

Entanglements of “Living Heritage”:
Ecomuseum Development in Rural China

by

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ABSTRACT

Museums are gaining increasing attention throughout the world for their ability to foster social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and collaboration in practices of heritage management, exhibition, and interpretation. This dissertation aims to contribute a critical perspective on museums as agents of social change through an exploration of new museological practices in contemporary China. Through an ethnography of the ecomuseum, I unravel the assumptions and expectations of implementing a Western concept based on notions of community participation, empowerment, and the democratization of heritage in the context of a transforming China.

In my ethnographic account of the multifaceted politics faced by ecomuseums, I question how power and authority are mediated through these civic institutions and how central aspects of museum and heritage practices are being redressed in Chinese society. This study exposes how ecomuseums in China are a result of global processes and positioned as part of a heritage protection movement and museum development boom to promote cultural nationalism, a “civilized” China, and state edicts of rural development in impoverished ethnic minority regions. Detailing the implications of government-led ecomuseum development in ethnic villages in southwest China, and the specific case of Huaili ecomuseum, in Guangxi, I interrogate the institutionalization of heritage and cultural landscapes through processes of exhibition, museumification, and the revaluing of culture. I explore the ecomuseum as a social space of cross-cultural encounter and friction through which local actors grapple with conditions of cultural governance and the entanglements cultural difference and a national heritage discourse. In my critical analysis of collected ethnographic narratives over 15 months of fieldwork from

state-directed interest groups, Chinese technocrats, and villager informants involved in the institutionalization of heritage, I present the complex arrangements and interactions that take place through the ecomuseum context and how subject positionalities shift and claims to heritage, identity, and voice are negotiated, regulated, and contested. This study contributes to the anthropology of China and museum and heritage studies, and aims to push new directions in the study of community heritage and museums, in offering a critical perspective of the political nature of ecomuseums in non-Western contexts, such as China.

To Mom and Dad, who have always supported me and pushed me to succeed.

To Sanae, who always stood by me.

And to Kaili, my little sweetheart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After assessing over 20 ethnic villages in the ethnically diverse Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, leaders of the regional Culture Bureau and a team of experts from the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities and Guangxi Institute of Ethnic Folk Culture decided on the Baiku Yao village of Huaili. Of the ten ethnic villages selected for the regional “1+10” Ecomuseum Program, Huaili would be the first to be initiated. On November 25th, 2004, the same day of the 20th anniversary of Lihu becoming a township, in Nandan county, northwest Guangxi, Baiku Yao villagers stood around the newly completed and government funded ecomuseum exhibition and documentation center on a cold and rainy day waiting for the opening ceremony to start. County, city, and region level officials arrived in Huaili with great pomp and circumstance, welcomed by Baiku Yao men blasting wooden rifles and young Baiku Yao women offering rice wine served in bamboo cups. Covered with umbrellas, the delegates stood next to each other in front of the ecomuseum center as they offered speeches to the large crowd of villagers. The official presentations emphasizing the distinct “cultural heritage” of the Baiku Yao (*Baiku Yao tese wenhua yichan*) and the necessity of its “protection” (*baohu*) under the new initiative of the “ecomuseum” (*shangtai bowuguan*). They resembled speeches made the year before when invited guests Su Donghai, Hu Chaoxiang, and An Laishun, directors of the first ecomuseum program in the adjacent province of Guizhou under the partnership of the Chinese and Norwegian governments, came to cut the red ribbon for Huaili ecomuseum’s ground breaking ceremony. At the ecomuseum center, only a handful of

villagers who had experience working and engaging in activities outside of Huaili and Lihu could understand the officials' rhetorical language on "protecting *minzu* culture" and the promise of "the museums draw of tourists to the area". At the end of ceremony, delegates turned to a large stone placed in front of the ecomuseum center. Rong Xiaoning, director of the Guangxi Culture Bureau and head of the Guangxi ecomuseum program, pulled the red cover from the stone unveiling the name of the ecomuseum, "China Guangxi Nandan Lihu White Trouser Yao Ecomuseum", written in bright red calligraphy and marked the opening of Guangxi's first ecomuseum. Officials and honored guests were ushered into the ecomuseum center to observe the core facility and first installment of the ecomuseum and the museological showcase of the local Baiku Yao. Local villagers waited outside and waited until officials had left before gradually entering the center to view themselves on display. Others Baiku Yao from Huaili created a rhythmic chorus beating their hanging bronze drums and cow-skin wooden drum, accompanied by blasted long reed bamboo (*lali*) and large water buffalo horns (*niujiang*) presenting to the directors of project intervention a cultural performance and the proclaimed vitality of Baiku Yao cultural traditions.

The opening ceremony and planning of the ecomuseum reflects an initiative closely in line with the contemporary Chinese state cultural policy to safeguard the nation's "cultural roots" and cultural diversity. It also embodies a common project development structure led by extra-local government social actors focused on the display and exploitation of previously "unidentified" and "untapped" cultural assets (see Oakes 1998, 2006; Swain 1989; Schein 2000; see also Yudice 2003). Without local population involvement and engagement in the planning and decision-making process for project

development, and consultation by upper-level government only reaching leaders at the township level, how the ecomuseum approach in China adheres to its Western-based philosophy for empowerment, community participation, and the democratization of safeguarding and managing local cultural heritage is called into question. This issue is further compounded by the fact that village residents understand the ecomuseum as purely a form of government intervention, as a created space for tourists and visiting officials, not for the local community. My dissertation interrogates the assumptions and expectations of the localized ecomuseum concept in China as an initiative implicated in broader political, economic and social forces to safeguard ethnic cultures and to instigate rural economic development. By exploring the manifestation of ecomuseum projects in rural ethnic locales, my research reveals the political nature of the institution and the many contradictions in preserving ethnic culture and reshaping cultural landscapes.

Drawing from data collected between 2008 and 2012, and over 18 months of fieldwork in ecomuseum sites in Guizhou province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, this study provides a critical ethnography of the ecomuseum institution in China. In my account of the multifaceted politics faced and incited by ecomuseums and the complex local/national/global spheres these institutions must negotiate, I identify ecomuseums as social spaces of *contact* and *friction*. I focus on the complex interactions and mediations that take place through museological processes incited through ecomuseum development that reshape local contexts and how articulations of heritage and identity are being recast in Chinese society through these civic institutions. In this study I explore how different social actors become entangled in the construction, negotiation, and contestation of cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and cultural difference

through this dynamic social space of cross-cultural encounter. This study contributes to critical museum and heritage studies in illustrating how such Western museological and heritage concepts translate in non-Western contexts. I shed light on the fact that ecomuseums in China reflect the political entanglements of these new museological practices. I also contend that ecomuseums introduce new roles of museums in Chinese society that extend beyond their long established nationalist and pedagogical function to incorporate aspects of rural development, community development, the commercialization of cultural heritage, and the reconfiguration of community-museum relations. I illustrate how ecomuseums in China are government/expert-led initiatives of cultural governance steeped in a state cultural policy of multiculturalism and cultural difference and larger national campaigns of rural development and the expansion of the cultural industry. Furthermore, I contend that through nuanced practices of project development the social lives and cultural landscapes of ethnic rural locales are transformed. As local populations and related cultural landscapes are incorporated into these projects they are converted into assigned objectified “heritage” through the museumification process, and also introduced new capabilities to claim belonging, identity, and the value of their heritage as their subjectivities change within the dynamic ecomuseum space. The range of cases in Guizhou province profiled throughout this study, and the detailed ethnographic account of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum in Guangxi, reveal the complexities and political dimensions that shape these transformative institutions and the locales they manifest in. My ethnographic research in these heritage projects reveals a logic of ecomuseums in China that is intricately associated with the discursive effects of globalizing processes, government work, and heritage tourism.

The above mentioned story of Huaili reflects a recent attempt in rural China to protect “fragile” “endangered” cultures and reconfigure local ethnic cultures as “living heritage”. The implementation of the Western “ecomuseum” concept, integrating the local natural and built heritage, the local territory or landscape, and community into the museum space as a “living museum”, represents a new experimental cultural strategy that is linked to an expanding heritage movement and cultural industry and aim to develop the Chinese country. Within this context, this study attends to what seems to be fundamental contradictions of ecomuseum development in China, in which the ecomuseum embodies multiple roles as an agent of cultural ossification and social and economic change, and is proclaimed to engage Western ecomuseological principles of community-based participatory heritage management and community development, as it assumes Chinese state edicts and agendas that often extend beyond the community.

In recognizing such contradictions, several questions arise in the exploration of ecomuseums in this non-Western context: What broader political-economy processes have led to the implementation of ecomuseum projects in China? How does the interplay and interaction of social, economic, political and globalizing forces, existing and emergent discourses, and diverse social actors, or “stakeholders”, shape the ongoing development of ecomuseums in China? How does the ecomuseum mediate cultural preservation and economic development in rural ethnic locales? What do ecomuseums in China show us about the dynamic process of heritage formation and the impact of the expanding heritage protection movement? Who defines heritage and to whom does “heritage” belong?¹ In the process of ecomuseum development who benefits, i.e. for

¹ I draw from similar question posed by Herzfeld (1991). See also Lowenthal (1998) and

whom is the ecomuseum for? What are the responses and reactions to the ecomuseum by local communities? These questions are tied to the deeper political nature of the project and questions on the power relations and forms of agency that are exacerbated and shift through the social space of the ecomuseum. They also point to the larger questions of global orientations and localization; that is, for example, how cross-culturally viable and applicable are Western principles of new museology and ecomuseology in the context of China? In exploring these questions in this study, I aim to uncover the many tensions of ecomuseum development in China, and new ways to think how global and national politics structure museums and communities and the relationships formed between them and between individuals and their past, present, and future. This dissertation addresses these theoretical and practical questions by critically examining themes of museumification and authentication, the recontextualization of heritage, and the politics of participation to understand what can be achieved through the agency of the ecomuseum in rural China.

The Need for Heritage Protection and Museum Development

Museums in China have long been utilized for purposes of nation-building and conveying particular political messages, representing devices for state propaganda, educating the citizenry, as repositories for national treasures and material culture, and centers for scientific research (MacDonald 2006). Across the world, museum have long often been used to “politically imbue the nation with value” (Newman and McLean 1998) and employed as “civilizing” agents and symbols of a “civilized” society. Over the past

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006).

150 years, museums in China have been employed for this purpose, specifically utilized for its nationalizing power and ability to create social order of things, people, and pasts. In the post-Mao reform era, however, museums in China have taken on new meaning in serving the ideology of market reform while seemingly tied to older nationalist and community revolutionary political state agendas and narratives. With just over 300 museums in 1978, China today has almost 4000, as of early 2013. This fast pace of museum development in contemporary China exemplifies the museum institution's association with modernity and progress of the nation as institutional fixtures of a "civilized" China. The dramatic unprecedented museum development boom since the early 1980s in China reflects a dynamic shift in the museological discourse and traditional museum paradigm. It also represents the impact of heritage protection "fever" now enveloping the country, from Beijing to Tibet. It also signifies the nation's move to engage globalizing processes and currents through articulations of "universal" claims to safeguarding the "heritage of humanity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006) and proclaiming the protection China's "cultural roots" and retention of its cultural diversity. At the same time as representing spaces to preserve the glory of the nation, museums have assisted in forging a collective memory and historical narrative of the nation, becoming a repository and structuring apparatus of China's growing cultural patrimony under a newly embraced global heritage discourse and combined growing cultural industry².

The development of museums across China is closely attributed to protecting different forms of heritage, i.e. tangible and intangible. Although such distinction

² See a diversity of publications issues by Xinhua news, CCTV, People's Daily on the recent focus on developing "cultural development" guidelines and expanding the "cultural industry" in China (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-02/15/content_14618001.htm)

between forms of heritage has only taken place in China within the past two decades, the move to push the revival of cultural traditions and celebrate the nation's cultural diversity and under a new political regime focused on economic reconstruction has been a government-led effort since the demise of the Cultural Revolution. More recently, it is associated with a growing concern of the pressures of development on the retention of China's "cultural roots" and "living traditions". As urbanization and industrialization, and destruction of natural and built cultural landscapes by the bulldozer of modernity has become more acute and expansive, Shan Jixiang, director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, laments that the protection of cultural heritage in China has "entered the most difficult, grave and critical period" (Branigan 2010).³ He Shuzhong, director of one of the leading non-government organizations on the protection of heritage in China, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center, stressed that "because of uncontrolled urban development and industrialization, because of environmental pollution and excess pressure from tourism, we have to say that much of our cultural heritage has been lost, and much more is in danger. To some extent, the loss of cultural heritage sites has left local culture in China without context, and globally significant sites without integrity".⁴ With the opening up of the disciplines of museology, archeological, and anthropology in the post-Mao era and the embrace of global heritage trends such as adoption of UNESCO's World Heritage Heritage discourse, Chinese scholars and government

³ Many experts, in fact, claim that rapid modernization since the post-Mao reform era poses a greater threat to China's cultural heritage than that brought on by the demise of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (see Sigley 2010).

⁴ This is from a recorded interview by The Archaeology Channel (<http://www.archaeologychannel.org/audio-guide/audio-commentaries/301-on-the-protection-of-chinas-cultural-heritage>).

agencies alike have begun explore new efforts to address these dangers and promote the state ideology of multiculturalism.

Museums have become an integral part of this endeavor. In the context of intensified global processes, China has seen the influence of what Buntinx and Karp (2006: 208) call the traveling museum institution - “moving from one context to another and from one geographic space to another” - as a tactical resource. The recent heritage protection movement and museum development boom has drawn increasingly from outside China, which has greatly influenced the expansion of the scope of cultural heritage protection, heritage institutions, and the dimensions of the cultural heritage industry in China. Insights from foreign museological trends and practices, including new forms and functions, often embodying a Western epistemology, has led to greater reflection in China on the different roles of the museum. It has also led to a reformulation of the cultural institution to fit in line with contemporary state edicts and issues surrounding heritage preservation, multiculturalism, and regional development.

One traveling museum concept that has found orientation in China and has been reproduced at the local level is the new museological approach of the ecomuseum. As a reflection of global connections and the embrace of foreign trends, the ecomuseum is seen by many Chinese scholars and government officials from the national to the local level as an advantageous, experimental initiative to address concerns of heritage protection and management, and also challenges of rural development and poverty reduction in China's countryside through the creation of “living museum” cultural destinations based on *in-situ* heritage preservation. With China's active pursuit of modernization since the beginning of the post-Mao reform era, tensions between the

conservation of declared cultural patrimony and the demands of economic development have arisen (Sofield and Li 1998). The ecomuseum has been presented a new alternative approach implemented in rural ethnic China to reconcile the different objectives of these emerging forces by linking them.⁵ As a bridge between meeting diverse political and economic objectives, I argue that the ecomuseum approach has become both a mechanism for heritage preservation and also economic development. It is seen as a social transformative agent of cultural landscapes and social lives through articulations of cultural difference in the museumification process and through local people's relationship with their past and present. And it is a economic socializing vehicle for creating new cultural economies and engaging local populations as "enterprising subjects" (Hall 1997; see Oakes 2006) as part of the larger tourism movement. As director of the National Committee of Ecomuseums and Community Museums, director of the first ecomuseum program in Chin and recognized "forefather" of ecomuseum development in China, Su Donghai has clearly stated the reasons for its implementation in China and more specifically in ethnic minority regions:

Even as China moves towards becoming a major industrial and world power, we have to recognize that the country still has many isolated, poverty-stricken ethnic minority communities. Having almost been cut off from the modern civilization, such communities have retained their varied cultures and traditions. They have been the focus of our efforts to preserve cultural diversity in the past decades (2006: 3).

There were therefore several good reasons for establishing an ecomuseum in these isolated villages, which at the time were seeking to break the bonds of poverty: principally that China's cultural traditions would be preserved, and that these villages would not lose their sense of identity in the process of modernization (2008: 35).

The adoption and localization of the foreign ecomuseum concept also exemplifies

⁵ Sofield and Li (1998) state that tourism has contributed "to the modernization process, its utilization of heritage for product development, and its role in meeting some socialist objectives".

China's attempt to extend the reach of the dominant heritage discourse and cultural heritage industry through the apparatus of the civic institution into the far reaches of China's periphery. Its emergence in China has led to greater scrutiny of the traditional "ethos of museums" in China. Su Donghai even proclaims that in promoting *in-situ* preservation of cultural heritages and keeping heritage alive, the ecomuseum acts as a remedy to defects of traditional museums (2005: 10).

My study focuses on how ecomuseums are implemented to meet these roles as an alternative museological approach within the larger context of neoliberal reform and a heritage protection "craze" in China. Analysis of my ethnographic research interrogates the orientations, implications, and contradictions of the complex political process of ecomuseum (*shengtai bowuguan*) development in ethnic villages in southwest China, where the majority of these institutions have been established⁶.

