

Jianghan Chen

ENGH 315: Folklore and Folklife

Professor: Dr. Lijun Zhang

20 October 2025

The Lunar New Year Street Parade in Dongtai, Jiangsu

Every year during the Lunar New Year, my hometown of Dongtai in Jiangsu Province becomes filled with color, sound, and excitement. The most remarkable event is the **street parade**, locally called *caijie* (踩街). Each town or village forms its own performance team and marches through the city center with music, costumes, and handmade props. This is not just entertainment—it is a vivid form of folk art that reflects how local people express happiness, pride, and community spirit at the beginning of the year.

From a **textual and stylistic perspective**, the Dongtai street parade combines music, dance, costume, and handcraft into one large folk performance. Performers dress in bright red and gold costumes, symbolizing luck and celebration. Teams perform traditional arts such as **dragon dance, lion dance, yangko, and waist-drum performance**. The dragon bodies are made from **bamboo frames** covered with painted silk and small lights, so they can twist and glow as if alive. The lion heads are often handmade by local craftsmen using paper, bamboo, and colorful wool threads. The loud beating of drums and gongs fills the air, creating a rhythm that keeps the performers and audience connected. Watching from the crowd, it feels like the whole city is breathing together in joy.

From a **typological perspective**, the street parade belongs to the category of **ritual folk performance**, where art, religion, and community identity mix naturally. Every team represents a town or village, and their costumes or props often show local characteristics. For example, some coastal towns add boat-shaped floats to symbolize their fishing traditions, while inland villages may highlight farming tools or scenes of harvest. This variety shows how a shared celebration still allows each group to express its unique identity through design and performance.

The **function and meaning** of the parade go beyond the visual spectacle. It is also a way for people to welcome the new year, pray for peace, and strengthen community ties. In the past, many villagers believed that loud sounds could drive away evil spirits and bring good fortune. Today, while fewer people hold such beliefs, the event still keeps that spiritual tone of renewal and unity. For older generations, it is a chance to pass down cultural memory; for younger people, it is a joyful way to reconnect with their roots in a modern city.

To understand this tradition more deeply, I talked with my grandmother, who has watched the parade since she was a child. She told me that decades ago, the teams used to walk for miles to reach the city and perform without any modern amplification or decorations. Everyone in the village helped—some made costumes, others prepared food for the performers. Now, she said, the city government also supports the event, and more young people join because it has become part of Dongtai’s cultural identity. Her story helped me realize that while the form of the parade keeps changing, its core spirit—**celebrating community and shared joy**—has stayed the same.

All in all, the **Dongtai New Year street parade** is a living example of folk art that connects material craft, collective performance, and emotional expression. The handmade dragons, lions, and costumes are all physical objects, but together they form a moving artwork that speaks about who we are as a community. Through this annual celebration, the people of Dongtai continue to weave their history, creativity, and hopes for the future into one beautiful, ever-evolving tradition.