

Tushan Temple Fair: The Dual Driving Force of Spiritual Civilization and Regional Economic Development in the Huai River Basin

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Abstract

The Tushan Yuwang Temple Fair, as the oldest and largest folk activity in the Huai River Basin, serves as both an important carrier of spiritual life for the people and a key engine for regional economic development. Through historical document analysis and field investigations, this paper explores how the Tushan Temple Fair deeply integrates into the construction of local spiritual civilization and the process of economic revitalization through its multiple functions, such as cultural inheritance, belief rituals, and commercial activities. The study argues that the temple fair achieves a positive interaction between spiritual value and economic value by activating collective memory, strengthening cultural identity, and promoting cultural and tourism integration, providing a referable path for the modern transformation of traditional folk activities.

Keywords

Tushan Temple Fair; Spiritual Civilization; Economic Development; Cultural Space; Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection; Huai River Basin.

1. Introduction

The origin of the Tushan Temple Fair can be traced back to ancient sacrificial culture. According to Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of the Xia Dynasty, "the rise of the Xia Dynasty began at Tushan," indicating the close connection between the Tushan area and the rise of the Xia Dynasty. The Han Dynasty was an important period for the institutionalization of the temple fair. In 195 BCE, Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang, passed by Tushan and ordered the construction of the Yuwang Temple, formally establishing the official sacrificial system for Yu the Great [1]. The Song Dynasty was a critical stage in the development of the temple fair. The great writer Su Shi vividly recorded in Seven Unique Sights of Haozhou that "people in Huainan say that Yu the Great was born on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month. On this day, tens of thousands of people gather on the mountain." During the Wanli era of the Ming Dynasty, the temple fair system was further improved, forming a custom of three annual sacrifices: the "Chaoyu Grand Temple Fair" on the 28th day of the third lunar month, the sacrifice for Yu the Great's birthday on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, and the Chongyang Festival sacrifice on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. These periodic sacrificial activities gradually evolved into comprehensive folk gatherings integrating belief, commerce, and entertainment [2].

The development of the temple fair reflects the strong vitality of folk culture. Qing Dynasty scholar Ruan Kuisheng described in Tea Chats: "In the early years of the dynasty... outside the Longxing Temple, stalls lined up closely, with no empty space left. Goods piled up like

mountains, and all kinds of performances were staged." During this period, the commercial and entertainment aspects of the temple fair significantly enhanced. In modern times, despite wars and social changes, the Tushan Temple Fair has maintained its vitality. According to a 2010 report by the Bengbu Daily, the number of participants in a single day of the temple fair could reach over 100,000, with activities covering the entire Tushan scenic area, forming a unique folk cultural landscape [3].

The Tushan Temple Fair constructs a multi-level cultural space containing rich spiritual symbols. The Yuwang Temple, as the core building, is not only the physical center but also a symbol of spiritual belief. Its architectural layout follows traditional rituals, and the structure of five courtyards and ten halls reflects the philosophical idea of harmony between nature and humanity. During the temple fair, the sacrificial ceremonies held here strictly adhere to ancient rituals, including burning incense and candles, sounding bells and drums, and performing the three offerings. Each of these steps carries profound cultural significance.

The folk activities at the temple fair are even more diverse, forming a unique system of meaning. The flower-drum lantern performance, as a national intangible cultural heritage, is not only an art form but also a channel for the release of collective emotions. The interaction between performers and audiences amid the sounds of gongs and drums creates a special mechanism of social cohesion. The custom of "holding mud dolls to pray for children" reflects the folk desire for the continuation of life. Through rituals such as touching the Qimu Stone and throwing stones to pray for children, respect and hope for fertility are expressed. These activities together constitute a complete cultural ecosystem, with profound social functions beyond entertainment [4].