The Ecomuseum Philosophy

To date, over 400 ecomuseums exist worldwide. The proliferation of ecomuseum projects is largely associated with implementing new heritage management and participatory sustainable development strategies at the local level. Because there is no single ecomuseum model, projects across the world have taken on diverse forms and practices depending on their local context. Yet, following a Western ecomuseum philosophy⁷ they assume a general function in local heritage conservation and in service

⁶ Of the 18 officially named "ecomuseums" (or *shengtai bowuguan*), 16 are in southwest China.

⁷ At the same time the ecomuseum concept emerged at a time of rethinking the museum's relationship with communities and mission in society, seen in a growing community museology and new museology school of thought, its terminological conception is rooted also in part to the 1960s-1970s environmentalism movement. The 'eco' prefix represents the museum's connection to the 'environment'

of their local populations. In representing an initiative that aims to be more relevant and responsive to society and steps beyond the physical space demarcated by buildings and collections to include the social, cultural, and natural landscape of a place, encompassing a territory of a place - natural and built heritage - and the local inhabitants and their culture (Riviere 1985; Davis 1999; Varine 2006; Simpson 1996), as a “museums without walls”, the ecomuseum approach is differentiated from traditional museums. The ecomuseum also takes the notion of the open-air museum, commonly seen throughout Europe and the Americas, further than the preservation of the “material evidence” from the past as a recreated historical landscape, to focus more on the *in-situ* heritage activities of the present with community members proposed as the main proponents of museum development and heritage management. Thus, the ecomuseum concept has a strong bond to the idea of the “integrated museum” - “integrated with society and with the environment, but also integrated to other organizations that served local people”, with a focus on the principle of community involvement and participation (Davis 1999). Corsane et al. (2007) explains that “[i]t might be argued that the ecomuseum is best thought of in this way, as a process that provides a means for local people to identify, conserve and celebrate their heritage..... a mechanism that would enable the conservation of cultural and natural heritage and the maintenance of local cultural identity, the democratization of the museum and the empowerment of local people”.

in its broadest sense, referring to the “social, cultural and natural environments shared by communities”, and is stated by Davis (1999), to have been “chosen as a term of convenience, driven by political expediency”. Incidentally, the importation and adoption of the concept to China in the mid-1980s, according to Su Donghai, was originally closely tied to China's growing attention to environmental and ecological concerns in the face of a rapidly developing economy. Since that time, terms such as natural and human ecology (*shengtai*) have come into popular usage, especially among top Chinese government leaders promoting protective measures and well-being of Chinese citizenry. Not to be confused with its association with the natural environment, the “ecomuseum” signifies more a focus on heritage (natural, tangible, and intangible) management and community development.

Since the ecomuseum term, *ecomusee*, was coined in France in 1971 by Hugues De Varine, then Director of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and Georges Henri Riviere, former Director and Permanent Adviser of ICOM,⁸ there has been a growing literature on ecomuseums and community museums and principles of ecomuseology and community museology. It was through this initial literature, in particular the seminal 1985 UNESCO-ICOM journal *Museum* special issue on ecomuseums, that the ecomuseum concept was introduced to China. The creation of the ecomuseum concept reflected a shift in museology and museum practices occurring in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the Americas. “Struggles for social justice, civil rights, individual freedom, world peace and democracy set a tune of change in society” in these contexts (dos Santos 2009: 47). Against this social backdrop and influenced by an environmentalism movement and growth of postmodernism and postcolonialism, scholars and museum practitioners began to question traditional museum approaches and reevaluate the museum's role in society.⁹ According to Peter Vergo (1989), the discipline

⁸ The two of them came together for lunch with Serge Antoine, Adviser to the French Minister of the Environment to discuss how to link the concepts of “museum” and the “environment” for the Minister of the Environment's ministerial role for the upcoming 9th Conference of ICOM to be held in Paris, Dijon and Grenoble (Davis 1999). Hugues de Varine (1996) clarifies that in 1971 attention came to concentrate more in the contribution of museums to the study and protection of the environment and to “relate the museum institution to natural and human ecology” (Varine 2006: 77). In the 1973, ICOM Symposium *Museum and Environment*, the ecomuseum, blending of the “eco” prefix with “museum”, was defined as a museum of the environment that incorporated all aspects of heritage, culture, and the natural environment and changes in the system of relationships which constitute the environment; used as a tool to encourage the local population to assist in the development of their environment (Final Report and Conclusions, ICOM Symposium 1973: 120). As noted by Davis (1999), the term was “chosen as a term of convenience, driven by political expediency”.

⁹ Paula Assunção dos Santos (2009) points to developments in the fields of education and social sciences through the 1970s as a contributing factor to the reshaping of museums and museology. Mainly based on the theories of Paulo Freire, Third World and developed nations experienced a promotion of “social and popular consciousness”, and efforts in a decentralization of power and the reversal of unequal power relations articulated through non-specialists taking on a new role in decision-making processes, allying investigation and action, and commitments to a more people-centered approach (dos Santos 2009: 48). At this time, political, social, and economic pressures forced museums to shift their attention and focus in places like South America.

experienced a widespread dissatisfaction with old museology, which was considered “too much about museum methods and too little about the purposes of museums”. As a result a “new museology”¹⁰ was formed that represented a theoretical approach to radically and critically reassess the role of museums within society and what the museum profession was doing (Vergo 1989), “opening up new dimensions” of the museum (see Hauenschild 2000). This radical transformation in museology, defined by Peter van Mensch as the “second museum revolution”,¹¹ was a critical rethinking of collections and exhibits, the meanings and authenticity of objects and representations, the classifications and social constructions formed within the museum institution, and new approaches and techniques to engage visitors and source communities (see Karp and Lavine 1991; Crooke 2006).¹² The ecomuseum concept came to represent a method of the “new museology” school of thought in Europe as well as community museology out of Latin America.

At the same time the dimension of the museum and its mission was being reexamined, so was its relationship with communities (Davis 1999; see also Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp et al. 1992; Vergo 1989; Crooke 2006). Like new museology, community museology “abandoned the traditional museology” (Heijnen 2010), but acted as a “response to concerns that museums were failing to interact with, represent, develop

¹⁰ André Desvallées coined the phrase “Nouvelle Muséologie” in 1982.

¹¹ “The first museums revolution is generally accepted to have occurred at the end of the nineteenth century as the nature of museums work became professional through training courses, journals and associations. Professional practices and standards of conservation, interpretation and education all developed during this period” (Hawke 2010: 36)

¹² Museologists and scholars such as Hugues de Varine, Michel Roy (1987) and Rivard (1984) illustrate the difficulty in defining specific aspects of new museology as “[t]here are no established rules or models, just theories that have been immediately belied by practice” (Varine 1983 cited in Hauenschild 1988). For example, “approaches focused on audience development, enhancement of education and communication functions of the museum, [and] more democratic representations in exhibitions, [as well as] issues concerning community development” (dos Santos 2009). Since 1960s, “new museology” has become an umbrella term to encompass the global shift in museology.

and sustain local communities” (Davis 1999). ICOM meetings during the late 1960s and early 1970s reflected this new museological shift in the museum's educational role in the service of society and societal development (Davis 1999: 52-53; de Varine 1985).¹³ In 1972, a joint meeting between UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) was held in Santiago de Chile, called the Round Table on the Development and the Role of Museums in the Contemporary World, which significantly redefined the purpose of the new museum “to engage with communities (often those that are disadvantaged, isolated or composed of indigenous minorities) in order to improve their social and economic conditions” (Davis 2008). Greater social responsibility and the active role of museums in society, with a focus on development and “heritage as a tool for empowerment” (Heijnen 2010) became the foundation for community museology in Latin America. Furthermore the notion of the “integrated museum” was introduced marking a radical reconfiguration of the museum form and function to involve local people in it’s the planning, thinking, and operation (Davis 1999; Riviere 1985; Maggi and Falletti 2000). This was an attempt to make the institution more responsive to the needs of society in terms that extended beyond the cultural domain (dos Santos 2009).

The idea of the ecomuseum went beyond the physical confines of the traditional museum and the notion of the reconstructed and fabricated cultural landscapes of

¹³ Outcomes of the General Assemblies of ICOM (International Council of Museums) in 1968, for example, presented new aspects of change to the museum institution: The first resolution agreed by this meeting was that ‘museums be recognized as major institutions in the service of development’, because of the contribution they can make to cultural, social and economic life. The tenth meeting urged museums to “undertake a continuous and complete assessment of the needs of the public which they serve” and evolve methods of action which will in future more firmly establish their educational and cultural roles in the service of mankind (Davis 1999). In 1974 International Council of Museums (ICOM) redefined the museum: “The museum is a permanent non-profit institution, open to the public, in the service of society and its development, which does research on the material evidence of man and his environment, acquires such evidence, preserves it, communicates it and, in particular, displays it for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment” (see Hauenschild 2000).

open-air museums, like Skansen and Colonial Williamsburg, to encompass the entire natural and cultural landscape of a given place or territory and the practice of *in-situ* heritage conservation. Georges Henri Rivière's innovative work in France creating “new museological” approaches and practices¹⁴, such the museology of Musée-Laboratoire and the Museum of Ethnology of the Trocadéro (see Mille 2011), combined with the pioneering work of Hugues de Varine¹⁵ promoting community-centered museum focusing on social needs led to the development of the world's first ecomuseums in France, Le Creusot Montceau-les-Mines in 1974. Prior to this time, “similar [new and community museological] initiatives had already been developed in the United States (at Anacostia in the suburbs of Washington in 1967), in Mexico (the Casa del Museo, a suburban extension of the National Museum of Anthropology in 1973) and in France (at Ouessant in 1968), albeit with a different denomination” (Maggi and Falletti 2000).

Since this undertaking of establishing the world’s first ecomuseums, Riviere and Varine have attempted to make outline several times the conceptual framework of the ecomuseum. Riviere in particular has developed an “evolutive definition” of the ecomuseum that has moved from a focus on “ecology and the environment to stressing the experimental nature of the ecomuseum and role for the local community” to more holistic presentation of what he calls an “interpretation space” with “limitless diversity”

¹⁴ In the later part of his career and prior to developing the first “ecomuseums” Rivière was deeply involved in museum development with a focus on the local and French countryside, seen through his work from 1967 under the French Regional Nature Parks (*Parcs Naturels Régionaux*) project to develop new museums through the adaptation of the Scandinavian open-air museum. These museums did “not just [deal] with cultural practices or architecture but also with the relations between man and his environment” (Hubert 1985: 186). Local residents were seen to protect and interpret their natural and cultural heritage as the parks initiative aided in enhancing economic development while ensuring preservation of local heritage.

¹⁵ Riviere was director of International Council of Museums (ICOM) from 1947 to his 1967, succeeded by his deputy director Hugues de Varine.

constituted by community action, conservation and preservation of local heritage, and its ability to act as laboratory for experimentation and a mirror for the local population's identity (Riviere 1985; Davis 2004). Hugues De Varine has focused more on the notion that the ecomuseum is a “fragmented museum”, “a pluridisciplinary and versatile institution” that signifies a synthesis of museum, local population, and environment and between different heritage elements found within the given territory. Where Riviere drew initially from a more traditional, top-down decision-making approach for museum development, Varine stressed a bottom-up mode of museum management focusing on local needs and interests, development, and social empowerment (see Mille 2011: 219). Both, however, understood the ecomuseum as an alternative museological form and approach to adapt to a transforming social dynamic and to a reconceptualization of the museum space and the institution's relationship with its communities and environment. Put simply, ecomuseums were seen as innovative experiments “to change radically the working methods, content and structure of an institution that some thought outmoded [and]... to help museums achieve social meaning, less in the sense of recognition and increased attendance, but more in regard to the museums concrete contributions to everyday life” (Hauenschild 2000).

In an attempt to articulate the dimensions of this rather elusive concept and define its form and function, several studies on ecomuseums have developed a comparative approach. Seen as one of the most effective ways to visualize the ecomuseum has been developed by Rivard's (1988) in the comparison of the ecomuseum with the classic, traditional museum. According to Rivard (1984), the traditional museum equals the

“building + collections + experts + public” (Fig. 1) while the ecomuseum equals “territory + heritage + memory + populations” (see also Varine 1996) (Fig. 2).

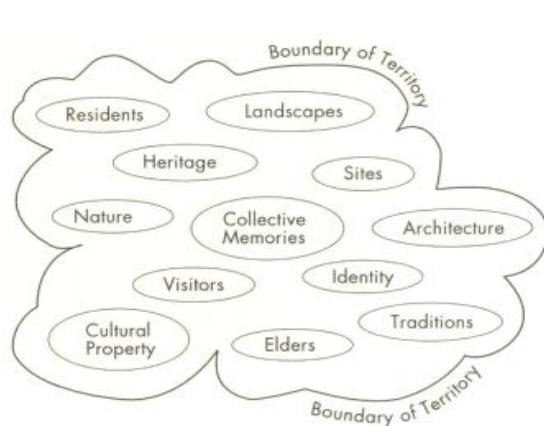


Figure 3.5b Graphic representations of the ecomuseum (after Rivard, 1984).



Figure 2: Traditional Museum Model (Rivard 1984, cited in Davis 1999)

Figure 1: Ecomuseum Model (Rivard 1984, cited in Davis 1999)

Peter Davis has developed two models focused more on the dimensions of the ecomuseum itself. The first is the “three circles model” which gauges the function of the ecomuseum by the amount of overlap of three arenas of the environment, community, and museum. Placing descriptive content in each of the three circles, Ohara (2008) illustrates their overlap as producing a fragmented, community museum based on heritage conservation and preservation and community involvement and participation through a range of museological forms (Fig. 3). The second is a “necklace model” which reformats Rivard's (1984) vision of the elements that constitute the ecomuseum. Davis illustrates the ecomuseum as a “thread”, or “mechanism that holds together the varied elements (the pearls, or special sites, the 'cultural touchstones') that make individual place distinctive” (2004: 89) (Fig. 4). This model helps to illustrate both the fragmented nature of the ecomuseum composed of different attributes of defined place and culture -

“landscape, nature, community, sites, song, traditions and so on” - and that they are linked together through the ecomuseum (Davis 1999: 240).

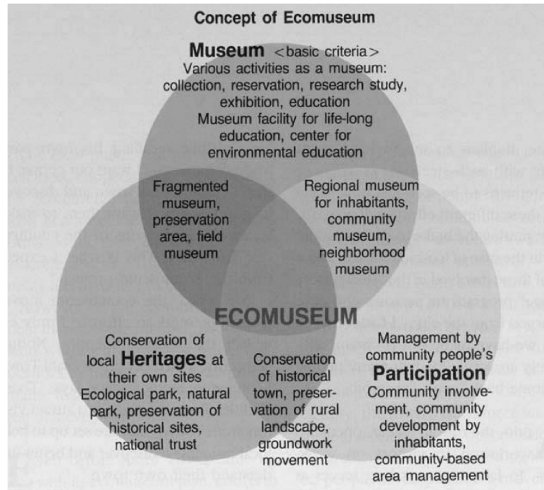


Figure 3: Ohara contribution to Davis's (1999) “three circles model”

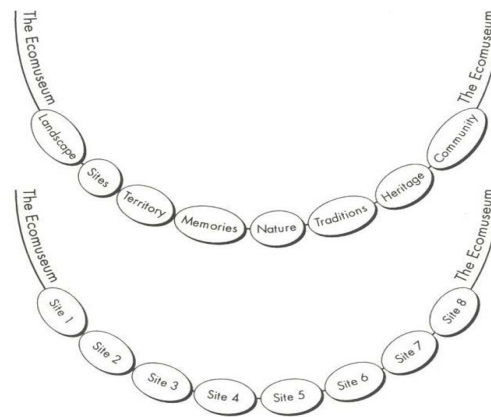


Figure 4: Davis (1999) Necklace Model

Beyond the conceptual framework of what constitutes the form of ecomuseum lies its purported central principle of community participation. The ecomuseum ideal calls for the involvement of the local community in the process of interpreting, caring for and protecting their heritage. The ecomuseum endeavor is ideally assumed to be initiated locally with an intention to address community needs and interests through collaborative and inclusive practices of research, “collection”, display and educational activities, and is thus seen to create an avenue for community participation and community development (Varine 2006). Through community participation, the ecomuseum is purported to work to provide an opportunity for local populations to engage in conserving, showcasing, and interpreting the unique aspects of their locality and culture, and is proposed to consequently enhance cultural pride and a sense of identity and place within the local population. As such, the local population, according to Davis (1999) can come to take on

a “curatorial” role of their heritage, and embrace a personal, conscious responsibility of environmental and cultural conservation (Varine 2006; see Rivard (1984:16). Thus, the ecomuseum is understood not as a product but as a cultural process, through which a sense of community, belonging, and place is cultivated, negotiated, and constituted through community engagement and participation and “present and future generations [learn] how to recognize, respect, use, transmit and produce their [heritage assets], as a base for building up all development processes” (Varine 2006: 85).

