefs and identities of a people are put on display for themselves and others,”<sup>21</sup> they are especially attractive and interesting to tourists and ethnographers.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Bauman. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Rpt. Waveland Press, 1984, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Rory Turner and Phillip H. McArthur. “Cultural Performances: Public Display Events and Festival.” In *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Fieldguide and Sourcebook*. Ed. George H. Schoemaker. Bloomington: Trickster Press, 1990, p.83.

In Gaobeidian's folkloric tourism, folk art performance is another main form chosen to be displayed to foreigners. When foreign guests are not present in Gaobeidian, old women and retired men often come together and dance with drums, fans, or silk fabric as a form of physical exercise. But when foreign guests are due to arrive in the village, the tourism company will inform the local government, and the spontaneous physical exercise will be organized into formal performances. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, villagers from the Western Area are required to give this performance, and Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, it is the Eastern Area's turn. If the guests are important or come in large numbers, the stilt-walking performance will be given.

The stilt-walking performance troupe is Gaobeidianer's glory. Though similar performances are quite popular in the Beijing area, Gaobeidian's troupe is one of the best and most well known in east Beijing. Established around 1886, the troupe exhibited its high performing arts at numerous temple festivals and many other celebrations before the 1950s. Then it disappeared from the village's public life in the subsequent two decades. Almost all performing costumes, stilts, and other properties were destroyed during the Culture Revolution (1966 to 1976).<sup>22</sup> After the post-1979 economic reforms and revised cultural policies, the stilt-walking troupe was rebuilt. At the end of 1990, however, several of the main performers left the troupe to do their own business, and the troupe was declined once again. In 2003, the village government invested 100,000 RMB to rebuild the troupe for the third time in its history. Since the troupe boasts a hundred-year history and a strong reputation, the reconstruction aimed to give prominence to Gaobeidian's appeal of "being old," which also was to add an additional attraction to the Classical Furniture Street, to enrich the villagers' cultural life, and to promote the excellent cultures of the nation.<sup>23</sup> But Zhang Wenxiu, the leader of the troupe looked upon the reconstruction differently from the local government: "The stilt-walking performance is a representative of our village's excellent folk culture. Besides that, our new leader likes to speculate in the cultural industry. She gives oral directions, so we rebuilt the troupe."

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<sup>22</sup> Gu Daming, ed. *Fengcai Gaobeidian (Wonderful Gaobeidian)*. Hong Kong: Huaxia Culture Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 45-46.

<sup>23</sup> Gu Daming, ed. *Fengcai Gaobeidian (Wonderful Gaobeidian)*. Hong Kong: Huaxia Culture Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 45-46.

The coming of the Olympics gave a considerable impetus to the transmission and reconstruction of folk art. With the rise of international folkloric tourism and more foreigners' visiting, the performers received much attention and had more opportunities to show their talent to the public. In February 2005, the troupe was chosen by the Beijing Tourism Administration and went to London to perform in the first London China Week, along with other five performing troupes. The activity was organized to showcase the traditional culture of Beijing and promote the upcoming 2008 Olympics and tourism in Beijing. This was a dramatic event for the village and the villagers. Everyone was excited and proud to going abroad. They performed at Trafalgar Square, a site that they had seen only on television before. Zhang Wenxiu said "I never dreamed that someday I could display my folk art, transmitted by several generations, in front of the world!"<sup>24</sup> On February 2006, the stilt-walking troupe, made of elementary and middle schools students from Gaobeidian, went abroad to Sydney, Australia, to promote the Olympic Games and Beijing's tourism again. These two trips stimulated great enthusiasm for the stilt walking tradition. Pictures and reports about their performances were exhibited in all the performers' families' homes, the local government's reception room, and the printed advertisements for folkloric tourism. This pride and excitement were clearly expressed in the book *Wonderful Gaobeidian*, which focused on the history and development of the stilt-walking performance team over the last 100 years. "What we really feel incredible is that the folk art of stilt walking established a bridge which made the dream of Gaobeidianers going abroad come true. This is a cultural trip that used our Chinese nation's excellent folk culture as the bridge. It wrote a new page for our motherland's international relations."<sup>25</sup>

After the third reconstruction, the stilt-walking art underwent other changes, stemming from two primary factors. First, performers usually did not possess the same level of skill that their predecessors did, so they had to find their own methods for attracting audiences. Second, their main audiences became foreigners, who did not know much about the folk art. Therefore, they began to emphasize the visual effects and stagecraft of their performance.