The commercial activities during the temple fair also carry cultural significance. The traditional temple market is not only a place for commodity exchange but also a platform for information dissemination and social interaction. The goods brought by merchants from different places include not only products but also different cultural customs and lifestyles. This cross-cultural exchange promotes cultural integration and innovation. As folklorist Wu Bing'an pointed out: "The temple fair is an exposition of folk culture and a living fossil of ethnic life." [5]

2. The Deep Interaction between the Temple Fair and Spiritual Civilization Construction

2.1. The Construction Mechanism of Collective Memory and Cultural Identity

The Tushan Temple Fair continuously activates and strengthens the collective memory of the people through periodic ritual activities. In the annual "Chaoyu Grand Ceremony," participants climb the mountain and worship along the ancient "Chaoyu Road." This act itself is a reenactment of history. Through physical participation, Yu the Great's spirit of "passing his home three times without entering" during the flood control is internalized as an individual's value. Field surveys show that over 80% of participants believe that the temple fair activities "enhance their sense of belonging to their hometown." The formation of this sense of identity is the result of the functioning of collective memory.

The temple fair also constructs cultural connections across time and space through activities such as genealogy revisions and searches for the roots of Yu's descendants. In recent years, with the deepening of globalization, the Tushan Temple Fair has become an important place for overseas Chinese to search for their roots. According to statistics, descendants of the Yu family from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and other places come to participate in the ancestor worship activities every year. This cross-regional cultural identity not only strengthens the cohesion of the Chinese nation but also injects new vitality into traditional culture.

The ritual performances at the temple fair are an important carrier of cultural identity. For example, the music and dance performances in the sacrificial ceremonies are not only an inheritance of ancient ritual and music culture but also a display of local characteristics. These performances often integrate local language, music, dance, and other elements, forming unique regional cultural symbols. By watching and participating in these activities, participants not only gain aesthetic experiences but also strengthen their identification with local culture.

2.2. The Realization of Moral Education and Social Integration Functions

As a cultural space, the Tushan Temple Fair plays an important role in moral education. The three offerings ceremony in the sacrificial rituals is not only a religious ceremony but also a carrier of moral education. Through the solemn and respectful ritual process, participants subconsciously accept the ideas of ritual system and values. Various promotional activities during the temple fair, such as the stories of Yu the Great Taming the Floods and Fangfeng's Punishment told by folk artists, convey core values such as justice and responsibility in an easy-to-understand manner.

The moral education function of the temple fair is also reflected in material carriers. Cultural relics such as stone inscriptions and couplets in the Yuwang Temple, like the cliff inscription "Vast View of Peace" written by the great Qing calligrapher Deng Shiru, not only have artistic value but are also physical teaching materials for moral education. These relics materialize abstract moral concepts through words, images, and other forms, allowing the public to naturally accept education during visits.

In terms of social integration, the temple fair plays a unique role. First, it breaks the daily social stratification, allowing people of different classes to participate in activities equally in the specific time and space of the temple fair. Second, various temporary organizations established during the temple fair, such as trade associations and flower associations, provide new platforms for social interaction for the public. These organizations often cross blood and geographical boundaries, promoting social integration on a larger scale. Finally, collective activities during the temple fair, such as parades and performances, enhance community cohesion and help resolve social conflicts.

2.3. The Social Functions of Psychological Adjustment and Emotional Release

Under the pressure of fast-paced modern life, the temple fair provides an important space for psychological adjustment for the public. The carnivalesque scenes in the flower-drum lantern performances allow participants to break daily behavioral norms in a specific time and space, releasing repressed emotions. This controlled release is actually an effective psychological regulation mechanism. Field surveys show that over 70% of participants believe that temple fair activities can effectively relieve psychological pressure, an effect that is particularly valuable in modern society.

The collective activities at the temple fair also have significant social therapy functions. When people participate in sacrifices, watch performances, and engage in transactions together, originally alienated interpersonal relationships are improved, and social cohesion is enhanced. Especially for left-behind groups in rural areas and the elderly in cities, the temple fair provides an important social platform, helping to eliminate loneliness and enhance life happiness.

In addition, the temple fair provides aesthetic pleasure through artistic activities. Whether it is the enthusiasm of the flower-drum lantern or the subtlety of folk opera, it brings aesthetic enjoyment to participants. This aesthetic experience not only enriches the spiritual life of the public but also improves their quality of life. As an elderly person who has been involved in temple fair organization for many years said: "We look forward to these few days every year. Having fun for a while can keep us happy for most of the year."