The first ecomuseums Le Creusot and Grande Lande in France set a precedent for the new museological method of the ecomuseum and became a projected “model” for a larger ecomuseum development movement which has spread across the globe (Davis 2007a: 198). Although an exploration of worldwide ecomuseums is outside the scope of this dissertation (see Davis 1999; Maggi and Falletti 2000), it is important to reiterate that the 400 plus ecomuseums developed offer a variety of definitions and models to heritage protection and community development.¹⁶ While it remains to be seen that all ecomuseums “move away from the traditional object centered curatorship to new practice that put people and communities first”, beyond their individual differences they aim to

¹⁶ An overview of ecomuseums in Quebec (Rivard 1985), Portugal (Nabias 1985), France (Hubert 1985), Japan (Corral 2010; Ohara 2008) and Italy (Maggi 2009) present the diversity of projects worldwide (see also Davis 1999, 2004; Maggi and Falletti 2000). The growth of an ecomuseum and transformation of a community and culture of the Ak-Chin tribe in the USA (Fuller 1992; Stokrocki 1996; Graybeal 2010), co-operative community museum in an urban district in Brazil (dos Santos 2012), first-hand experiences of the benefits and challenges to ecomuseum project development in Italy (Murtas and Davis), the relationship between ecomuseums, cultural heritage, and cultural tourism in Portugal (Pereiro 2006), building a “network” ecomuseum model over a large territory in eastern Japan (Ohara and Yanagida 2006), Vietnam's introduction of the ecomuseum to a World Heritage Site (Galla 2002), the prospect in applying ecomuseology for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in England (Stefano and Corsane 2008; Corsane et al 2007) and to address the threat to retaining cultural landscapes in Turkey (Elliott 2006), area just a handful of case studies on ecomuseum worldwide.

evoke community-based social change focusing on local distinctiveness and the celebration of local heritage (Murtas and Davis 2009: 150-1).

While cases in Europe, the Americas, and now Asia, illustrate that their development, planning and operation may have involved local communities in decision-making processes on how to represent and manage cultural traditions and the past and to look towards the future in terms of development, not all ecomuseum projects have come to reach the mission of establishing a “community museum” proclaimed by Varine.

Ecomuseums in China represent a case that calls into question just how the relationship between the community and the ecomuseum. And, moreover, points to the cross-cultural viability of implementing ecomuseological approaches in this non-Western context where a state political structure is firmly in place. This dissertation reexamines the ecomuseum concept for a time that is almost half a century after when it was first developed and with different globalizing processes at work, in a context beyond its original European and North and South American focus.

Calling for Critical Ecomuseum Studies

Since the development of the “new museology” school of thought in the early 1970s, heritage institutions have come under close scrutiny. In an attempt to move away from the cultural orthodoxy of museums and traditional heritage management and conservation practices, increasingly attention has turned towards their mission and practices in claims to serve society. Critical assessment of the role of the museum and heritage institution has also led to a questioning of the “assumed right” of the dominant ideology and systems of power and authority found in and constituting these “ideological institutions” (Harrison

1993). Corsane (2002: 14) claims that museums and heritage institutions can no longer be understood in the “modernist paradigm as authorities that transmit absolute knowledge in a linear fashion to their different publics”. The museum, now more than ever, is explored as a cultural construct and product of specific historical, social, political, and economic contexts (Kreps 2003; MacDonald 1998). Many scholars, too, have explored museums and heritage institutions as sites of interaction and dialogue, as social arenas for cultural encounter and difference, where claims to heritage, culture, and identity are expressed and negotiated and played out (see Clifford 1997; Corsane 2002; Smith 2006; Crooke 2010). Importantly, the museums, their collections, and exhibitions has become analyzed as both products and agents of social change (Kaplan 1994) and for its inherently political nature (Karp and Lavine 1991). Aspects of authority and ownership, multivocality, dissonance, the politics of representation, and social inclusion and community engagement have begun to be address in the discipline and by the museum institution itself (Macdonald 2006; Clifford 1988; Sandell 2002). For museum practice, the question has recently become not just what constitutes heritage, its preservation, and the political underpinnings of collection and display, but also who are and should be the guardians of a community’s cultural heritage (Kreps 2003). Looking at discursively constructed heritage, Hall (2005) asks the poignant question, “Whose Heritage”? Questions on ownership and control now arise on “Whose voices should be heard?”, “What approaches can allow for different voices to come through?” (Corsane 2005: 9), and “Who constitutes what the heritage worthy of preservation is?” (Kreps 2003; see also Smith 2006). Waterton and Watson (2013: 3) state that when heritage is seen in relation to its community the inevitable question raised is “to whom a particular narrative actually

belongs”. Looking closely at the agency of the institution other questions are raised, such as What do museums contribute to the socioeconomic development of a community, its sense of place and identity? and How well do museums serve communities and are used to help sustain and conserve their cultural traditions? (Kreps 2003). These questions are particularly pertinent when an relationship is forged between the museum and communities and heritage and the museum endeavor becomes mediated by diverse social actors (see Waterton and Watson 2013).

In the attempt to engage more with different audiences and embrace new histories and interpretations, museums have undertaken community engagement activities, working to be more relevant and responsive to their communities (see Hodges and Watson 2000; Russell 1997; Weil 2002). Simpson (2007:) states that today, museums are evolving as centers of cultural activity and community involvement, becoming “useful and powerful tool(s) for the politicization and promotion of culture”. And Weil (2003) has also recognizes museums as powerful spaces that have shown a recent move to extend beyond dominant stakeholders to address interests of their communities and diverse audiences (see also Watson 2007; Peers and Brown 2003). Becoming more people-centered, rather than object-centered, and taking on a more social inclusionist approach, museums have been seen to not only provide more public access to the museum practices and decisions but also shift their role in and relationship to society (Sandell 2003). Since the 1970s, many studies have explored different museum and heritage institution development approaches to understand how they can create a platform for marginalized community groups' voices to be recognized, heard, and voiced, highlighting notions of “shared authority” promoted through aspects of interpretation and

decision-making (Sandell 2003; Newman and McLean 1998; Smith 2003 et al.). Indeed, these aims were the basis for the development of the ecomuseum approach under schools of thought of “new museology” and “community museology”, discussed above. Kreps (2003) claims that multiple voices and perspectives are beginning to significantly inform global and national museological discourses and practices and contends that they help in the “liberation of culture from the management regimes of Eurocentric museology”. Importantly, within this context of redressing museology and museum forms and functions, literature has also been increasingly critical of the museum as “theaters of display”, and embodying an “exhibitionary complex” as mechanisms for assembling and reassembling forms of dominant power and authority (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Harrison 2011; see Bennett 1995). As museums take on more interactive roles with diverse audiences and their communities, debates over identity and cultural representation become more intensified. Understanding the meanings and consequences of their relationship with communities and the public and their role as claimed “civic institutions” is emphasized as demanding significant attention, especially in often unexplored contexts.

What we see today is more focus on the field of relations surrounding museums and the *contacts* and *friction* within and through these cultural institutions as they experience globalizing processes and expanding networks of social and material interaction (Harrison 2011; Karp et al. 2006). For many practitioners and scholars, the ecomuseum reflects what Hooper-Greenhill (2000) calls the categorical “post-museum”, enabling multivocality and plural interpretations as a dynamic space. It represents a new way for perceiving museums that move “beyond the mausoleum” (Witcomb 2003), to reinvent its

role, function, and form in contemporary society as a museum of, for, and by the community. Its key principles of community participation and community-based sustainable development through the innovative method of integrating the local territory, community, natural, built, and intangible heritage and memory into the museum space has been a key factor in the ecomuseum's phenomenological adoption and implementation worldwide.

Although the ecomuseum concept extends the scope of the museum as a new dialogic space, emphasizing notions of community participation and community development, scholarship on ecomuseums often explore the contact relations, the social and cultural engagements between different actors and discourses within this dynamic space, as *frictionless*. Studies on ecomuseums cases worldwide often do not take account of theoretical tools used in critical museum and heritage studies mentioned above on the politics of difference, representation, inclusion and exclusion, and participation. They often do not address “the sense in which moments of assembling and reassembling within the museum network also often produce *friction* and conflict” (Harrison 2011; see also Karp et al. 2006). In fact, concentration on the innovativeness of this new museological approach and its potential for and attainment of beneficial social change, seem to overshadow the challenges faced in their ongoing development in national, regional, and local contexts. Most studies on ecomuseums set their tone by presenting the initiative as a new advantageous museological approach for community participation, self-representation, and ownership of heritage resources and the management processes, and more utilitarian functions of rural or urban regeneration, sustainable development, and tourism (Corsane et al. 2009), creating ultimately an ideal of the ecomuseum through

a global discourse. Even as these important complex subjects are highlighted in the literature, current scholarship only scratches the surface, with the explorations of the course of project development and local, regional, and national implications as only skin deep.¹⁷ I contend that they fail to critically explore the political dimensions of the ecomuseum and pay little attention to the political, social, and economic forces that shape the project itself and impact its outcome on local cultural landscapes and social lives. On cases in China, in particular, accounts are based on very brief, shorter-term investigative research that focus more on the approach's Western roots and prospects and less on its inherent politics as a government and expert-led community heritage initiative. But even in international cases where museologist practitioners write on the intricacies of the process of ecomuseum implementation and development (Rivard 1984; Nabais 1985; Murtas and Davis 2009), the political nature of community involvement and participation, power relations between social actors and forms of agency involved in decision-making practices, and nuanced impacts of the project are not clearly examined or exposed.

In terms of heritage work, much of the scholarship on these “community museums” have remained on one side of the “heritage debate” (Lumely 2005); it is focused on the positivist notion that heritage has the potential to offer representations of local life that provide an ongoing public forum for the expression of local identities and the interpretation of the stories told and experienced, not the other side emphasized by heritage critics on the demise of heritage, its attributes of fabrication and manipulation intertwined in ideological agendas, and its tainted tendency of commodification of culture

¹⁷ Although much of the literature on ecomuseum is in languages other than English, this assessment is based on English publications. My immersion in the worldwide literature on ecomuseums, attendance to international conferences on ecomuseums, and discussions with key scholars in the field reveal that this lack of critical analysis has been a common trend in ecomuseum scholarship.

and landscapes. It seems that because the ecomuseum is defined as a new museological approach and situated in a Western rhetoric of empowerment and participation, the ecomuseum has become equated to a direct act of community participation and community regeneration, as if it has been freed from its originally intended politics.¹⁸

While I do not intend here to gloss over the importance of the current literature on ecomuseums in contributing to expand the field of museum studies and community heritage work,¹⁹ it is important to note that these contributions have often failed to heed the words of the forefather of the global ecomuseum concept, Hugues de Varine (1993: 393) in understanding and exploring the ecomuseum as a “political instrument”.

The ecomuseum has not received the attention it deserves as a politically-latent

¹⁸ See Leal (2007: 544) on this argument for the notion of participation itself. In conversations with Hugues de Varine, he explained to me that this issue has become the main problem facing ecomuseums today: “the ecomuseum has become a brand, anything is called an ecomuseum nowadays” and its mere development falsely declares a success in community-based heritage conservation and proclaims the attainment of “shared heritage”.

¹⁹ Peter Davis has conducted extensive work on ecomuseums and has become a strong advocate of ecomuseums worldwide “exploring the ways they have provided a more democratic museum model” (Davis 2004). He does raise key theoretical concerns on the ecomuseum’s connection to building a “sense of place” or ‘spirit of place’”, involving identity formation and belonging (Davis 1999, 2004; Davis et al 2010; Davis and Murtas 2009; Corsane et al 2009). Under the tutelage of Peter Davis and Gerard Corsane, many students at the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University have investigated difference ecomuseums and explored the link between ecomuseumology and sense of place (Stefano and Corsane 2009; Hawke 2010; Davis et al 2010; Elliott 2006). Gerard Corsane et al. (2007) and his student Stephanie Hawke (2010) take the theoretical and psychological discussion of place and identity a step further to relate the ecomuseum to the development of forms of capital. Drawing on the work of Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), Corsane and Hawke examine ecomuseums as a kind of catalyst for social capital, seen to promote participation processes that encourage local people to organize themselves, nurture trust and reciprocity, and build social exchanges and relationships within the community and between social groups. In addition, Graybeal begins her discussion on ecomuseum by pointing to the many critical issues posed through the museum field, such as colonialism and imperialism, and “the contentious relationship between museums, indigenous peoples, and the public” (Graybeal 2010). However, further analysis on these issues in the context of the ecomuseum are cut short in presenting the ecomuseum as a new instructive approach to museum work. One scholar who has pushed the field of new museology in a new direction by offering critical insight into alternative museological practices and defining a new school of thought with a focus on South America called sociomuseology is Paula Assunção dos Santos (2009, 2010). Santos’ work has been at the forefront of critically examining notions of community development and new museology approaches and articulating political issues of agencies and identity within the museum field.

philosophy and enterprise steeped in the rights of access, inclusion, and social empowerment, and processes of cultural production, identity and place formation, and the complexities of “decolonizing museology” (Graybeal 2010; Davis 1999; Varine 2005). As Nash (2006) states: “Because the production of museum programs and the production of research in museums are about producing meaning, and about producing interpretations of people's places in a wider context, they are inevitably a matter of contestation”. It is important to recognize that processes imbued in museums and heritage projects have a political aspect, and are often regarded “sites of struggle”. Especially as projects that forge new relations between the community and the museology, and call for community participation and development through the utilization and conservation of “heritage” resources, the ecomuseum cannot be ignored in how it invokes complex social processes and multifaceted interpretations of heritage and meaning, and exacerbates questions on what should be remembered and what should be forgotten and who decides.

My study draws from the growing literature on critical museum and heritage studies to contribute to the study of ecomuseums, community museums and community heritage work by examining not only a new context for ecomuseum development, but also its political nature. My study employs an anthropological approach to explore the implications of ecomuseum development on rural Chinese communities, arguing that ecomuseums should not be looked at as simply an innovative approach to community-based heritage work, community and cultural development, and the conservation of heritage. This study exposes the nature of this dynamic social space created in rural locales and its implications for transforming social lives and cultural landscapes in China. Exploring key themes of heritageization and authentication, the

politics of exhibition and representation, the dynamics of identity formation, the impacts of the commercialization of culture through tourism development, an assessment of forms of community engagement and participation, and ownership, agency and power relations that constitute the complex workings of the ecomuseum in this dissertation, I aim to add a critical examination of the ecomuseum to attempt to fill the gap in current literature. I contend that through an analysis of these different themes, the political motivations, ideological underpinnings, and the broader economic and cultural forces that the ecomuseum is implicated in can be revealed.

Drawing on empirical evidence from ecomuseum cases situated within the socialist state system of China, I demonstrate that they are implicated in different, often contradictory, existing and emergent global, national, and local discourses. Throughout this study, I show how the ecomuseum is a “contact zone” (Clifford 1997) of interaction between these diverse discourses and involved social actors, and generates “friction” (Tsing 2005) through the encounters and negotiation of multiple interpretations of development, cultural heritage, and identity. I also expose how, as these multiple agendas of cultural preservation, cultural exploitation, rural development, and poverty alleviation play out through the ecomuseum, involved social actors take on new subject positionalities and roles, specifically seen through processes of cultural production, exhibition, and consumption. Although seen as a relatively recent addition to the global phenomenon of ecomuseum development, projects in China offer an important case to elucidate the political processes that articulate claims to identity, heritage, and power through this museum initiative in the local context (Harrison 2011; Smith 2006; Waterton and Watson 2013). In exploring areas of political drama through an ethnography of the

ecomuseum, my study aims to tackle head-on a critical exploration of these new museological approach and the struggles and debates that surround them.

Methodology

Combining long-term fieldwork and anthropological methods of interviewing, survey, and participant observation, this study presents an ethnography of the ecomuseum in rural China. It critically analyzes gathered ethnographic narratives from state-directed interest groups, Chinese technocrats, and villager informants involved in the institutionalization of cultural heritage through the ecomuseum to enable a more in-depth perspective on the nuanced forms of engagement and mediation of state political structure, heritage discourse, and processes of modernity in a transforming China. The research on ecomuseums took place over an extended period between 2008 and 2012.

After conducting extensive research on topics related to identity politics and the implications of rural development in southwest China since 2000, my attention was turned to the recent cultural strategy of the ecomuseum implemented with the expansion of the heritage protection movement and related cultural industry and museum development boom.²⁰ In the summer of 2008, I conducted preliminary fieldwork on seven ecomuseum villages in Guizhou and Guangxi to understand what constituted an ecomuseum in China. Drawing on interviews with regional, county, and township government officials, ecomuseum staff and village leaders, and conversations with local villagers, I learned why and how these sites were selected for ecomuseum development,

²⁰ It was Dr. Pan Shouyong, professor of anthropology and museum studies at Central University for Nationalities, where I acted as visiting instructor from 2005-2007, who introduced me to the ecomuseum in China.

the process of implementation, and how they were operated. However, many questions arose from this preliminary research concerning the different agendas of involved actors, the impact of ecomuseum development on the social lives of villagers and their home village, what constituted forms of villager engagement and local responses to these projects of foreign intervention, how notions and claims to identity, heritage, and the constitution of community were rethought in the ecomuseum context, and how new relations were forged through project implementation. I also became concerned with how ecomuseums mediated their proposed role purported by extra-local developers of heritage protection and social and economic development.