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<sup>24</sup> "Xiao Cun Gaoqiao Dui, Wuzi Dong Yinglun" (Small Village's Stilt-walking Troupe Moved London by Dancing), February 19, 2005,

[http://www.bj.xinhuanet.com/bjpd\\_sdzx/2005-02/19/content\\_3741992.htm](http://www.bj.xinhuanet.com/bjpd_sdzx/2005-02/19/content_3741992.htm)

<sup>25</sup> Fengcai Gaobeidian (*Wonderful Gaobeidian*), Preface, no.2.

The “plain” costumes were changed into the more elaborate costumes characteristic of Peking opera; female actresses was integrated into the troupe; two more clowns were added to amuse the audiences; songs accompanying the performance were omitted. Zhang Wenxiu explained the reasons of the recent changes: “Now our performance focuses on the visual effects and stagecraft, because foreigners don’t understand what we are singing about when they come to visit.”

Stilt-walking used to be performed at temple festivals and other celebrations to worship goddesses and gods as well as to enhance the reputation of the village (*haocai mailian*, meaning “waste money, buy face”). Now it is usually performed at especially big festivals or at greeting ceremonies to welcome important officials, businessmen, or foreign guests. At other times, a tourist can “buy” the troupe’s performance by paying 1,500 RMB without masks and costumes, and 2,000 RMB for a formal performance. These were the highest prices for folk arts shows in the village. Generally speaking, the stilt-walking performance has become the “king” in the village’s folklore.

### **Regulating International Folkloric Tourism: Olympic Homestays and Relevant Training**

In early summer of 2008, several months before the beginning of Olympics, the “Olympic homestays” program was started by the Beijing Tourism Administration. The program aimed to supplement Beijing's hotel resources and to offer foreign visitors a chance to “experience Beijing citizens’ real lives,”<sup>26</sup> and “to extend the spirit of the People's Olympics to foreign guests.”<sup>27</sup> Requirements for the Olympic homestays included a separate guest room as well as facilities for personal grooming and cooking. In addition, at least one member of the host family had to have conversational skills in a language other than Chinese. 598 homestay households were selected from *minsuhu* and ordinary applicants, and were given “Olympic Homestay” china plates from the Beijing Tourism Administration. Among them, the ten *Minsuhu* families in Gaobeidian all were chosen to become “Olympic homestays.”

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<sup>26</sup> “Beijing Olympic homestay selected.” [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn), 2008-07-12. See also [http://rss.xinhuanet.com/newsc/english/2008-07/12/content\\_8535580.htm](http://rss.xinhuanet.com/newsc/english/2008-07/12/content_8535580.htm)

<sup>27</sup> “Beijing begins search for 1,000 Olympic homestay hosts.” <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/n214301279.shtml>. Updated 2008-04-10

When I asked how “Olympic homestays” were selected in Gaobeidian, Liu Xin again stressed the importance of “Chinese characteristics.” “We selected them on the base of *Minsuhu*. The first requirement was that the family must have certain characteristics. If the families have no characteristics at all, that would be a problem, because we will display traditional Chinese culture during the Olympics. This is the nation’s requirement. One *minsuhu* in our village can play Chinese yo-yo very well. In another family the host was a carpenter; he was good at woodcraft. He made all the widow frames and furniture in his house. He also could make lanterns. Young visitors liked to chat with him about woodcraft and look at the pictures of the lantern festival of our village.”<sup>28</sup>