3. The Multi-Dimensional Driving Force of the Temple Fair on Regional Economic Development

3.1. Practical Paths of Cultural and Tourism Integration and Industrial Extension

As an important cultural resource, the Tushan Temple Fair plays a significant role in promoting the integration of culture and tourism. According to data from the Bengbu Culture and Tourism Bureau, the number of local tourists during the temple fair increases by more than three times compared to usual days, directly driving the hotel occupancy rate to over 95%. This agglomeration effect is not limited to the temple fair period but also drives year-round tourism development. For example, a tourism route themed around the culture of Yu connects scenic spots such as Mount Tu Mountain, the Huai River waterfront, and the Yu Hui Village ruins, forming a distinctive tourism product.

In terms of cultural and creative product development, the temple fair has spurred a series of innovative practices. The annual sales of cultural and creative products such as Yu the Great IP blind boxes and Qimu Stone souvenirs have exceeded ten million yuan. These products not only realize the transformation of cultural value but also cultivate young consumer groups. More notably, the temple fair promotes the integrated development model of "intangible cultural heritage + tourism + agriculture." For example, the sales of Huaiyuan pomegranates have increased by 40% through the temple fair channel, and local farmers have also developed pomegranate carvings and other crafts, increasing the added value of agricultural products.

The economic benefits brought by the temple fair are also reflected in industrial chain extension. Taking the flower-drum lantern performance as an example, it not only drives the performance market but also promotes related industries such as costume production, musical instrument production, and training education. According to statistics, there are more than 20 professional flower-drum lantern performance groups and over 100 amateur performance teams in the Bengbu area, directly or indirectly creating employment for thousands of people. This industrial cluster effect fully demonstrates the economic potential of traditional cultural resources.

3.2. The Actual Effects of the Business Platform and Employment Promotion

The traditional market function of the Tushan Temple Fair demonstrates new vitality in modern society. During the temple fair, the organizers delineate special commercial areas and set up standard booths, maintaining the characteristics of the traditional market while integrating modern business elements. These booths not only sell local specialties but also introduce fine products from other places, forming a diversified product system. Investigations show that the average daily turnover of a single booth during the temple fair can be 5-8 times that of ordinary days.

The temple fair's role in promoting employment is particularly significant. In terms of direct employment, positions in temple fair management, performance, security, etc., provide a large number of temporary employment opportunities for the local area. In terms of indirect employment, related industries such as transportation, catering, and accommodation need to increase staff during the temple fair. More importantly, the temple fair provides a stage for traditional skill holders such as artisans and folk artists to display and sell their works. For example, the willow weaving technique in the Huaibei area has been revitalized through the temple fair, and the average annual income of related practitioners has increased by more than 30%.

The temple fair has also innovated the e-commerce poverty alleviation model. The organizers built an online platform, allowing people who cannot attend in person to purchase temple fair goods. This "offline experience, online sales" model is particularly suitable for agricultural and

sideline products and handicrafts. Some farmers have established stable customer groups through the temple fair channel, achieving sustainable income growth.

3.3. The Linkage Effect of Infrastructure Upgrading and Investment Attraction

The development of the temple fair has directly promoted the improvement of local infrastructure. In recent years, Bengbu City has invested funds to repair the mountain roads of Tushan, build additional parking lots, and open special temple fair bus routes. These facilities not only serve the needs during the temple fair but also benefit daily use. More importantly, the brand effect of the temple fair has attracted social capital investment. For example, a cultural and tourism company invested in the construction of the Yu Culture Experience Hall, which not only displays the history of Yu the Great's flood control but also allows tourists to immersively experience ancient sacrificial scenes through VR technology.

The temple fair has also driven the overall development of the surrounding areas. Centered on the Tushan scenic area, a business cluster including homestays, agritainment, and cultural and creative shops has formed. These commercial facilities not only serve tourists but also improve the living conditions of local residents. According to statistics, the commercial rent in the area around the temple fair has increased by 150% within five years, reflecting the economic vitality brought by the temple fair.

In terms of investment attraction, the cultural brand value of the temple fair is increasingly prominent. More and more enterprises are willing to sponsor temple fair activities, which not only enhances the corporate image but also alleviates the financial pressure of the temple fair. This mutually beneficial model provides new ideas for the sustainable development of the temple fair.