This myriad of questions lead me to begin ethnographic fieldwork on ecomuseums in southwest China in 2010. Based on my preliminary fieldwork, I initially selected three ecomuseum sites - Tang'an, Longli, and Huaili - for the proposed study. Each represented a different theme driving ecomuseum development, with each village possessing a distinct ethnic composition and economic status of the local population, and variety outcomes of community engagement. However, the approach to create a comparative study on ecomuseums in China proved to be inappropriate considering the diversity of variables across these sites and the time needed to build rapport with local actors in order to provide a detailed account of the implications of ecomuseum development. As a result, while continuing to frequent ecomuseums in Guizhou and Guangxi, I decided to focus on one specific ecomuseum case study of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum. This proved to allow me to both achieve cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) with a specific village and local population and uncover the deeper politics pertaining to the ongoing process of ecomuseum development, and at the same time provided greater understanding of the

similarities and differences across sites and the broader forces that has shaped this ecomuseum development phenomenon in China.

My ethnography of the ecomuseum address the diversity of narratives that shape the institution and its development. I examine the ecomuseum to get at, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2013) suggests, “what is the story they tell?” and “how do they tell the story” as well as their influence on the intimate lives of local populations they encompass in “how they engage the public?”. In addition, I pay close attention to the ecomuseum as a cultural construct and product of specific historical, social, political, and economic contexts (Kreps 2003; MacDonald 1998). In presenting a descriptive as well as analytical study on the diversity of narratives and discourses that come through and emerge in the dynamic social space of the ecomuseum and my own ethnography, I have become concerned with the ideas about subjectivity and the shaping of “personhood” - “the grounds of human capabilities and actions, ideas about the self, and the expression of emotions” (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Throughout my ethnography, I expose the complex workings of ecomuseums in China, and offer in the following chapters a culturally and contextually sensitive portrait of the relationships and frictions that shape these initiatives and the rural locales they are situated in. Presented throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to “harness the emotional power of the site where the museum is located” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2013).

To develop an ethnography of the ecomuseum and understand the “webs of meaning” (Geertz 1973) that surround the institution, I have employed different qualitative methods. Collection of ethnographic data through my longer-term engagement in the field draws from participant observation and in-depth interviews. For data collected

from different ecomuseum sites in Guizhou and Guangxi, not including Huaili, I made repeated visits to each village and stayed between a few weeks to over a month meeting with local officials, village leaders, ecomuseum operators, and village residents. For the case study of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum (hereafter Huaili ecomuseum), I developed an understanding of the local cultural landscape and village dynamics and built strong rapport with local people over one year of fieldwork. Complete immersion in the ecomuseum social space, resulted in personally taking on multiple positionalities as an observer, researcher of local culture and ecomuseum development, visitor, as well as a full participant in ecomuseum operations and village events, including ecomuseum collection management and activity planning, and village funerals, weddings, and becoming a ritually sanctified “godfather” of two Baiku Yao children. Participant observation and formal and informal conversations with local actors allowed me to capture people's behaviors, experiences, and attitudes, and their social relations in everyday contexts. Across all the ecomuseum sites I researched I conducted 120 interviews with local villagers, leaders and elites, and government officials. These interviews focused on the attitudes and perceptions on the ecomuseum, its impact on everyday life, community, and heritage, and forms of engagement, as well as living conditions, daily routines, cultural practices, and social, economic, and political concerns.

Throughout my fieldwork, I also concentrated on exploring forms of local cultural knowledge that surround cultural inheritance in each field site. I spent considerable time examining processes, techniques, meanings, and significances of tangible and intangible cultural forms of local villagers, including dress-making, religious rituals and sacred tools, vernacular architecture, etc. In addition, I examined how forms of local heritage were

reinterpreted through the ecomuseum project and how new meanings and values have emerged through their recontextualization. This has helped me to consider the relationship between different discourses of heritage and tensions surrounding claims to traditional knowledge systems. In-depth interviews generated focused individual narratives of life histories “to gain further understanding of the historical and cultural experiences that shape personal and interpersonal relationships” in and across communities (Naples 2003: 43). They “offer[ed] a context in which to examine the development of political consciousness” in each local site among involved actors (Mohanty et al. 1991: 33). My research uses this approach to interviewing to make the complex lives of local ethnic villagers situated in the ecomuseum “contact zone” context visible and the agency of heritage more clear. Overall, interviews have provided a portrait of the plurality of voices in ecomuseum spaces. On another level, I have used interviewing and the collection of narratives through the ethnography of an institution “to explore the links between everyday life experiences and broad-based social structural process[es]” (Naples 2003:45; see also Smith 2006).

My fieldwork in ecomuseum sites was supplemented with data collected from interviews with Chinese government leaders and experts in from local townships and counties to provincial capitals of Guiyang and Nanning, in Guizhou and Guangxi, respectively, and Beijing. This data aided in grasping the broader ideological, political and economic forces at work in ecomuseum development in rural China and that extend beyond the local context. It has also helped to “locate and trace the points of connection among individuals working in different parts of institutional complexes of activity”

(DeVault and McCoy 2006: 18) to reveal the complexity of social relations and processes influencing ecomuseum village communities.

My research recognizes Hammersley's (1992) argument that "the data which ethnographers use is a product of their participation in the field rather than a mere reflection of the phenomenon studied, and/or is constructed in and through the process and analysis and the writing of ethnographic accounts" (Naples 2003: 38). I was not only a foreigner working in China, but an American associated with a different set a cultural and social values. Throughout my fieldwork, I constantly assessed how my presence and participation in the ecomuseum contact space influenced both my informants and my own work. In this ethnography, I also acknowledge, as Strathern (1985: 192, cited in Herzfeld 1989: 3) states, the "limits of our own representational devices" and that writing ethnography involves an ethnographic authority, whereby data is framed through the researcher's standpoint epistemology (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1983). As such, I give consideration to the partiality of knowledge presented in this ethnography of the ecomuseum in China. While I draw on empirical evidence from across several ecomuseum sites, what follows are observations and reflections by an outsider. For this reason, my research has used self-reflection "as a tool to deepen ethnographic analysis and to highlight the dilemmas of fieldwork" (Naples 2003: 41; see also Rabinow 1977). As an ethnography of a museum institution which people and cultures are not just situated and represented through processes of objectification and cultural production and consumption, but also take part in and engage the discourses in which they are entangled in, I employ reflective as well as dialogic techniques to reveal how power and difference construct encounters in the field (Naples 2003: 39) and the ongoing shifts and exchanges

of positions through the museum space (Luke 2002). By exploring the poetics and politics of the ecomuseum effect in China, I take account of ecomuseum's agency and narrative structure with attention to the regional, national, and global frames within which they are located (Karp and Lavine 1991; Bruner 2001).

Chapter Summary

This dissertation is divided into six chapters following this introductory chapter. Chapter two provides a background to the evolution of the museum in China over the past 150 years and emergence of the heritage protection movement in contemporary China to provide a historical context for the recent adoption and localization of the ecomuseum concept. I begin by tracing the history of the emergence of the museum (*bowuguan*) in China through the introduction by foreign powers in the colonial period of the late 19th century, and how the cultural institution was then adopted and developed by the Chinese under ideological currents of nationalism and communism. Over time, these institutions have shifted in purpose as treasure houses to cultural repositories and cabinets of curiosity to state ideological devices. Museums were never just about the preservation of cultural patrimony, but embedded in larger state-led projects and globalizing processes that shaped the cultural field in China and the idea of the nation. This chapter then shifts to explore the recent, post-Mao reform era embrace of the global heritage discourse and how this has introduced new dimensions and understandings of heritage that have influenced museum practices and the urgent move to safeguard China's "cultural roots" and the building of a "civilized" nation. This has culminated in a remarkable nation-wide museum development boom and a frenzy in identifying and selecting and enlisting

“cultural heritage” on regional, national, and international heritage lists. What we learn from the genealogy of the museum in China and what we see in today's institution is not a separation but a composed layering of historical currents and narratives, most recently packaged within a contemporary market reform discourse that combines cultural nationalism and the industrialization of culture. The chapter ends with how the adoption of the new museological approach of the ecomuseum exemplifies this shift in the traditional museum paradigm in China, pointing to Chinese (re)conceptualizations of relations with the past and present and various forms of “heritage”, including now “intangible cultural heritage”, and what the modern museum represents in contemporary Chinese society.

In Chapter three I turn to the main ethnographic case of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum in northwest Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Arguing that the ecomuseum is implicated in several state agendas that extend well beyond the local community. I focus on the primary work of ecomuseum construction in rural ethnic locales involving the “curation” and “museumification” of the ethnic village. Drawing on the work of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), I critically explore the political economics of display and reveal how the ecomuseum has been made through the conversion of the Baiku Yao ways of life into “living heritage” and transformation of the cultural landscape into a cultural destination of display. I examine two parts of establishing the ecomuseum project enacted by extra-local government and museum professional actors: the curation of the ecomuseum exhibition center and the museumification of the Huaili village's natural villages (*ziran cun*) of ManJiang, HuaQiao, and HuaTu, which compose the defined territory of the ecomuseum. I argue that Huaili and the Baiku Yao culture are

framed within the museum space and through museological processes of remembering, forgetting, and imagining (MacDonald 2003; Varutti 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Also, I contend that as an “authenticated” and iconized representative “protected” ethnic minority village, Huaili ecomuseum plays an important role in constituting cultural difference and the modern ethnic subject as part of the body politic (Cowan 1990; Herzfeld 2004). Furthermore, I explore how that the narratives and representations that come to constitute the imagined Baiku Yao in the ecomuseum through an authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006) framing notions of cultural difference, class, and ethnicity are historically and socially situated. I examine historical discourses on the Yao and Baiku Yao presented through scholarly and state-directed historical records and oral histories from village informants to uncover how the Baiku Yao are represented through the contemporary exhibitionary complex (Bennett 1995) of the ecomuseum. I end this chapter by analyzing the implications of creating museumified spaces and, what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) calls spectacles of the quotidian in rural ethnic China. As a result of the interactions that take place through the creation of the ecomuseum and the exhibition of everyday life, the local population of the Baiku Yao have become engaged in processes of identity work.

Chapter four transitions away from Huaili to present the larger context of ecomuseums in southwest China. This chapter focuses in particular on the first generation of ecomuseum projects in China established in Guizhou province. was launched. I first chart the emergence of the ecomuseum concept in China through global connections between the Chinese state, Chinese museologists, and the Norwegian government. This helps to I reveal how its localization and implementation in rural ethnic China takes on

specific assigned roles in satisfying state edicts of rural development, poverty alleviation, and the promotion of cultural diversity through the preservation of ethnic minority cultural heritage. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in three ecomuseum sites - Suoga, Tang'an, and Longli - in Guizhou, I demonstrate how each project represents a particular theme - poverty alleviation, tourism development, and historic preservation. Each case reveals distinct outcomes to ecomuseum development as they assume a different mission with a similar ecomuseum “model” under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Program.

Chapter five moves back to Huaili and examines how not only social lives of village residents but also their local heritage is implicated in processes of ecomuseum development. This chapter focuses on the recontextualization of “heritage” through the ecomuseum. In addition to the local place and community being reinscribed into the symbolic landscape of the ecomuseum, I argue that so, too, is local heritage. Using a material culture framework of analysis, I present the case of the social life of the Baiku Yao's ceremonial bronze drum (as a tangible and intangible cultural form) and its movement, reconfiguration, and revaluation through different social contexts and regimes of value (Appadurai 1986; Thomas 1991, 1994). By exploring the trajectory of the biographical object of the bronze drum in Baiku Yao society, I argue that the establishment of the ecomuseum introduces new significances for local “heritage” and impacts the formation of new relations between people and this heritage (Kopytoff 1986; Hoskins 1998). I first present the bronze drum located in the traditional knowledge system of the Baiku Yao as a sacred, ceremonial object and practice. Through the production of sound, the drum transcends its material form to take on anthropomorphic attributes and enliven the supernatural, playing a significant role in funeral events and

possessing an intangible value in the ritual order, social organization of Baiku Yao kin relations, and individual forms of prestige. In the establishment of the ecomuseum project, local villagers' relationship with the bronze drum and other cultural forms and practices are seen to have become significantly altered. Through the government and expert led intervention of the ecomuseum, the bronze drum has become deemed a valuable “heritage” of the Baiku Yao. Positioned in the extra-local authorized heritage discourse and cultural heritage industry as a cultural commodity, the bronze drum's mediation of social agency (Gell 1998) becomes even more evident, influencing social actions of local Baiku Yao and idioms of cultural identity. In second half of this chapter, I introduce how through processes of heritage-making and development of tourism through the Huaili ecomuseum, the singularization of the bronze drum and its valuation according to traditional cultural and ritual system is complicated. This is seen through the integration of the bronze drum into the community-produced tourist Baiku Yao Cultural Performance in Huaili, and the larger heritage tourism industry, as a new cultural asset and cultural symbol of the Baiku Yao. Even as the bronze drum continues to exist as an important sacred ritual object in Baiku Yao society, its movement within the context of the ecomuseum and cultural industry with a second life as revalued heritage, imposes new demands on the Baiku Yao in the negotiation of the conception, practice, and value of the drum and reorientations of identity and the traditional knowledge system.

Chapter six explores the relationship between the ecomuseum and the local population in Huaili through a critical assessment of forms of interaction and community engagement. Interactions between involved actors are seen as a creative force in the manifestation of the ecomuseum and the transformation of the project. However, in terms

of community participation, the ecomuseum in China leaves much to be desired. I argue that the establishment of the ecomuseum in China calls into question the viability of Western cultural values and the ecomuseological principle of community participation in this non-Western context. I begin to explore the political nature of participation through the ecomuseum endeavor by first providing a conceptual and contextual framework for understanding notions of community participation and participatory development and its past and present application in China. The discussion on community participation is extended to its relationship with heritage, which has received increasing attention in recent years in China from local and government-led heritage tourism projects to large-scale heritage protection programs funded by international agencies. After providing a context for analysis, I present ethnographic data from my fieldwork in Huaili to describe the course of ongoing ecomuseum development. In focusing on two phases of ecomuseum development, I illustrate the political nature of participation and the different power relations between involved social actors that define forms of community engagement and response to the ecomuseum. The first, initial phase, demonstrates how the control of the ecomuseum project was in the hands of extra-local government and expert actors dictating project planning, construction, and operation. The second, redirection phase, reveals a concerted shift in the course of the project led by hired Baiku Yao community ecomuseum staff. Although new relationships were forged between multiple actors in the making of the ecomuseum in the initial phase, relations between extra-local and local actors remained disconnected. In the second phase, I argue that ecomuseum staff's mediation of their role as "insiders" and "outsiders", the operation of the ecomuseum, and the state dominant heritage discourse and the local community

heritage discourse, incited efforts to redirect the project and launch new participatory community heritage initiatives which have led to greater community involvement. The new direction of the Huaili ecomuseum has proven that while a political framework exists whereby ecomuseums are deeply entangled in the workings of government, local community actors are not necessarily bound by it. I contend that the ongoing cultural process of the ecomuseum development creates a social space of encounter and contact whereby friction through actors' interactions can generate new capabilities for mobility and contestation and a locus for new forms of agency (Tsing 2005). I argue that there is a fundamental contradiction within the idea of the ecomuseum in China. While the manifestation of the “ecomuseum” does not assume Western principles of community participation, social empowerment, and the democratization of heritage as it embodies distinct form of cultural governance as an assemblage of government, it has become, as seen in the case of Huaili, the impetus for ecomuseological practices. In this way, the ecomuseum is understood for its transformative and agentive role in how it has brought things about, how it lends voice to certain people, and silences others, and triggers new relations and power structures. Chapter six is followed by short ethnographic vignettes in chapter seven to demonstrate that engagements with the ecomuseum project in other village sites in southwest China can also lead to reorientations of identity and claims to heritage driven by local village residents themselves.