All the 598 “Olympic homestays” received training before the Olympics. The training mainly focused on basic knowledge of the Olympics Games, etiquette, hygiene, dealing with emergencies, basic English for communicating with guests, and so on. “Most are directions about etiquette. For instance, do not shake hands with a lady for too long; prepare a pair of chopsticks for public use; don’t spit onto the guests face while talking, and so on.” Hao Zhiying told us. The homestay providers were required to attend classes and read materials such as a booklet titled *Training for Preparing for the Olympics: A Reader for Homestay Reception of Folkloric Tourism*. Edited by the Beijing Tourism Administration in 2006, the booklet was used as a textbook for “training for the Olympics” and to improve the service quality of folkloric tourism. Five chapters were included in this textbook. 1. The Marketing Skills and Service of Folkloric Tourism. 2. Proprieties in Service. 3. Accommodation Service. 4. Promoting Traditional Foodways. 5. Hygiene and Safety of Eating. Numerous suggestions were provided to *minsuhu* to direct their folkloric tourism, such as instructions for decorating rooms and courtyards with farming tools or handicrafts instead of modern electronic equipment; cooking dishes which embody the countryside style instead of the dishes popular in cities; using pillows filled with buckwheat shells instead of duck’s down or man-made cotton, and so on.

In Gaobeidian village, similar training already had begun in 2005. The “Tribune on People’s Olympics” was established to propagate knowledge about the Olympics, local

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Liu Xin, April 2009.

history and folklore, and to teach villagers basic English. Xu Mingqing remembered that the training was especially focused on polite behavior. A folklorist was invited to spread knowledge of folklore. “He told us the origin of Duanwu Festival, how to hang *aicao* (argy wormwood) on the door, why we have *zongzi* in the festival . . .very detailed.” She also learned several English sentences from the Tribune, such as “Welcome to my home.”

How did this trainings impact folkloric tourism? It seems that the influence was limited. Liu Xin and Hao Zhiying all agreed that the training was necessary for to conduct folkloric tourism as an industry. “No regulation, no good brand.” Hao said. But Liu Xin felt the training was stiff. “As for the courteous behavior. Farmers sometimes speak to each other rudely, but this is a way that they show their intimate relationship. It would sound strange if they talked politely.” Xu Mingqing frankly admitted that she already forgot what the folklorist said and most of the English taught at that time. “He talked in detail, but I could understand some of his words. I wrote down what he said in my notebook. Then I introduced them to my foreign guests at once. After the foreigners left, I forgot.”

## **Conclusions**

The Olympic Games arrived at Gaobeidian at a time when the village had already moved forward in commercializing traditional culture and was eager to accelerate its tourism industry. Therefore this “global platform” became a great opportunity for them. Under its direct stimulation, international folkloric tourism in Gaobeidian emerged, and thus influenced the transmission and transformation of folklore in this village in many respects. As the descriptions have shown above, some folklore was revived within the public sphere. The stilt-walking performance, *xiaochahui*, *yangge*, which were cut off from the village life in the past half century, were revitalized. Traditional local customs such as floating lanterns in river on July 15<sup>th</sup> was restarted. Folk handicrafts such paper-cutting, mud doll making, and mask-painting again became visible, now through tourism. Large folklore festivals were organized. Knowledge about folklore was widely spread through classes, training material, local newspapers, books, and the company’s advertisements. While some of this revived

folklore remains primarily as a show for foreign tourists (like floating lanterns on July 15), other aspects of traditional culture grew vitality and become an integral part of their today's everyday life. Xu Mingqing provided us such an example.

