

Village Ties in the City:
The Rhythms of Lion and Dragon Territory in Guangzhou

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Yu Gao declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of International Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization in China challenges the idea of the rural-urban dichotomy. Rural areas have been reterritorialized as cities while some urban cores still have villages. Yet the notion that a village is disjunctive space in the city remains pervasive, with villages in cities routinely treated as backward areas distinct from modern space, which limits the possibilities of villages and homogenizes the city. This research questions the disjuncture between the village and the city and demonstrates how village ties, through intra-village and inter-village sociospatial relations, some new, some historic, with the economy, urban infrastructure, local government, national policy, and the natural environment, all link in a territorial process of cyclical festival days, continuously reshaping the emerging urban landscape.

This research on villages and festival days in and around Guangzhou adopts a dialectical spatial approach that reveals the village as process. It adopts an ethnographic methodology based on rhythmanalysis that respects the temporalities of lived space. The empirical focus, on performances and mutual visits of the Lion dance and the Dragon boats, the region's most popular festival celebration forms, embeds the analysis in village economic production, social reproduction, territorial history, and cultural and symbolic representations. The Lion performance particularly reifies the intra-village place and territorial relations; the Dragon-boat activities bring the nature-society metabolism into daily life; the mutual visits of the Lion and Dragon from different villages illustrate the significance of inter-village and village-city interactions in the village process. In some villages, the Lion and Dragon, through recovery and repositioning of village history, contribute to rebuilding village temples, reoccupying ancestral halls, and developing urban tourism led by local government. Based on five years of participant-observation during festival days, with visits to thirty-three villages, the analysis finds how villages are lived in the city and how dynamics of village celebrations interpret and negotiate exigencies of political economy to maintain and invigorate daily life in a region experiencing hurtling change. This research develops a new understanding of the village in urbanizing China.

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