

Interview with Yang Hua

Interview with Yang Hua, a tea server at a teashop within the outer hall of the South-facing Cliff Temple (*Nanyan Gong*). Born and raised in Laoying, Yang Hua spent her whole life in the area despite a two-year stint in Fuzhou studying the art of the tea ceremony. Twenty-three years old, she's been employed at South-facing Cliff Temple since 1999.

Interviewer: Can you start off by telling me a little something of your history here at South-facing Temple?

Yang Hua: At first I worked at a restaurant here on Crow Ridge, but that job was horrible and didn't last very long. Next, I got a job with the Tourist Reception Office. While there, I studied hard and attained a tour-guide certificate. I became an expert in the buildings and cultural relics of the South-facing Temple area and though it gave me an opportunity to meet many people from all over China, the money was simply not enough. My dream has always been to own my own business but being a tour-guide was bringing me no closer to this dream. What I needed was to start saving, but working as a tour guide I could hardly afford my daily expenses. Going to school to learn the tea ceremony gave me the opportunity to master an art that few people can do. I was then able to return and secure a job here. I've so far been able to save a large amount of money.

I think I will be the manager here soon and hope to keep advancing in the near future. You see, things in life are simply tests of strength and determination. It's quite like this tea: One must conduct a very complicated procedure to transform a tea plant into its final product, a cup of tea sweet in your mouth. There is a saying describing the process of enjoying tea: "When the bitterness ends, the sweetness begins" (*kujin ganlai*). Just as the first sip may taste bitter, with another sip of hot water and a new cup of tea, the taste is transformed and becomes sweet. This saying applies to life as well: One must undergo temporary hardships to be able to enjoy the fruits of one's hard work.

Interviewer: And how you feel about the area

Yang Hua: I really enjoy it here. I like working on Wudang Shan because of the beautiful surrounding environment.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on your perception of the transformation of the Wudang Shan scenic area, and particularly the Crow Ridge/South-facing Cliff Temple, during the last few years?

Yang Hua: The transformation has been incredibly large. The area has sincerely undergone an enormous advancement. The numbers of tourists has increased sharply every year. The administration and management of the area has likewise improved greatly. Tourist facilities are much better. There is much better transportation, tour

guides and many more shops. When I first came to work here in 1999 there were hardly any shops in the area. Now there are shops all over the place.

Interviewer: Most of the improvements you've mentioned chiefly benefit incoming visitors. What about the effects upon locals?

Yang Hua: Improved transportation has helped locals, especially farmers. It used to be very difficult to buy goods and they were very expensive due to the high transportation costs. Now with the new road built, goods are much cheaper.

Interviewer: Have you seen the booklet entitled *Trustworthy People of Wudang* (Chengxin Wudang Ren)? And if so, have you read it?

Yang Hua: Yes I have seen it. We have it here, in fact it's almost everywhere. I haven't read it though.

[We examine the pamphlet briefly]

Interviewer: What do you think about this section here on 'civilizing' local culture?

Yang Hua: I think our government ought to try its best to raise the level of civilization (*wenhua shuiping*) of the mountain inhabitants. For example, several years ago restaurant workers would literally grab passing tourists and pull them into their restaurants to eat. This is no longer allowed. They can call them, but aren't allowed to physically pull them in. Laws like this have made the area more civilized.

Wudang Shan is now a World Cultural Heritage Site. As such it represents ancient Chinese culture as its people likewise represent modern Chinese culture. We should work hard to raise our level of civilization.

Interviewer: You seem quite enthusiastic about the development of the area. Can you think of any shortcomings to this development?

Yang Hua: Yes there definitely are, but it's hard to give specific examples. I guess the people's level of education is still not high enough.

There still aren't as many tourists here as there are on other sacred mountains; maybe this means the intensity of propaganda isn't quite enough (*xuanchuan de lidu bugou*). I'm not really sure how to answer this question though.

Interviewer: Have you heard about the program for the relocation of mountain residents? If so, what are your opinions about this phenomenon?

Yang Hua: Yes I've heard about it, although I'm not familiar with anyone who's actually been moved. I was in Fujian Province when the Crow Ridge residents got moved. I work very hard and rarely associate with those kinds of people. I'm sure it's a hassle (*mafan @*) for them but the future plan for the Wudang Shan Scenic Area stipulates their removal so

they simply haven't got a choice. This program is for the greater goal of the development of the area.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the increased numbers of foreigners visiting the area?

Yang Hua: Foreigners are very welcome here. This is a World Cultural Heritage Site and its *gongfu* and cultural relics are all very unique. We hope that foreigners leave here with a good impression and help spread the name of Wudang Shan around the world.

Interviewer: How would you characterize the religious situation these days? You've stated there've been more tourists of late. Does this apply to pilgrims as well?

Yang Hua: Yes there are more pilgrims as of late, but they are nonetheless far outnumbered by tourists. It's hard to say just how important Daoism is for people these days. I haven't noticed any really large changes, but I'm really not sure about this subject.

Interviewer: As for temple preservation and renovation, can you tell me a little about the plan to restore the South-facing Cliff Temple? Where is the funding coming from?

Yang Hua: The Bureau of Cultural Relics handles the finances of the renovation project. They are a government unit and so have access to such funds. Volunteer donations are likewise funneled through that unit. The restoration of the Outer Hall happened relatively recently – at least since I first got here. The South-facing Cliff Temple itself though hasn't been fixed up yet.

Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about the damage incurred here during the Cultural Revolution?

Yang Hua: I didn't think there were many problems here during the Cultural Revolution, but I'm really not sure. As I was a tour guide, I am highly familiar with the history of this area, but know relatively little about its more recent history. I know a lot about what happened hundreds of years ago, but nothing about what happened then.