I was born in 1952, after liberation; I can do nothing (traditional). After I became the *minsuhu*, I was compelled to learn. At beginning I didn't know how to wrap *zongzi*, how to roll the *yuanxiao*. Later quite a few foreign guests came; the tourism company wanted me to teach them to make these traditional foods. How did I know? So I had to learn. Now I can make *zongzi*, *yuanxiao*. I used to directly go to market and buy noodles there, now I always do it by myself, and I get used to it. Now I really feel that the food made by myself is really delicious, I bake Chinese pancakes too. They are very delicious.”<sup>29</sup>

The emergence of international folkloric tourism also affected most Gaobeidianers' attitudes and conceptions of folklore. Interest in folklore from foreign tourists simulated their consciousness of the value of folk traditions. Instead of looking at folk traditions as “old thoughts, old habits, old customs,” and obstacles to socialist construction—perspectives that were dominant over the past 60 years--the villagers perceived folklore more positively than before. In our fieldwork, local officials and *minsuhu* always stressed proudly that folklore was “excellent” heritage, as expressed by Zhang Wenxiu: “The stilt-walking performance is a representative of our village's excellent folk culture.” With these positive attitudes, *minsuhu* tend to adopt and transmit folklore more consciously. For instance, after becoming a *minsuhu*, Xu Mingqing gradually learnt to decorate her rooms with artwork full of Chinese characteristics, such as Chinese knot, red pepper, birdcage, etc. She explained that “you must decorate with something full of Chinese characteristics. They must be folkloric, traditional. Don't hang a painting of a foreign beauty on your wall. You should use our own past, traditional culture. I like them anyway, I don't like foreign beauties (on my wall). The foreigners feel interested in these (decorations), they sometimes asked me what these means.”

However, the international folkloric tourism influenced the transmission of folklore in some negative ways as well, beginning with the selection, distillation and promotion of what

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Xu Mingqing, May 2009.

counts as “Chinese characteristics.” While folkloric tourism served to revive folk customs and performance forms from the past, it did so in a selective, and often, simplified manner. For instance, the art of stilt-walking was simplified. This folk art performance used to win fame and reputation by the outstanding skills of its performers, from jumping and rolling from high stairway to singing songs with humorous lyrics. Now that the primary audience is comprised of foreigners, who know little about the folk art, the troupe modified the form significantly. In addition, a newly fabricated hierarchy of folk arts seems to be emerging. As I described above, the stilt-walking performance used to be performed at temple festivals and other village celebrations. While it was famous, it was not placed over other forms of performances. Now it is usually performed only at particularly large festivals or for important guests. And performances can be bought by tourists paying the highest price of any of the folk arts shows in the village. Similar situations also could be found in the current intangible cultural heritage movement. Once a folklore genre is designated as “heritage,” it is then set above other counterparts, gaining far more prominence and dominance.

Not all of the genres in the arena of folklore were chosen to be displayed in front of foreigners. In Gaobeidian, as in many other places in China, foodways and folk art performance were often the main forms to be displayed. These forms were chosen perhaps in part because they played important role in the villagers’ everyday life, often historically. But they also were chosen because they were thought to be the proper vehicles through which to communicate with foreign guests, guests who usually cannot speak Chinese and only stay for a short time.

Folklore played primary roles in international tourism. It was used as a bridge to connect the individual farmers, the suburban village, the capital, the nation, and the world. During our fieldwork, many *minsuhu* and officials expressed their pride in helping foreigners experience Beijing and China through Gaobeidian’s folkloric display.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the villagers

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<sup>30</sup> Chu Yueqing described how the homestay reception was successful in presenting “a big and harmonious Chinese family.”: “The foreigners lack emotional attachment among family members. Their children never live with the parents once they are 18 years old. The foreign tourists who come here are usually old men and women. They love to stay with our big families-- to stay with our old parents and little children, eating, sleeping, chatting, laughing together. They love this family atmosphere. They can feel the emotional attachment among family members from us. I remember

also caught a glimpse of the world from this bridge. When we interviewed Xu Mingqing, she kept talking about her guests coming from the United States, Finland, Japan, and other countries, how smart the Finland young fellow was, and how the Japanese guests like to send small gifts. She admired these foreigners very much. “They are so free and *xiaosa* (unrestrained). They don’t take anything undesirable to their hearts. So, we should not be ungenerous in our reception, right?” Sometimes the impression they got from these glimpses were full of images about the “other” world. For example, Liu Xin told us that *minsuhu* basically knows the characteristics of different peoples. “All the villagers know that African people was very talkative and passionate. Once they come, they can play several days without sleep.”