In the conclusion chapter, I revisit the roles of the ecomuseum in Chinese society a transformative agent in rural development, heritage formation and preservation, the forging of a new museum-community relationship, as well as an economic socializing vehicle embedded in the larger tourism industry. I present here my overriding theoretical

framework that ecomuseums exist as “contact zones” (Clifford 1997) of increasing friction where different articulations of culture, knowledge, meaning, and value are expressed, negotiated, regulated, and contested through cross-cultural encounters and interactions. As ecomuseums are ensconced in government work right from their inception in China, I argue that they must be understood within the political framework and the state edicts they are implicated in and come to represent mechanisms of civic management and cultural governance (Bennett 1995, 1998). However, the ecomuseum is not a mere governmental assemblage nor a harmonious space of cross-cultural encounter. It is built on and generates friction. In my ethnography of the ecomuseum in southwest China, I have shown how the adoption of the foreign ecomuseum concept, its localization and implementation in rural ethnic localities, and ongoing development process often produce tensions, conflicts, and frictions (Tsing 2005). In tracing the connections through which ecomuseums operate in rural China and how different actors engage in and respond to them, my dissertation offers a portrait of what can be achieved through the agency of the ecomuseum and the nuanced and complicated realities, risks, and opportunities of mediating heritage politics and rural development in China.

CHAPTER 2

CREATING WINDOWS OF CIVILIZATION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE MUSEUM IN CHINA

Museums have in the last few decades been explored as cultural agents. Studies have demonstrated how museums are not simply spaces for the gathering and preserving of objects, histories, memories, and identities, but also important actors in the construction of meaning, representations, and encounters. Although the museum from its inception has been embedded in cultural and political processes that also constitute the “exhibitionary complex” (Bennett 1995), it has only recently been explored as such. Now they have been carefully deconstructed for their pedagogical mission (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 2007; Hein 1998) and seen as social institutions with ideological functions (Duncan and Wallach 1980), appropriated for social, political, and cultural ends. Peeling back layer after layer of the institution, scholars have revealed hierarchies of value, forms of cultural production, and ideological narratives that shape the institution and its practices (Bennett 1995; MacDonald 1997; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Karp and Lavine 1991). From issues of objectification and estrangement and inclusive, exclusive, and metonymic practices to processes of nation-building and identity formation, scholars have examined the intricacies and forces embodied in the work of the political arena of the museum that not only reflect their inner workings but also society and social change as a whole (see MacDonald 1996; Coombes 1988; Sandell 1998, 2003; Newman and McLean 2006; Gable 1992; Tilley et al 2006). This chapter aims to extend this literature on museums and contribute to providing an account of the often unexplored context of China. This chapter details the evolution of the museum in China from its emergence on

Chinese soil by Western forces in the mid-nineteenth century to its transformation under Mao and most recently incorporated into a new cultural policy framed under an ideology of market reform. It provides a background to understand how the museum and processes of exhibition and practices of heritage collection and preservation in China have been been entangled in the ideological currents of existing political and social orders, now and over the past 150 years. An exploration of the museum institution offers insights into the development of the cultural field and industry in China and the processes of cultural production that shape how society understands its past and present.

This chapter explores the historical, social, and political currents that have shaped the museum in the past and today²¹. What this chapter aims to elucidate is how, in the context of China, the contemporary museum represents a reflection of social, cultural, and political transformations throughout history. I am interested in the “transformation in the arrangement of the cultural field” in China (Bennett 1995). In providing an overview of the practice of collecting during the dynastic period, and the different forms and functions of the museum since the later half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as colonial museums by Western forces, nationalist museums under the New Culture Movement and Republic Period, state museums in the Mao era, and the museum development boom and nation-wide heritage protection campaign in the post-1978 reform period, I attempt to expose how museums are embedded in social programs of control and knowledge production that work to define the nation and its citizenry. By presenting how museums have been a reflection of and relevant to the transformation of

²¹ Here I take a similar approach to Tony Bennett's (1995) *The Birth of the Museum*, Hopper-Greenhill's (1992) *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, and Sherman and Rogoff's (1994) edited volume *Museum Cultures*.

Chinese society, I provide a background to better understand how new museological practices like the ecomuseum in China are embedded in a Chinese political framework.

Today, through the development of new “modern” museum edifices and the introduction of new museological practices we can see Chinese museums' nationalist roots and conventional socialist narratives have not necessarily disappeared, but have rather been reshaped under a new cultural logic serving ideologies of neoliberalism and market reform in a modern China (Denton 2005). To take Denton's argument further, I argue that the emergence of the ecomuseum shows us that the museum is part of an expanding cultural industry and also has embraced new roles in the national strategy of rural development and poverty alleviation. It signifies an agent of social change, in its ability to refashion the practice of the museum in Chinese society, the reorientation of tangible and intangible heritage in the museum space, and impact of the museum on local populations and the expression of cultural forms and local identities.

Collecting Antiquity in Imperial China

China has had a long history of collecting and storing cultural artifacts and instruments (*guwu* or *guqi*). Forms of collection and the housing of things existed well before foreign powers entered China and introduced the notion of the museum in the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the dynastic era, holding collections, or what Clunas (1991) terms “superfluous things”, were mainly an imperial and elite class practice kept private. There were instances throughout the dynastic period where collected objects did receive public exhibition, such as after Confucius's death in 479BC, when his clothes, hats, musical instruments, and carts were exhibited in his reformer residence which was

later rebuilt as a temple for worship and making sacrifices to the great sage (Su 1995). Varutti (2010) claims that over the course of Chinese history “valued objects and artistic treasures have been subject to varying ‘regimes of visibility’: alternately protected from general view as private and personal, and then publicly exposed as emblems of cultural refinement and political authority”.

During imperial era, *guwu* represented significant aesthetic and sacred value and legitimacy for political authority. In Chinese society, only objects or material culture considered of elite nature or used for ritual and ancestral practices and worship were protected under specific dynastic social and official laws and codes such as *The Ming Code* (Haiming 2012: 46). Even more, those objects that included the written word were held in the highest degree. “A bronze *ding* (three legged vessel) or bronze drum (*tonggu*) was prized above all else if it had Chinese characters on it ... the character bestowed the value more than the bronze itself” (Pan Shouyong personal conversation; Brown 2011: 1).²² For some, such as the Emperor Huizong (r. 1101-1125), collecting *guwu* and *guqi* was not based on an innate desire of discovery or the accumulation of wealth, as emphasized in literature on Western collection practices, but a means to build social relationships and declare his cultural and political authority (Ebrey 2009). Ebrey (2009) argues that Huizong, who amassed a collection of over nine thousands objects, including books, bronzes, calligraphy and paintings in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), used antiquity

²² Chinese have long engaged in carving important texts on massive stone steles and bronzes. During the Warring State period (476-221 BC) these were referred to as “stone and bronze” inscriptions, or *Jinshi* (Brown 2003). It was during the Song dynasty that the possession of cultural and sacred antiquity was strongly associated with the examination and preservation of objects. *Jinshi* became a scholarly field similar to modern day archeology. Brown (2003) explains this as antiquarianism, “a way to understand the past through the systematic investigation of material artifacts and one-of-a-kind inscriptions” and antiquarians were seen as “guardians of China's cultural patrimony”. Fascination with antiquities also meant a reinterpretation of the past and rearticulation of objects’ worth and “authenticity” (*zhen* or *zhenshi*) as they were deemed of high value (see Clunas 1991).

to negotiate complex relationships at court while accommodating new constructions of culture; he was a political agent who not only consumed cultural objects but also had an impact on the production, circulation, and imagination of culture, thus defining culture and inscribing its value. The case of Emperor Huizong reflects the important role material culture has in the negotiation and shaping of social relations, which existed not only in the imperial era but continues up until the present day. As I will show in my ethnography of the ecomuseum in contemporary China, the “collection” it possesses and constitutes and the very culture of the museum builds relationships between people. Through practices of collecting involving processes of inclusion, exclusion, and interpretation, culture becomes tied to political ramifications and maneuvering, and caught up in political strategies, agendas, and struggles that influence relations between people, and how they imagine themselves, others, and the idea of nation.

The Emergence of the Museum at the Turn of the 20th Century

Although active collecting and the study of antiquity to understand the past and the value of material culture has existed for over 1000 years in China, it was not until the colonization of China by Western powers in the mid-late 1800s and after the fall of the Qing dynasty that cultural objects were seen through “scientific” (*kexue*) anthropological and archeological lens as forms of curiosity and spectacle to be housed and displayed for public viewing. Since that time, collections and the exhibition of material culture has become a means to preserve the past, to educate the citizenry, and to define and strengthen the Chinese nation.

Colonial Museums

The “museum” was first introduced in China in the middle of the nineteenth century. France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the United States entered China after the Opium War of 1840 and semi-colonized the nation with the British. Forced openness to foreign powers did not only result in forms of resource exploitation but also interaction with Western ideological trends, values, and technologies. Similar to other colonies of the early nineteenth century, one way foreign powers put their stamp of dominance in the relatively unexplored county of China was through the establishment of museums.²³ At the same time they were a modern strategy to signify progress and the hierarchy of nations (Qin 2004), colonial museums “served to provide Westerners in the Far East with a platform from which to conduct research into natural history or ethnology” (Chang 2012). Museums across China, for example, the Zhendan Museum (also known as the Musee Heude) in Shanghai established in 1868 by the French, the Shanghai Museum established in 1874 by the Royal Asiatic Society, the Jinan Museum established in Shandong by the British in 1904, and the West China Union University Museum of Art, Archeology, and Ethnology established in 1914 in Sichuan by the United States (Su 1995; Fitzgerald 1996), marked a new lens to view Chinese culture - as both ethnographic and “high art” - and a dismantling of Chinese old ethical order and redressing of notions of what constituted historical progress through Western forms of exhibition and collection (Fitzgerald 1996: 51). While this was not the first time China had witnessed the use of culture for purposes of cultural governance, the museum represented a new, effective way of establishing a new social and political order through a public institution (Qin 2004).

²³ Examples include India's Calcutta Museum South African Museum established by the British in 1814 and 1825, respectively, and Brazil's National Museum founded by the Portuguese in 1818.

The late Qing dynasty and turn of the 20th century was a time of conjuncture of Chinese and Western thought and values. This was not only as a result of the colonial era but also the influence of Chinese intellectuals' actively learning in and from the West. Karl and Zarrow (2002: 6) explain this as a period of historical confrontation as China moved from “a disintegrating particularistic dynastic order toward a globalized national future that was deeply constrained by the imperialist context of capitalist expansionism”. The introduction of new institutional, cultural, political, and economic practices in China at this time defined such social transformations. The application of the exhibition and museum is one such current that demonstrated China's effort to remake its image on the global scene and establish a new domestic social and political order at the end of the dynastic era (see Qin 2004).

Exposure to “colonial museums” (Claypool 2005) and international expositions²⁴ introduced Chinese to new techniques of exhibition and display that mobilized a new “exhibitionary culture” (Fernsebner 2006: 103). The Chinese were also learning Western approaches of science and its application for exhibition not only for art and archeological artifacts (*wu*) but also natural specimens (*qi*). It was at this time that the museum was understood as an institution for the scientific study of things (*bowu*),²⁵ and placement of

²⁴ Interest in engaging with global “modern” nations led to China’s participation in multiple exhibitionary events like the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle, and the Nanyang Exposition of 1910. Fernsebner (2006: 101) defines as a time of “activism in the realm of the exhibition” in which China “displayed—materially and rhetorically—the imaginings of both a national and global order” (Fernsebner 2006: 101) and was central to a specific “national cause: global competition and survival”. National and regional fairs held in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Wuhan in the early 1900s also offered Chinese citizenry the ability to encounter the display of large collections.

²⁵ Claypool (2005: 575) notes that advancing science played an important role in attempting to articulate the superiority of 'science' and expose Chinese “false theories of religion and ethics; false theories of physics and metaphysics; false theories of domestic and international government”, according to Reverend E. C. Bridgman, president of the Royal Asiatic Society.

cultural and natural objects within the museum space denoted a scientific value (see Claypool 2005).

Chinese Definitions of Museum

The Chinese term *bowuguan*, or museum, originated from Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. Although terminology for this institutional space, or built entity (*guan*), made its way to China at this time mainly from Chinese intellectuals studying in Japan, the word *bowu*, combining the two words “extensive” (*bo*) and “thing” (*wu*), was seen in Chinese texts much earlier. “The term ‘*bowu*’ originally meant ‘having a fine understanding of the reasons for things’” (Chang 2012: 17).²⁶ Prior to the emergence of the term museum in China, institutions and organizations housing things were referred to by the objects they contained, such as *jigulou* (bone amassing buildings), *wanzhongyuan* (gardens of everything), *huage* (painting pavilions), *jibaoyuan* (courtyards of treasures), and *junqilou* (military equipment buildings) recorded by observers Bin Zhuang and Zhang Deyi (Chang 2012: 16). Later, as such sites became recognized as store houses for collection, display, and inquiry, the term “museum” (*bowuguan*) began to take hold. In

²⁶ Chang (2012: 17) highlights the early uses of the term: The ‘*bowu junzi*’ of the *Chunqiu Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo Qiuming’s Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals, date unknown, probably around the fifth century BC) and the *Shiji* (Historical Records) of Sima Qian (145-86 BC), is someone who has a fine understanding of the reasons for things. The *Bowuzhi* (literally ‘records of extensive things’ or as it were, Records of Myriad Things), by Zhang Hua (232-300) of the Western Jin (266-316), is the first book to use ‘*bowu*’ in its title (Chen 1992: 5). The ‘*bowu zhi shi*’ (personages of extensive things), first mentioned by Zhang Hua in this text, referred to figures with extensive knowledge of astronomy, geography and other fantastic things. This implication of having seen and heard much continued to be used in subsequent periods; in *Xu Bowuzhi* (Continued Records of Myriad Things) by Li Shi (1108-1181) of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), *Guang Bowuzhi* (Records of Things Broad and Extensive), and *Bowu Yaolan* (Myriad Things to be Viewed) by Dong Si-zhang (1587-1628) and Gu Ying-tai (1620- 1690), respectively, of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

China, the etymology of the term museum (*bowuguan*) is understood as a “hall for the study of things” or “house of extensive things”. Thus, there is an emphasis on both the notion of “knowledge” and “objects”, as a physical space for research and knowledge production and dissemination and object preservation.²⁷

The Nantong Museum: the First Chinese Established Museum

Appropriation of the “museum” concept and scientific approach to the collection, display, and study of things by the Chinese is seen to have culminated in the establishment of the first Chinese museum in Nantong in 1905 by Zhang Jian. With its elaborate collection of classified plants situated around the building of stored artifacts and natural specimens, Nantong Museum was called a *bowuyuan*, or a “garden” for the study of things.²⁸ For the intellectual and entrepreneur Zhang Jian, the museum was a learning space for the dissemination of knowledge similar to a school, possessing both a pedagogical and patriotic mission (Claypool 2005: 576). Nantong Museum not only represented was the appropriation of Western museological practices of exhibition and “scientific” discovery and knowledge, but also a means to integrate China's patrimony into the public institution through political processes of representation and cultural production. This involved making sense of society and nature through the ordering of things, such as the placement of objects into collections categories as nature (animals, plants, minerals), history (epigraphs, chariots, robes, and ritual), and art (calligraphy,

²⁷ The physical space associated with the term *bowuguan* is very much intact in contemporary China and in sites where ecomuseums (*shengtai bowuguan*) have been established, the physically associated with the museum creates significant limitations to the possibilities of ecomuseum work.

²⁸ The *yuan* for the Nantong Museum was different than “the homophone *yuan*, which was used at the time by local, British, and Jesuits in the compound for “museum” and in modern Chinese as well meaning “academy” (Claypool 2005).

painting, carvings, embroidery, lacquerware, earthenware figurines, ceramics and porcelain). Those things placed in the museum became symbols of the China's diverse cultures and environment and transmitters of a Chinese 'collective' memory and a collective 'us'. The Nantong Museums, reflected "the rise of a culture in China that focused on collecting and showing achievements that represented the new and modern, with the purposes of targeting the public and remaking China's national image" (Qin 2004: 689).

National Awakening and Saving the Nation

With the faltering of the Qing dynasty political order at the beginning of the 20th century, came close scrutiny of the history of the nation under Western control and its future direction. Guided by the reformers Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei, a "self-strengthening" reform movement grew in China. Like other reformers and intellectuals of the early 1900s, they called for greater national consciousness, or a "national awakening", and a rethinking of the political and social structure of the state and its associated institutions to further the progress of the Chinese nation. Fitzgerald (1996: 48) explains this period:

As each defeat invited close reflection on the incapacity of the old order to defend the realm, the idea of a national awakening promised a day of historical redemption when the county would finally shake off the shackles of foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism and stand wealthy, strong, and proud as an independent state. It was not historians but China's reforms and revolutionaries who first telescoped the history of national defeat and progressive reform into a simple schema of historical progress punctuated by awakenings of one kind and another .

Chinese advocates for change began to search for Chinese origins to fashion a new Chinese nation and national consciousness within the political order. Under this reform movement the museum became embedded into the national politics.