4. Practical Challenges and Innovative Paths for the Development of the Temple Fair

4.1. Core Challenges: The Dilemma of Commercialization and Inheritance Gap

With the expansion of the temple fair scale, the problems brought by commercialization are becoming increasingly prominent. In some activities, gambling games and low-quality product stalls squeeze the space for traditional rituals, and even "pseudo-folk" performances appear. This over-commercialization tendency not only dilutes the cultural connotation of the temple fair but may also cause social problems. For example, some commercial activities are inconsistent with the cultural positioning of the temple fair, damaging the overall cultural atmosphere.

The inheritance gap is another severe challenge. Surveys show that among the main participants and performers of the Tushan Temple Fair, people over 60 years old account for more than 65%, while young people under 35 account for only 12%. This imbalance in age structure leads to the risk of loss of many traditional skills. For example, some high-difficulty movements in the flower-drum lantern are gradually simplified or even disappear due to the lack of young inheritors.

Ecological pressure cannot be ignored. Large-scale crowd activities bring problems such as garbage pollution and noise disturbance. Taking the 2022 temple fair as an example, the three-day activity produced nearly 100 tons of garbage, putting great pressure on the local ecological environment. In addition, safety hazards caused by dense crowds and traffic congestion need to be properly resolved.

4.2. Innovative Paths: The Balance between Preserving the Essence and Development

4.2.1. Innovation of Living Inheritance Mechanism

It is recommended to establish a temple fair council with multi-party participation to establish a scientific decision-making mechanism. Specifically, the successful experience of "intangible cultural heritage entering campuses" can be used for reference by offering temple fair culture courses in local primary and secondary schools to cultivate young people's cultural identity. At the same time, establish digital archives and use 3D scanning and other technologies to record traditional rituals, preserving complete cultural memory for future generations.

4.2.2. Exploration of Deep Cultural and Tourism Integration

Develop high-quality routes such as the "Yu the Great Cultural Tour," connecting the Tushan Temple Fair with other cultural attractions in the Huai River Basin. For example, cooperate with areas related to Yu the Great's culture, such as Yuzhou in Henan and Kuaiji in Zhejiang, to launch cross-regional cultural and tourism products. At the same time, develop the nighttime economy and create real-life performances like Yu the Great Taming the Floods to extend tourists' stay.

4.2.3. Optimization of the Community Benefit Model

Encourage villagers to establish flower-drum lantern cooperatives and establish a reasonable income distribution mechanism. Set up a temple fair development fund to support artisans in innovating product design. Implement a "green temple fair" certification system and reward merchants with good environmental performance. In addition, a temple fair volunteer system can be established to attract young people to participate in temple fair services.

4.2.4. Construction of a Smart Temple Fair

Use big data technology for passenger flow monitoring and early warning to improve management efficiency. Develop a dedicated temple fair APP to provide services such as guided tours and reservations. Establish an online temple fair platform to realize "cloud temple fair" and expand the scope of influence. These digital means can not only enhance the experience but also provide data support for temple fair management.

5. Conclusion

The development history of the Tushan Temple Fair proves that traditional folk activities are not only "living fossils" of history but also dynamic resources for promoting spiritual civilization and economic development. Its successful experience can be summarized in three aspects:

First, the temple fair achieves the unity of spiritual value and economic value. It stimulates consumer demand through cultural identity and feeds back cultural inheritance through economic activities, forming a virtuous circle. For example, the flower-drum lantern performance not only meets the spiritual needs of the people but also supports the inheritance of skills through performance income.

Second, the temple fair demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative governance between the government and the community. Policy support provides institutional guarantee for the temple fair, and public participation ensures its vitality. This top-down and bottom-up governance model maintains the authenticity of the culture while adapting to the needs of the times.

Finally, the temple fair achieves a balance between tradition and innovation. While retaining the core rituals, it actively embraces new technologies and forms. For example, the application of VR technology not only enhances the experience but also spreads traditional culture.

In the future, the development of the Tushan Temple Fair should focus on three aspects: first, strengthen international communication and display Chinese culture through the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage platform; second, deepen smart construction and use big data to improve management level; third, strengthen community participation to ensure that the temple fair is always rooted among the people. Only in this way can the thousand-year-old temple fair continue to exert its unique value and become a model that demonstrates cultural confidence and assists high-quality regional development.

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