The international folkloric tourism was multifunctional. Through displaying folklore to foreign tourists, tourism was used not only to find more employment opportunities for the landless farmers, but also, using Liu Xin’s words, to display the village’s “old traditions, old folklore”, “to let the foreigners experience our old Beijing’s folk culture,” and furthermore, “to represent the image of China.” The folklore items being displayed had various sources. Some directly originated from this village (such as the stilt-walking performance of Gaobeidian’s troupe) and thus could be attributed to “local folk traditions,” but some items had less “locality” (such as *Gongbao Jiding*, Chinese knot, and *Tangzhuang*). These diverse folklore items were mixed together to present multiple images of the village itself, Beijing, and China to the world. The main content of the images included “long history,” hospitality, cultural diversity, and harmony. The different identities of the village, the capital, and the nation overlapped but were unified by a social logic: the village was a representative of the capital and the nation. As Liu Xin said: “What we displayed not only represent Gaobeidian’s folk culture. They also represent Beijing’s folk culture, and China’s folk culture. . . . The Olympics is going to be held in Beijing soon. Our village is so close to Beijing, we cannot bring shame to China. We are Chinese, not only Gaobeidianers.” Even Grandma Kang, who complained a lot about the folkloric tourism, told us rather seriously: “we represent the

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there was an older American woman who stayed with our minsuhu for just one night, but didn’t want to leave. She cried when she left, because she was touched by the emotional attachment in our big families. Interview with Chu Yueqing, May 2009.

country. If we did not finish the work well, that is to bring shame on our country. We can't do that thing.”

Does international folkloric tourism actually benefit the villagers? Different people had different answers. According to a document provided by the tourism company, the folkloric tourism benefited the village greatly: “In the first years of tourism, the 10 *minsuhu* had hosted more than 500 foreign guests, and they got an average income of 8,000 RMB for each family. Through the development of the folkloric tourism, those homestay farmers got money in their pocket, their TV machines now have shadows (which means the machine now is of high quality), their radios now have sounds, our village become known in our country and abroad, various officials keep coming. This situation stimulates more farmers to participate in the project.”<sup>31</sup> But when I asked Kang whether she profited from the tourism, she said “if we rely on it, we will drink only the northwest wind.” She complained that 30 *yuan* for one person per meal was not enough. She sometimes had to pay for the budget deficits by herself. When I asked why she did not quit, she said “We were chosen by the village government. This was a glory. That means your family is clean and healthy. That means the government trusts you and has high regard of you. We don't want to quit. We will see how things develop.”

Although the slogan of the 2008 Olympiad was “One world, One dream,” it was actually “one world, various dreams” in Gaobeidian's tourism industry. Different villagers had different dreams about the Olympics and the tourism. Zhang Jie's family liked to make friends all over the world; Xu Mingqing enjoyed the reception because it added fun to her life and she could be much healthier, happier, and open-minded by doing this. A young middle school student who performed the stilt-walking performance told us that he took part in the performance team in order to get the chance to “play abroad.” The Olympics meant for him that “lots of foreign tourists will come, so I can make some friends with their children in my age, afterwards I can play with them abroad and, later on, to study abroad.” Another student attended the stilt performance just hoping he could play outside for a while.