Museums became an important instrument to redefine Chinese culture and knowledge under the nationalist campaign. Early reformist thinkers came to understand the museum as a tool to enhance public knowledge, educate the public, and most important to help “save the nation” (see Claypool 2005; Varutti 2010). At the turn of century, “collected culture was no longer understood through concepts of aesthetics or antiquity, comprised of symbolic objects, with magic and cosmological properties, whose possession entailed possession of political power” , but rather as a symbol of the Chinese nation (Hamlish 1995: 20). Furthermore, the museum was perceived as a protector of culture and history, that had come under threat from Western intrusion (Claypool 2005). As a public storehouse for China’s cultural patrimony, the museum acted as the embodiment of Chinese identity and site for the perpetuation and preservation of Chinese culture. Under a new nationalist sentiment, the museum became an integral part of constructing the modern Chinese nation (Hamlish 1995: 22).

Interpreting Folklore in the early 20th Century

An important shift in museological practices and forms of collection at this time came from a New Cultural Movement (*xin wenhua yundong*) that “swept along every educated Chinese” (Richter 1983: 355-6). The movement imbued the nation with a sense of responsibility for future progress and the critical questioning of the old and current social and political order. As Western thought and trends of science and democracy

became more popular alongside an awareness of the need to protect the nation's heritage, issues over interpretations of the past and patrimony and its preservation came under heated debate. While many reformers focused on political activism to establish a new political order, Chinese academics, such as historians Hu Shi and his student Gu Jiegang, focused more on “cultural reconstruction” and efforts to “reorganize the nation's past” through academic study. Known as “antiquity doubters” (*yigupai*), they were adamantly skeptical of the asserted authenticity of ancient Chinese texts and “questioned the veracity of the received narrative of early Chinese history” (Liu and Chen 2012: 3). This resulted in a new interest in vernacular literature, and the exploration of Chinese folklore as a missing component to studies on Chinese history and society.²⁹

Scholars argued that past scholarship ignored the major portion of the population - the common people - and only promoted the culture of the ruling classes. Twentieth-century folklorists aimed to right this wrong through research on the literature and customs of the common people (Tuohy 1991: 195). The growing interest in studying folk traditions presented a new medium to explore and recognize the diversity of Chinese culture and to understand the persistence of the past and the continuity of traditions vital for promoting a Chinese collective memory and identity, and greater national consciousness. For Chinese nationalists, folklore was perceived as a natural product of the common people that have developed over time without “outside” influence (Tuohy 1991) and as such must be identified, recorded, and conserved under the rhetoric of cultural survival. What ensued was a rise in the study of folk culture (*minsu xue*) across

²⁹ Gu Jiegang saw folklore as one way to fill the gap in studies on Chinese history while other scholars focused more specifically on the study of folk songs. As Richter (1983) states, Gu's interest in folklore was less about the political motives of “building the nation” and more on the personal aspirations of building evidence for his historical skepticism.

China and the establishment of folk song, literature, and art centers.³⁰ What folklore studies brought to China was a new focus on common people's cultural practices, rather than elitist cultural forms, and also a new medium to display a “Chinese nation”.

Museums, Marxism, and Mao

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 brought another shift in ways of defining the nation and articulations of Chinese culture through display. After liberation, public cultural exhibitionary and educational spaces like museums, libraries, and schools became completely state-led and the Chinese state became the steward of culture. Socialist narratives quickly entered and shaped every institutional form. Under a grand state communist ideology, museums institutions served a social function and were imbued a pedagogical mission to declare a unified yet diverse nation of cultures centered on a revolutionary government-approved vision of Chinese identity and history (Varutti (2010).

The Chinese government attached great importance to museum development as it was seen as a public space to educate the masses and to legitimize ideological tenets under the Communist Party. The museum was tied to the national political project of “political indoctrination, patriotic education and the dissemination of Communist ideology” (Varutti 2010: 752). This was made undeniably clear by the head of the

³⁰ Influenced greatly by his work with Japanese folklorists, Zhou Zuoren, for example, established a center for the study of folk songs at Peking University in 1918, which later changed into the Society for Folk Songs and led to the publication of *Folksongs Weekly* (*geyao zhoukan*). Later with other scholars in the mid-1920s, Zhou developed the discipline of folklore studies (*minsuxue*) and Society for Folklore at Sun Yat-sen University and started the publication *Folk Literature and Art* (*minjian wenyi*) which later became *Folklore* (*minsuo*) including work on folk literature, customs, and common beliefs (Liu 2010: 192).

Ministry of Culture in 1951 who announced that: “The entire responsibility of museum endeavors is to promote the patriotic education of the revolution, and therefore the museum must educate the people to know more about their history and culture, so that they will love their country wholeheartedly while promoting political determination and the passion for the economic production” (Kim 2011: 2).

In 1956, a National Museum Conference was held in Beijing giving way to a new theoretical definition of the museum in China, establishing three key features and two main tasks of the institution (Su 2008:122):

- Museums are a kind of scientific institution;
 - Museums are a kind of educational institution;
 - Museums are centers for collecting material, spiritual remains and natural specimens.
-
- Museums serve for scientific issues;
 - Museums serve for the population at large.

Later, during his visit to Anhui in 1958, Mao Zedong adamantly highlighted the importance of museums' role in society, stating that: “Every provincial city should have such a museum. It is extremely important for people to understand their own history and the power of creation” (*yige sheng de zhuyao chengshi dou yinggai you zheyang de bowuguan. Renmin renshi ziji de lishi he chuangzao de liliang, shi yijian hen yaojin de shi*) (Zhang 2006: 3). With Mao’s words the country saw a rise in the number of government sponsored museums, reaching 72 by 1957.³¹ China also witnessed the creation of national museums such as the China National History Museum, the Chinese Revolution Museum, and the Cultural Palace for Nationalities.

³¹ Only 21 museums existed nation-wide after the Sino-Japanese War and World War II (An 2001).

The Soviet Foundation: Marxist-Leninist Thought

Under Mao, museology was formed on a new foundation from the Soviet Union museum development approach. A generation of Chinese scholars such as Lu Jimin went to the Soviet Union to study approaches to museums.³² Beijing scholars Wang Yeqiu, Han Shouxuan, Wang Zhenduo, Fu Zhenlun and others began to conduct courses on museum studies and with their students compiled the volume *An Introduction to Museum Studies* in 1957 (Su 1995). The text importantly reflected a new phase in the evolution of museums and museum studies in China, presenting a rather “parochial theory” of museology, “stamped with political ideology” of the times. Museums for the first time were established on the basis on a Marxist-Leninist platform belonging to the super-structure of society, and closely adhered to the official ideology of the state (Varutti 2010: 325; Wang 2001: 3). They functioned as important ideological apparatuses and material evidence to advance Marxism-Leninism (Varutti 2010: 325; An 2001).³³

At the same time museums were coming under state stewardship, so was cultural heritage itself. In 1961, the Chinese government initiated a new policy called the *Temporary Regulations on Cultural Relics Protection and Management* that for the first time declared official state regulation on cultural relics preservation. It detailed five categories of “cultural relics” ranging from historical structures and archeological sites to physical artifacts and documents. It highlighted cultural relics importance to a new China

³² Lu Jimin was one of the first to study museums in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. He was one of the main proponents of museum studies during the Mao era and later became secretary of the Ministry of Culture, director of Cultural Relics Bureau, and director of the Palace Museum. After returning to China he wrote several seminal works to introduce China to concepts, theories, and practices of museums. His book, *China Museums Practice and Theory (Zhongguo Bowuguan Shilun)* became a kind of “dictionary of museum studies” on the foundation of Soviet Union museum studies approaches for Chinese scholars and students.

³³ Museum exhibitions were based on historical materialism, depicting specific periodic stages of the nation's development and “progress”, and on the scientific value of objects (Varutti 2008; An 2001).

through their association with the “revolution” and “scientific value”. Later in 1982, in a post-Mao China, this regulation was redrafted as the *Law on Protection of Cultural Relics*.³⁴

The Ethnic Minority Discourse and Minzu Museums

In the 1953 the Chinese Communist Party launched the ethnic nationalities identification program (*minzu shibie*) to survey, register, and classify the diverse ethnic groups living across the country. Borrowing from its close geographical and Communist neighbor, China employed a Stalin's four criteria to define what constituted an “ethnic nationality” based on common territory, language, economy and psychological nature (Harrell 1995: 23). “Consistently, Marxist-Leninist theories of social evolution (drawing from Lewis H. Morgan (1885 [1877]) were applied to classify ethnic groups according to their proscribed “stage of development” (Harrell 1995). This system of classification provided a deemed “scientific” basis for historical materialism and the ensuing process of hierarchization of ethnic groups – a process essentially political rather than scientific” - leading to a scaling of ethnicity according to a degree of being 'modern' or closeness to the “vanguard” Han majority (Varutti 2010; see also Blum 2001; Gladney 1994; Harrell 1995). With the classification of 55 official ethnic minority nationalities and the Han ethnic nationality, China was defined as a multinational, under a slogan of diversity in unity (with the Han constituting over 90% of the population).³⁵

³⁴ Chang (2012: 61) states, that the changes to the policy in 1982, and revised in 2002, in adding new items to be considered as cultural relics and the dropping of the term “revolution” from the list of historical documents “indicated that the revolutionary discourse was weakened as the whole nation moved its focus from class conflict toward economic development”.

³⁵ Gladney claims the Han ethnic group is a modern invention established under Sun Yatsen and further fixed under Mao.

Ethnicity was brought into the museum space as a place to define ethnicity and at the same time fix ethnic and cultural classifications, promote principles of historical materialism, and legitimize notions of a unified nation of ethnic, cultural diversity. While museums showcased aspects of ethnic cultures in China before liberation, such as the Western China University Museum at Sichuan University established in 1917 as well as in parts of the Central Museum of China in Nanjing (*Zhongyang Bowuyuan*), it was only under Mao that the first *minzu* museums were developed. Work under the ethnic identification program aided in the collection of material culture of ethnic minorities which were used for the main collections of the first two *minzu* museums, the Museum of the Central University for Nationalities (*zhongyang minzu daxue*) and the Cultural Palace of Nationalities (*wenhua minzu gong*) (Kim 2011).

In the process of integrating ethnic minorities into the new China under Mao, according to Hung (2012: 577),

“nothing that the Party-state did to affirm the presence of the minorities was symbolically more important than erecting a grand building dedicated to them in the nation’s capital [of Beijing]. Such a structure would enhance the status of the minorities, affirm their rightful place as fully-fledged, not marginal, members of the nation, and, most importantly, from the standpoint of officials, demonstrate the government’s genuine concern for their well-being”.

In terms of representing an exhibitionary complex of the state in its ability to frame ethnic identities under a univocal socialist narrative, the Cultural Palace for Nationalities, in particular, is seen to represent the model for *minzu* museums and *minzu* representations in China, emphasizing the key terms unity (*tuanjie*), diversity (*duoyangxing*), and progress (*jinbu*). Like other museums established during the Mao era and even today,

“the Palace [has] served multiple purposes as a museum, an exhibition center, a symbol and an official propaganda platform for the Party-state” (Hung 2012).³⁶

One way to understand semiotic and semantic practices of the *minzu* museum in framing representations of ethnicity and cultural difference under a Marxist-Leninist discourse is through the common display technique of “featureless standardized mannequins”, as explored by Varutti (2010: 328-9), and application of ordering ethnic representation into apolitical exhibition categories of costumes and textiles, musical instruments, everyday tools, and ritual objects, which are deemed as safe and non-threatening to the centrality of the Han Chinese cultural system (Varutti 2010). The use of mannequins donning colorful and distinct ethnic minority dress highlight cultural difference and impart uniformity of a homogeneous Chinese ethnic “other” (Varutti 2010: 328-9). The role of *minzu* museums as sites for constructing and disseminating images of the ethnic “other” and the strategies through which culture and ethnicity is drawn into political narratives and institutionalized as a government assemblage has persisted to the present day and can be found to extend beyond the traditional *minzu* museum space to include ethnic theme parks, cultural destinations, and local community museums.

While ethnicity was an expression of cultural difference and diversity of the nation, folk culture (*minsu wenhua*) was associated with a long and continuous Chinese civilization, a common Chinese cultural identity, and an important part of imagining China as a “cultural and historical entity” (Tuohy 1991: 196). Drawing on the work of Handler (1988), Tuohy (1991: 196) explains that China's perception and formulation of a

³⁶ When [the Cultural Palace] was built, it included three distinct divisions: the museum (the name was changed to the “exhibition hall” in 1978 and again to “museum” in 1997), the library, and the *wenwuguan* (cultural entertainment hall) (Kim 2011: 6).

national cultural heritage has been tied to ideological narratives of boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity. Although folk culture came to be closely associated with the culture of the Han majority, distinct from ethnic minority culture, the Chinese government often employed the notion of folk culture to create the metaphor of a family [“of fifty-six brother nationalities”] to illustrate how ethnic group as members of a large family contribute their strengths to the nation and form a Chinese civilization (Tuohy 1991: 198). Thus, as museum displays of ethnic minorities depicted notions of “us” and “them”, folk culture came to transcend difference to point to a unified nation with a “common” heritage.

Cultural protection, research, and display was closely sanctioned during the Mao era. Only those things that represented “good attributes” of the nation under a socialist ideology and thought to strengthen the new social and political order were celebrated and protected. Svensson (2006), for example, writes that “heritage of so-called class enemies, capitalists, landlords, and religious groups were destroyed, desecrated, and forgotten after 1949, or else it was reinterpreted and rewritten through an ideological and political lens as feudal, backward, and superstitious, and thus not worthy of preservation, while the revolutionary heritage, on the other hand, was celebrated and privileged”. “Destroy the old to make way for the new” (*pojiu lixin*) became a rhetorical catch phrase as the Chinese government tried to construct a new socialist structure. Museums, as storehouses of a selected and reinterpreted past and sanctuaries for the revolutionary present, played a key role in this process of nation-building and the legitimization of state authority.

Post-1978 Reform Era and “Opening Up” the Heritage Discourse

Cultural Revival in the Wake of the Cultural Revolution

From 1967 to 1976, the Chinese government policy shifted from “unity through diversity” to “unity through uniformity”. Chou Lin, the Guizhou Provincial First Party Secretary during this time explained this process as, “The fewer the differences among the peoples, the faster the development can be” (Ma 1994: 56). This was the premise of the Cultural Revolution, which called for an attack on cultural diversity and political reactionaries. The government pressed for forcing political, economic, and cultural assimilation fueled by an underlying principle of “advancing together to build a socialist society” (Moseley 1965: 23). Specifically, ethnic and cultural customs and traditions were seen as impediments to social and economic progress (Dreyer 1976: 160). Ethnic minority languages, traditional rituals, dress, and festivals were viewed as obstacles to minorities’ personal development, and to the development of the nation as a whole. This was a period of cultural suppression involving the ban of the “Four Olds” (*sijiu*) - old ideas, culture, customs, and habits. Ethnic minority culture was heavily suppressed and ethnic communities were prohibited to wear ethnic dress and engage in festivals, traditional customs, and deemed “superstitions” (*mixin*) ritual and religious practices, and forced to embrace a Han Chinese culture (Dreyer 1976). The Red Guard, organized under the People's Liberation Army, worked to rid China of all objects and manifestations of the “old civilization”. Their aim was to “destroy the old civilization in order to establish the new civilization” built on a “proletarian class nature” (Elegant 1971). Museum activities, like many public institutions at this time, were closed as their historical relics and

material culture were considered to be behind the times and reactionary and associated with elitism and the old China (Su 1995).

After the fall of the Mao regime, China under Deng Xiaoping changed courses and established a new order based on economic reconstruction in 1978. In the wake of the destruction caused by the Cultural Revolution, China experienced a radical shift to “open up and reform” (*gaige kaifa*). The government pressed for cultural revitalization, the celebration of cultures, and a dramatic response to the degradation of cultural institutions. Starting at The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in December 1978, there was made a definitive call for modernization stressing efforts “to develop a rich and varied cultural life, and to construct a high level of socialist spiritual civilization; under those prerequisites (presuppositions), ethnology, folklore, sociology, anthropology, and so on flourished within a short period of time” (Tang and Peng 1988: 3-4). With proclamations to celebrate China’s cultural diversity came a campaign of cultural revival. Ethnic minority cultures and traditional Han Chinese customs were no longer suppressed as they were under Mao and new forms of cultural expression and exhibition began to reemerge and were identified as important to the nation’s cultural patrimony as they were integrated into reinstated public institutions like the museum, which gradually moved away from their former revolutionary and political struggle mission.

Su Donghai (1995) states that the development of museums and promotion of safeguarding China’s cultural patrimony was so important to the mission of the new China that it was even incorporated in the Five-year Plan for National Economic and

Social Development and the Constitution of 1982 (<http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>):

The state promotes the development of literature and art, the press, broadcasting and television undertakings, publishing and distribution services, libraries, museums, cultural centres and other cultural undertakings, that serve the people and socialism, and sponsors mass cultural activities. The state protects places of scenic and historical interest, valuable cultural monuments and relics and other important items of China's historical and cultural heritage.

The year 1982 also marked the year of promulgating the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics*, which set out clear principles for tangible and immovable heritage preservation, and marked the importance of the museum as a storehouse and preservation mechanism for the nation's patrimony.

Focus on the revival of folklore and ethnic minority cultural practices came with the Chinese state acknowledging the importance of the preservation of cultural customs and traditions to rebuild the nation. A national survey of folklore also ensued and the discipline of folklore studies and folklore research societies were established in most universities across the country. The museum reemerged as an important apparatus to display and celebrate cultural diversity and protect material culture and relics of different cultures and times (see Figure 3). At the same time as proclaiming the recognition of cultural traditions and difference through their display, *minzu* museums and exhibitions continued to act as mechanisms to fix assumptions about ethnic minorities and inform the public's (including ethnic minority peoples themselves) imagery about ethnicity and cultural difference through acts of inclusion, exclusion, remembering, and forgetting (see Varutti 2010). *Minzu* museums, however, employed different exhibitionary narratives to situate ethnic cultural forms as “art”, “relics of a vanishing culture”, and representative of the “cultural richness of the Chinese nation” (Varutti 2008, 2010, 2011). In the post-Mao

reform era, the establishment of *minzu* museums and exhibitions on ethnic culture began to increase in number and did not only reflect a state cultural policy but also narratives informed by the ideology of market reform.³⁷ Such museums began to engage a process of “folklorisation” (Varutti 2008) that highlights superficial, exotic, and spectacular cultural symbols of ethnic difference specifically for purposes of commercialization and tourism as political agendas of national consolidation and containment continue to exist.



Figure 5. The website banner to the Chinese National Museum of Ethnology, est. 1995. The image suggests the celebration ethnic diversity of a “unified” of China (http://www.cnmuseum.com/web/c_00000013/)

China Under a New Nationalist Discourse

No longer was the past seen as a hindrance to progress. Rather, the past was claimed as the cultural roots from which a new “civilized nation” (*wenming guojia*) would grow in a new modern China. Museums continued to serve to legitimize the authority of the regime (Lu 1998; Denton 2005). Yet, under Deng they were used to bring China out of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and restore the image of the nation. The revamping of exhibitions in the 1980s was “[c]onsistent with the ideological values of the Deng regime...to “seek truth through facts” and restore a “scientific” representation of the past,

³⁷ There are only seven *minzu* museums across China's autonomous regions, municipalities, and 33 provinces (Pan 2008). However, Pan (2008) shows, by drawing on a 2008 report by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission that the overall number of museums in ethnic minority regions has reached 286 and those affiliated with the State Ethnic Affairs Commission is 163.

in contrast to the distortions and misrepresentations of the Cultural Revolution” (Denton 2005: 568). Under “new ideological foundation in nationalist discourse” emerging in China in the post-Mao reform era (Varutti 2010), museums and cultural patrimony became an important tool to strengthen narratives on national pride, cultural prestige, and a national identity as well as the cultivation of a “civilized” citizenry (see Lu 1998; Wang 2001). Museums became an integral part of a new “culture fever” (*wenhua re*) (Lin and Galikowski 1999: 54; Pohl 2008: 93; Wang 1996) to identify, collect, and protect all that represented symbols of the Chinese civilization, ranging from historical artifacts and immovable sites to cultural landscapes and most recently, intangible cultural heritage. Chinese history and heritage was reevaluated and exhibitions reconfigured under this new nationalist, civilizing discourse.

After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Propaganda Department issued a “Circular on Fully Using Cultural Relics to Conduct Education in Patriotism and Revolutionary Traditions” in 1991. This was an important initiative implemented across China to use patrimony and the institution of the museum to promote “pragmatic patriotism” (“pragmatic nationalism”). It was followed in 1994 by the a state issued “Guidelines for Patriotic Education” which shifted education curriculum and examinations from Marxist political thought to patriotic education and emphasized “boosting the nation’s spirit, enhancing its cohesion, fostering its self-esteem and sense of pride, consolidating and developing a patriotic united front to the broadest extent possible, and directing and rallying the masses’ patriotic passions to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics [and] helping the motherland become unified, prosperous and strong” (Zhao 2004: 219). Museums were put on the

front line of this pragmatic patriotism initiative. Combined with a market reform and the opening up policy, new targets were set to increase the total number of museums nation-wide and thus China began to experience rapid museum development (Vickers 2007: 369).

The Discipline of Museology in China

The museum studies also “opened up” in post-1978 China and became a formal academic discipline. In 1980, Nankai University, Fudan University, Shanghai University, and Hangzhou University became the front runners for establishing the major of museology and graduating the first group of Chinese museologists who would later help define museological practices and theories in contemporary China³⁸.

Post-1978 reform period became an important time for expanding the field of museum studies and professional exchange and collaboration. The Chinese Society of Museums (CSM) held its first symposium in May 1982 to bring together scholars from across the country to promote museology at a national scale³⁹. Soon “nationwide activities in museum and museological research [were] strongly promoted and museum societies and groups were established across all provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions and museum symposiums were held several times a year (Su 1995; An 2001). In the early 1980s, many Chinese scholars turned to the West to explore

³⁸ An Laishun, one of the main proponents of the ecomuseum movement in China and head coordinatory of the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum program was one of the first graduate from Nankai University’s museum studies program.

³⁹ The Chinese Society of Museums was actually established back in 1935 by Ma Heng, director of the Palace Museum, Yuan Tongli director of both the Peking Library and Palace Museum Library, and members of the preparatory committee for the Central Museum. This group of scholars developed the Society’s leading principles and aims for “academic research of museums, undertaking museum development, and to plan museum mutual assistance” (Su 1995).

strategies for economic and social development and political reform. This engagement with the “global” was not only in terms of economic restructuring through market liberalization and global capitalism, but also the exploration of foreign theoretical and practical approaches. An Laishun, a leading expert in new museology in China, explained to me that in the 1980s Chinese scholars began to experience a “fever” and “sensitivity” to new (*xinxian*) international museum and social science trends that brought understanding to new approaches and the development of Western museum techniques and approaches to China (personal conversation 2011). Many scholars recognize the adoption of such approaches and practices as an important shift in museology in China as the initial phase of “internationalization” (An 2001). A proliferation of academic and professional journals on museum studies began to emerge disseminating scholarship on the museology of China and the world⁴⁰. Seminal texts such as National Cultural Relics Bureau’s (1985) *The Introduction to Chinese Museums*, Wang HongJun’s (1986) *Foundation of Chinese Museology*, and Lu Jimin’s (n.d.) *China Encyclopedia: Museum Volume* marked the foundation of a growing openness and understanding of the complexities of museums, which greatly impacted the academic community. China's engagement with ICOM after it became an active member in 1983, also had a significant impact on the 'internationalization' of Chinese museology thought. Chinese scholars became increasingly active in collaborating with ICOM, establishing China’s own ICOM committee organization, attending international conferences, and hosting symposiums in the 1990s and the massive Annual ICOM Meeting in Shanghai in 2011.

⁴⁰ The Chinese Society of Museums launched the quarterly *Chinese Museums* journal in 1984 and later *The Museum Newsletter* and Jilin Province Institute published its own journal focusing on translating seminal foreign works on museums into Chinese.

Museum Development Boom: Redefining the Institution

Over the last three decades, the number of museums in China has risen at an unprecedented rate. With just over 300 museums in 1978 the number grew to 1,392 by 2000 and jumped to 3,020 by 2009 and most recently reached 3,589 in late 2011 (Kim 2011; Szántó 2010). Where Su Donghai claims ten museums were established every ten days between 1980 to 1985, since 2011 more than one museum has been built every day. What has led to this dramatic rise in museum construction? What new forms of museums do we see today? How has the museum been redefined within this new era of museum rapid construction? How has the museum development boom altered the museums role in Chinese society? The museum development boom in China is linked to China's recent rise in wealth, massive urban and rural development strategies, growth of the heritage tourism industry, and collaboration with the global community linked to the adoption of foreign discourses.

China's push for museum development nation-wide is tied to building a modern nation-state. Museums represent a monument of modernity and perception of a "civilized" nation. Dellios (2002: 1-2) states, [m]useums are deemed to play important roles in 'national development' and 'socio-economic development'", drawing on the declaration of the Directory of Museums and Living Display, which states ... developing countries will make great sacrifices in order to have museums.... To have no museums, in today's circumstances, is to admit that one is below the minimum level of civilization required of a modern state (Hudson and Nicholls 1985: x). As Dellios (2002: 2) argues, "the assumption is that the more museums a nation possesses, the more 'civilised' or

'developed' it is". The Chinese have appropriated this notion and pushed for nation-wide museum development as an effort to not only proclaim national development and progress and creating an active, "educated" citizenry, but also to measure themselves against a European-American yardstick; in the modern Chinese way, to try to one up the West in possessing the most museums in the world.⁴¹

This point is also pertinent to China's effort to extend its soft power. Besides soft power aspects of diplomacy and trade incentives which China has extended to much of the globe, especially ASEAN⁴² and the European Union, it has worked to develop a soft cultural power through aspects of cultural and education exchanges, international collaboration on cultural projects, and the growth of a heritage movement. This is seen, for example, through the building of Confucian Institutes in 350 universities world-wide, hosting the 2008 Olympics and 2010 World Expo, and working with international organizations like the United Nations, World Bank, UNESCO, and ICOM. With the nation now reaching a level of wealth and modernization, focus has turned to include culture in the national strategy. In his 2007 keynote speech to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Hu Jintao brought to the attention of many Chinese the need to enhance Chinese culture as the country's "soft power". Many Chinese leaders would agree with Peking University professor Guo Jianyu, who has recently published a new book on the topic, that: "History and reality both attest to the fact that the rise of great nations is not only an economic phenomenon but also a cultural

⁴¹ As a rising power, there is a common theme in contemporary China to be number one in the world in a variety of things, such as tallest building, most grand Olympics, and most museums.

⁴² Although many would debate China's exertion of power has in fact negatively impacted its diplomatic ties, especially in the South China Sea, i.e. the acquisition of islands claimed by Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines and of course Taiwan itself.

phenomenon. It's not just about economic development; it's also about cultural prosperity" (Bandurski 2012). China has recognized that culture as an asset and the effort to build a "cultural industry" (*wenhua changye*) is now more important than ever before.

Two articles in the People's Daily (Bandurski 2012) for example state:

Building a socialist cultural power is a necessary task in the enhancement of our country's comprehensive national strength (*zonghe guoli*) and the protection of our national cultural security (*guojia wenhua anquan*). It is also an objective need in satisfying the people's cultural demands (*qingshen wenhua xuqiu*) and preserving the people's cultural rights and interests.

Without culture to guide the way, without the great richness of a people's spiritual world, without bringing the spiritual strength of the whole nation into play, a country and a people cannot possibly stand strong in the forest of nations.

Furthermore, underlying the soft cultural power effort is a nationalist sentiment to reject and alleviate the "hostile" assault of Western soft power of culture and ideology. Domestically, strengthening soft power is seen to promote a heightened sense of identity (*rentong*), cultural consciousness (*wenhua zijue*) and cultural confidence (*wenhua zixin*) among Chinese (Bandurski 2012). This is highlighted in Hu Jintao's 2007 speech and most recently stressed by China's new president Xi Jinping and is seen clearly in the Minister of Culture Sun Jianzheng promoted slogan, "Culture is so important; culture is like the calling card of a country; culture is the spirit of a nation" (Pollack 2008).

China has, in a short time, according to David Shambaugh, "managed significantly to increase its "cultural footprint" overseas" (The Atlantic 2012)⁴³. In many ways, from 'Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon' to Nobel Prize Laureates Gao Xianjing, Liu Xiaobo, and Mo Yan, China's "traditional culture has entered the realm of global popular culture"

⁴³ Yet, considering China has only recently begun this soft power push, its global image as an awakening dragon seeing rapid modernization yet tied to Communist ideology, and growing tensions with other Asian nations in territorial disputes and diplomacy issues with Western nations, Shambaugh rightfully claims, "[China's] global image is mixed at best" (The Atlantic 2012).

(Nye 2005). Soft power and the policy on cultural nationalism is what makes domestic efforts like museum development and the heritage industry so important. They not only represent a symbol of modernity and advancement of the civilization as well as a heightened sense of dignity as part of contemporary modern society, but also show to the international community that China cares about promoting cultural diversity, has engaged in the “humanitarian” effort of protecting cultural patrimony, and has worked to share it with the world. China supports this cause so much so that the government has sponsored thousands of multimillion dollar cultural institutions to house, exhibit, and preserve Chinese culture and that also aim to meet international standards. Within the last decades, museums and heritage projects have already seen potential in being used as soft power to build a positive image of China at home and abroad, through international heritage festivals, traveling worldwide heritage shows, traveling museum exhibits, the establishment of Heritage Day and Museum Day holidays, and welcoming growing collaboration on museum exchanges and regional heritage protection projects.

Modern State-run Museums

An important part of the museum development boom in China is the diversity of museum forms and practices that have been introduced on Chinese soil. Today, the museum institution extends well beyond the previously seen state-run institutions. Cotter (2013) has illustrated a four category typology of museums in contemporary China - state institutions, private museums, billionaire vanity museums, and cultural hubs - where the boundaries between them are often blurred. As of late 2012, of China's 3,589 museums, 3,054 are state-owned (Xinhua 2012). Although state-owned museums have remained

tied to socialist meta-narratives, they have seen a dramatic shift in form, function, and outreach.

These new characteristics can be defined through the dimensions of size and scale, breadth of the collection and themes, architectural symbolism, and educational programs. The National Museum of China (formerly the National History Museum), for example, underwent significant renovation in 2007 and is now claimed as the largest museum in the world after offering a space of 192,000 square meters in the heart of the nation's capital. Nearby, the National Art Museum, originally built in 1962, has also launched a renovation plan attracting considerable attention for holding an international competition to choose an architect.⁴⁴ These two museums along with others popping up across China that are designed by foreign or Chinese foreign-trained architects do not only represent the scale of China's growing interest in museums and expanding the cultural industry, but also illustrates China's recent focus on the symbolism of the museum form. Museums have come to signify monuments of modernity. By incorporating state-of-the-art displays, offering massive collections, and Western style architecture designed by foreigners, the museum demonstrates China's modern advancement. Doing this, China has begun to push the boundaries of what constitutes the museum space and form. For many museums, such as Steven Holl's Nanjing Sifang Art Museum (Fig. 4) and the Sir Norman Foster + Partners' Datong Art Museum - China's 'Museum of the 21st Century' (Fig. 5), including many proposals by MAD Design, OMA, and the three finalists for the National Art Museum project, the museum edifice has become modern art itself. Steven Holl even

⁴⁴ More than 150 international architects submitted proposals in 2010, and recently the review committee has narrowed it down to the three world-renowned finalists: the American architect Frank Gehry, the Iraqi-born Zaha Hadid and the French architect Jean Nouvel (Perlez 2012; Rosenfield 2012).

claimed half-jokingly at a conference on China’s recent museum development boom that “my [Sifang] museum is about space, I don’t want [the Chinese] to put anything in it; it is a museum about space, this is about architecture by the way” (Columbia University GSAPP 2013). As a laboratory for experimentation, China’s museum development begins to see architecture transcend the functional space to focus on its artistic quality, or rather foreign aesthetics. For Chinese museum sponsors the new museum edifice represents an asphyxiation with modernity, the development of a new somewhat Western-like Chinese model, and the ability to be innovative and extravagant within the structure of state bureaucracy, stringent political framework, and the homogeneous landscapes of expanding urban centers.



Figure 6. Nanjing Sifang Art Museum by Steven Holl. (<http://www.contemporist.com/2011/05/10/>)

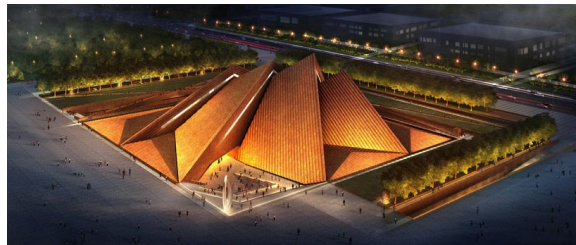


Figure 7. Datong Art Museum by Foster + Partners (<http://inhabitat.com/foster-partners-unveils-new-steel-pyramid-passive-art-museum-in-datong-china/>)

Many museums in China have also extended their collections and exhibitions to include a wider breadth of cultural and historical representation. Rather than focusing on one particular theme, museums present now a hodgepodge of displays “mixing history, ethnography, science, politics, art and entertainment” (Cotter 2013). Museums have

become in effect multipurpose apparatuses that work to extend their significance in society, seemingly to attract a wider audience and greater international and government attention. Museums in China have also begun to integrate educational programming into their management scheme, which He Lin, deputy director with the public education department of the National Art Museum of China, claims “has been absent in museum services in China for a long time” (Zhu 2008). Some museums in China, including her own, have worked to launch new unprecedented educational programs that show great promise for enhancing the public's interpretation of culture, history, and art and greater understanding of what museums offer.⁴⁵ Although these practices are not yet plentiful, they represent a gradual shift away from museums being simply store houses and exhibition venues to forums to better serve the public.