One obvious feature of Gaobeidian's tourism was that the village government played a

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<sup>31</sup> Beijing Gaobeidian Tourism Culture company: “The Cultural Industry of International Folkloric Tourism in Gaobeidian,” 2007, unpublished.

primary role. It was the village government, usually with help from higher-level officials and experts, who designed, supported, and controlled the direction of tourism. When discussing China's cultural globalization, Yan Yunxiang argued that it is "a new type of cultural globalization: a managed process in which the state plays a leading role, and the elite and populace work together to actively claim ownership of the emerging global culture."<sup>32</sup> His observation is partially right for the Gaobeidian case in that the village government "has been playing an active leadership role in almost all aspects of the process,"<sup>33</sup> and most of the time, villagers did cooperate with the government. But sometimes the villagers did not follow the government's instructions and actively changed the government's plan into something else. The globalizing process thus became a managed but at the same time multi-vocal chorus. Our observation of an English training on the Tribune on the People's Olympics clearly shows this. On April 12, 2008, two volunteers were invited by the village government to teach villagers some everyday English. The audiences were mostly middle-aged and old women. They came to the class with grandchildren or handiwork in their hands. Grandma Sun even brought a basket of fresh vegetable to trim. Several old women helped her trimming while kept talking about trifles from dogs' shit on the streets to a certain child's appearance. When the class began, their topics were changed to what the volunteers were wearing, whose clothes were proper, who looked pretty, so on and so forth. After the class, we asked Grandma Sun why she came here. She said "The village government required us to come. But, on the other hand, I had nothing to do on this Saturday. Our house is renovating, the rooms are messy. So I came here to chat with my old friends, just for fun." Obviously, these women actively changed a formal class organized by the government into an informal gathering where they could do household chores and chat with old friends about anything they were interested in.

Our fieldwork revealed that after preparing so hard for the potential foreign tourists, the villagers were very disappointed to find out that the expected 2000 foreign guests did not show up in their village at all during the 2008 Olympiad. Instead, there were only 28 tourists staying with *minsuhu* overnight while 260 guests only stayed for only half a day. The guests

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<sup>32</sup> Yunxiang Yan, "Managed Globalization: State Power and Cultural Transition in China." In *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

mainly came from France, Britain, Finland, Hungary, Holland, Spanish, Sweden, Italy, the United States, and South Korea. Nonetheless, after the Olympics, international folkloric tourism continues to develop in Gaobeidian. Now in the name of “New Socialist Village Construction,” the western area of the village is being rebuilt. The village government persuades villagers to build their houses according to a unified *Hui* architecture style so that the village is more attractive and is able to host more tourists in the near future. A new temple worshipping Lu Ban, the legendary ancestor of Chinese carpenters, has been constructed on the street of Classical Furniture and quickly is becoming a stop of the folkloric tourism route. On May 27, 2009, at the Duanwu Festival, a competition for making *zongzi* was held. To attract more tourists, the village government offers lower rents to *Huasheng Tianqiao* Company, which aims to revive Beijing folk art performances (such as flying cycles, circuses, acrobatics, handicrafts, etc.) that used to be played at Tianqiao area. Although the “Chinese Folklore Park” collapsed because of the lack of tourists, a new company focusing on Jade craft is being constructing in its place. “All in all,” Chu Yuqing concluded: “We are confident in the future of folkloric tourism. Gaobeidianers now can make a living through the cultural industry, and we gradually understand this rice bowl (meaning “enterprise”). We have savored its taste.”

During our fieldwork in Gaobeidian, I always liked to stand on the bridge over Tonghui River, watching the river flow slowly past the old sluice gate as cars, trucks and trains kept passing by the village. Corresponding with this scenery, Gaobeidianer’s efforts in industrializing folklore and establishing international folkloric tourism have to be understood within the village’s developing history, its interrelationship with Beijing, and the complicated social, political and economical contexts of contemporary China. Exploring the impacts of 2008 Olympic Games on folk traditions in this suburb village provides students of folklore with a complex picture in which tradition and modernization, local and global, individual and state, decline and revival, are all woven together.