Private Museums

Private museums were introduced in China only twenty years ago and now account for approximately 14% of China's museums, totaling 535 in number.⁴⁶ From the Rockbund Art Museum and Minsheng Art Museum to the Red Sandalwood Museum and China Sex Museum, private museums have predominantly been established by single wealthy patrons or domestic agencies, such as real-estate and banking corporations. They have been an important part of the expanding museum and cultural heritage sector,

⁴⁵ The National Art Museum began to offer art lessons for children in 2008 to explore the parameters and perceptions of Chinese and Western art forms. The Guangdong Museum of Art also offers “customized education programs for youth, senior citizens, disabled people and expats [and] also does outreach to rural areas and venues such as prisons” (Zhu 2008).

⁴⁶ Private collections were first introduced through mounted exhibitions “in collaboration with state cultural organizations, or by individual collectors, private collection syndicates, or by museums themselves in the late 1980s” (Song 2008). With the rise in wealth, public recognition, and government approval this gradually transitioned into the development of private museum spaces during the 1990s.

“bringing valuable collections from the private into the public domain” (Barne 2005). Private museums have also worked to push the boundary of museological practices and museum content in China. Some, like the Er Dongqiang Folk Art Museum in Shanghai and the Home-Appliance Museum in Lizhou, Guangxi “document the more intimate aspects of cultural life – the trappings of what was once termed the “lesser way” (*xiaodao*) of social endeavour – long neglected by state museums” (China Heritage Newsletter 2005b). Others offer collections amassed by China's *nouveaux riches*, discussed below, or provide an avenue for audiences to engage in art not normally displayed. For example, according to Hou Hanru, museum expert of private art centers in China, “private museums and galleries have dominated the display of experimental art” as state-run museums have continuously been closed to experimental artists (Holden 2012). Specifically, the Himalayas Art Museum in Shanghai, a 3 billion yuan (US\$480 million) complex designed by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, that also includes a hotel, offices, and a theater, was established by Chinese billionaire Dai Zhikang, and represents a leading exhibition space for experimental art (Holden 2012). According to its founder, the museum is important in providing a space for young artists who have been frozen out of the state cultural system and a platform to “gradually convert [the government's] concepts on culture and art” (Holden 2012). Private museums also have begun to focus on aspects of China's history that was seemingly excluded from state-run museums. One important case is a museum established by wealthy property developer Fan Jianchun, who has constructed twenty-five museums in a museum village that deal with the sensitive history of the anti-Japanese War and the Cultural Revolution.

At the same time many private museums struggle to survive due to financial problems,⁴⁷ others merely vie for attention as they are equipped with owners with deep pockets. Chinese entrepreneurs capitalizing on China's booming economy have focused their attention on the rising art market and the esteem for amassing huge collections.⁴⁸ Recently, these private collectors have begun to look at ways to display their collections through the construction of their own museum. Cotter (2013) calls this a recent trend to build “vanity museums”. Cotter (2013) states: “Late last year, Liu Yiqian, a billionaire Shanghai investor, and his wife, Wang Wei, opened their Dragon Museum (also known as the Long Museum), with holdings that included ancient bronzes, Mao-era paintings and contemporary works.” As some of China's best known art collectors, “they spent nearly 2 billion yuan (\$317 million) on art in the past two years” (Associated Press 2012). For example, Budi Tek, a Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneur, art philanthropist, and collector, who has amassed a collection of some of the top contemporary art in Asia, specifically from China, has proposed to build a new museum in Shanghai (he already has his Yuz Museum in Jakarta) to house his collection (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2012). These so-called vanity museums do more than just represent the wealth of private collectors and their effort to house and display their “hobby”. They also represent an elitist attitude to educate and “give back to society”. Owner of the Long Museum, Wang Wei, states that she aims

⁴⁷ Unlike the majority of government-funded museums that are free to visitors – an official declaration by the national government in early 2008 - most private museums have to charge for admittance. The central government announced in early 2008 free admission for all museums and memorial sites administered under the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH). In 2009, 77 percent of all museums under SACH were free to the public <http://english.caixin.com/2011-08-12/100290515.html>. While the government at the national, provincial, city and county levels has helped subsidize many private museums, it is argued that the total amounts allocated is far from enough. Not including private museums, “[o]ver the past five years, the central Government has allocated 11.2 billion yuan (\$1.8 billion) to subsidize the free admission museums” (Pan 2013). According to one private museum curator, “[private museums] will have no income if they are free, but no visitors if they charge” (Lu et al. 2013).

⁴⁸ According to Forbes, China has the world's second-highest number of billionaires.

to give a cultural education to the public by “teach[ing] [rich housewives] to be more tasteful” and Budi Tek claims his museum is “an extension of love to society” (<http://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-super-rich-building-private-art-museums-2012-5>). For the Chinese state, these individuals are considered active cultural citizens.

Confronting History?

Although pushing the boundaries of what constitutes the museum space and practices of collecting, exhibiting, and preserving never before seen in Chinese history, museums continue to remain tightly controlled public institutions under the Chinese state ideological discourse. New York Times journalist Ian Johnson (2011) argues that:

One tradition has remained firmly in place: China will not confront its own history. The museum is less the product of extensive research, discovery or creativity than the most prominent symbol of the Communist Party’s efforts to control the narrative of history and suppress alternative points of view, even those that exist within the governing elite”.

History remains to be a difficult subject for museums in China, specifically the events of the 20th century such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and Tiananmen Square (1989), which are commonly missing from public display. From state-led to private museums, exhibitions present a selected idealized version of history specifically in line with the Chinese Communist Party official narrative. “Alternative” histories that include or re-represent sensitive events are often not allowed in museums in China, and are rarely considered by curators as they could evoke the wrath of government sanction. Museums are constantly monitored for their content in China, seemingly held under “censorship” as exhibitions are under constant government review, and often having to accommodate government requests. Efforts to present an ideal history

or one not overwhelmed with the tragedies of the past, specifically the failures of past regimes, is nothing new in countries worldwide. But, as Johnson (2011) states, many cannot compare to China in “so completely suppressing the shades of gray about their past”. As a result, newly built museums are increasingly faced with having to maneuver within China's state bureaucracy and around many political narrative that present certain constraints. They have to constantly negotiate the terms of museum development guidelines and the developing heritage protection discourse in an attempt to make gradual and small changes within the institution and the system of public display.

Heritage “Fever” and Reinterpreting the Past

The museum development boom in contemporary China is intricately linked to the expansion of the heritage discourse in China and growth of the cultural industry. Since China ratified the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage in 1985, China has embraced the global heritage discourse and launched a cultural heritage protection movement nationwide. While the movement began to take shape slowly in the 1980s and early 1990s, it took off in the late 1990s and since the turn of the century.⁴⁹ Now there is a rising call to establish local level heritage

⁴⁹ “Enacted at the seventeenth meeting of the UNESCO General Conference in 1972, the convention sought to identify, protect, and preserve the “cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity” (Hevia 2001: 223). Nation-states would recognize and nominate particular sites representing “the best possible examples of cultural and natural heritage” to then be reviewed by the World Heritage Committee and the Cultural Heritage Division of UNESCO and potentially be included on the World Heritage list. The list signified the “universal value” of particular local sites and their “global significance” that extended beyond the local and national belonging to all peoples “irrespective of the territory on which they are located.”

projects and heritage institutions, such as museums, to management regional and local heritages and house the abundance of identified and classified cultural patrimony.

The adoption of the UNESCO-led global heritage discourse has led to a significant shift in understandings of heritage for the Chinese in the post-Mao era. Ryckman (1986) argues that the Chinese have long understood material manifestations as unable “to escape the rush of time”. According to Ryckman (1986), unlike other civilizations, China does not perform “essentially an active, aggressive attempt to challenge and overcome the erosion of time” through the retention of physical structures and to “build for eternity”. Rather, the Chinese have “yielded to the onrush of time, the better to deflect it”, as seen through the composition of physical structures. This demonstrates that the Chinese attitude towards the past have been focused more on adaptation rather than an aim for permanence. The “Chinese civilization seems not to have regarded its history as violated or abused when the historic monuments collapsed or burned, as long as those could be replaced or restored, and their functions regained” (Ryckman 1986). For the Chinese, it was perfectly justifiable for immovable heritage to be modified, destroyed, and rebuilt several times over, embodying and embracing endless change and fluidity seen through its content and form. Value for such heritage lied in spiritual or symbolic, rather than, physical continuity. As a result, Ryckham declares that permanence and heritage for the Chinese is found more to inhabit the people and the stories that surround the structure than the structure itself. Thus, in China there exists a unique interpretation of the retention of the past and what constitutes authenticity (see Zhu 2013).

While this notion of impermanence continues among the Chinese to the present day, opening up and engagement with global trends and Western value systems in the the

post-Mao period has begun to stir the heritage pot, creating much more nuanced conceptions and definitions of safeguarding heritage and China's past than Ryckham proposes. Na Li (2008: 59) states, supporting Ryckham's argument, that "[i]n China, preservation efforts emphasize the continuation of forms and usage, because the original materials, mainly wood, are vulnerable to natural disasters such as fires and to changes of dynasties or political regimes.... Replacement and maintenance reflect a particular Chinese way of preservation". We continue to see this across China from the refurbishing of the Forbidden City in Beijing to reinforcing early Qing dynasty stone bridges in rural Guangxi using modern concrete. Today, this attitude and practice is compounded by a growing sense to hold onto the physical past and sense of the "original".

At the national and regional government levels, this is seen through China's negotiation of international conservation principles, such as the Burra and Venice Charters⁵⁰ and the Nara Document. It is also seen through the composition and enactment of several national acts of legislation and regulations like the 1982 *The Cultural-Asset Protection Law* "[which] assigned different levels of importance to historic landmarks" (Li 2008: 53), the 1997 *Circular on Strengthening and Promoting the Protection of Cultural Relics*, the 2002 revised *Law on Protection of Cultural Relics*, the Beijing Document, Xian Declaration, and Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (commonly referred to as the "China Principles"). China has also seen a dramatic rise in the designation of historic districts, townships, and villages for protection under government administration, placing emphasis on not only on cultural continuity but

⁵⁰ Burra Charter formal name is the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance and Venice Charter is the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites.

also on the survival of the physical “authentic” past. Zhu’s (2013) analysis of the notion of “authenticity” in China explains this change:

Nowadays, the Chinese government has gradually recognized the importance of “the old” and the value of history due to the increasing entanglement with the international heritage conservation movement around the world. The method of “restoring the old as it was” (*xiujiu rujiu*), as was propagated by Liang [Sicheng] has become one of the main key terms to understand heritage “authenticity” for architecture conservation. The ideological transformation from a Maoist perspective on cultural heritage to a perception of the matter in times of China’s open-door policy even enables Chinese people to rethink and redefine the idea of “the old” (*jiu*). The interim notion of “the old” as a backward and rigid implication has been altered into an appreciation of tradition and culture, tangible and intangible heritage.

Today we see the dynamic negotiation of the global and local in terms of how the Chinese interpret criteria for preservation and authenticity, as well as the relationship between cultural retention and “restoring the old as it was” and economic development, which often involves practices of social, cultural and infrastructure change. In many ways, such engagements introduce new questions on issues of authenticity and authority; in particular, what constitutes historical significance and originality and who decides on such terms. It also elucidates the complexities of the developing heritage discourse in China as the country experiences the “juxtaposition of different value systems on heritage conservation” as it works to “define its own authenticity criteria through learning from both its history of restoration and “international” principles” (Zhu 2013)⁵¹.

Heritage as an Economic Resource

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, the Communist Party emphasized “utilizing the past for the present” (Haiming (2012: 65), whereby cultural

⁵¹ For a overview of international guidelines of authenticity, such as the Venice Charter and Nara Convention, and China's interpretation of heritage preservation see Zhu (2013).

patrimony was a tool to legitimize of the Mao regime and promote a revolutionary socialist narrative. With the “open door policy” of the early 1980s, the past, and culture itself has indeed continued to be regarded in serving the present. Yet, now in a new era of political and economic reconstruction it falls under a new ideology of market reform. As a result of Deng’s early reforms⁵², the state cultural policy has come to fit with the economic policy (Sofield and Li 1998). Cultural heritage has become a new resource to promote regional economic development, through avenues such as the tourism industry.

Heritage protection “fever” across China has signaled the growth of a heritage industry. Growing sentiment over the last two decades in China to hold onto the past and safeguard heritage forms and sites as representations of the past as China experiences greater worldwide attention has cultivated an onslaught of efforts from the national to local level to identify and classify heritage forms. These are efforts to receive recognition for enlisted heritage items on regional, national and international UNESCO protection lists, and reciprocally fuel regional tourism development. The urgency for countermeasures to address the mounting loss of heritage as the country undergoes significant pressures of modernization and development and rediscovering its past (Gruber 2007: 255), has come at that same time as realizing the value of heritage. Across China, the importance of cultural retention and preservation has become deeply linked to,

⁵² Deng Xiaoping’s philosophy for reform became official in December 1978 at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee (Wen and Tisdell 2001: 275). Deng’s broad notion of his reform philosophy was called the “Four Modernizations”: liberalizing agriculture, attracting foreign investment, implementing an aggressive export policy, and creating special zones. Driven by economic pragmatism, Deng introduced slogans like “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, “Black or white, so long as it catches a mice, it is a good cat” and “to get rich is glorious” to define the new development discourse. Unprecedented economic development swept across China as the country changed from an administrative driven command economy under Mao to a price driven market economy under Deng. Markets were opened first in the countryside and then in urban centers. Local government investment in industry grew along with international trade and foreign direct investment, specifically in several Special Economic Zones (SEZ). And an industrial revolution took place as light and heavy industry expanded and export-led growth was encouraged.

and seems to be superseded in many ways by, economic development (see also Sigley 2010; McLaren 2010; Wang 2008). Indeed, as Cros et al. (2007: 89) state, “the economic benefits emanating from heritage attractions have changed people’s attitudes towards conservation”.

The development of the heritage industry in China has its origins in the emergence of cultural tourism in the early 1980s.⁵³ According to Lew and Yu (1995: 5), “from 1949 to the mid-1960s, there was no single state organ responsible for tourism due to its small scale”. This changed in the 1980s, when the national government declared tourism to be a comprehensive economic activity under Deng's economic construction plan (Lew and Yu 1995: 6). According to Sofield and Li (1998):

Politically, tourism was justified for the first time as an acceptable industry because in socialist terms it would advance economic reforms and the policy of opening to the outside world, it would further friendship and mutual understanding between the Chinese proletariat and other peoples of the world, and it would contribute to world peace. It was justified in cultural terms by the contribution it could make to national unity through the preservation of folklore and heritage sites.

The Chinese government has since stressed tourism as an important “pillar industry” which is seen to require less investment, yet have quicker results, better efficiency, larger employment potential, and a greater potential to improve people’s livelihood than many other tertiary service sectors (Lew and Yu 1995: 9; Oakes 1997).⁵⁴ Tourism has been a driving force for economic development especially for rural peripheral regions inhabited

⁵³ For more complete exploration of China's tourism industry see Lew and Yu (2003), Ryan and Gu (2008), Wen and Tisdell (2001), and Chio (2009). According to Sofield and Li (1998), heritage became linked to tourism through the Heritage Conservation Act of 1982. The act was established “to strengthen the conservation of China’s heritage” and “to carry out nationalism, to promote revolutionary traditions, and to build up socialism and modernization” (Sofield and Li 1998: 370-371).

⁵⁴ The rise in domestic and foreign travelers was shown in a 2000 report, the National Tourism Administration (NTA) that stressed the importance of cultural tourism as tourism revenue was over 450 billion RMB, about 5.05% of the nation's GDP.

by the majority of China's ethnic minority populations, such as Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Tibet. Cultural uniqueness and local heritages have become new economic assets under the current cultural policy. This was clearly articulated in a speech by the Director of Cultural Affairs, Li Zuihuan, in 1990 stating: "[d]evelopment assistance needed to be sought and the nationalities should try to find ways to make money from their heritage" (Sofield and Li 1998: 371). It seems that Chinese people across the country have begun to heed these words as they negotiate terms of cultural commercialization.

Heritage and cultural forms and practices are incorporated into tourism through a commoditization process, where selected forms are deemed "valuable" resources of the past and present, such as certain relics, monuments, historical events, legends, folklore, music, dance, and festivals, and are transformed into products through acts of selection, interpretation, and repackaging. Ashworth (1994: 17) contends that "the interpretation, not the resource, is literally the product" of the process of making heritage or "heritagization". For example, Anagnost (1993: 595) explains that the "juxtaposition of a nostalgia for a historical past with the commodity is not accidental" in the creation of large shopping malls that architecturally replicate Ming and Qing dynasty landscapes, called *fanggujie*, or "old towns", as "the desire for one excites the desire for the other". This signifies one of many cases in China that embodies changes in Chinese perceptions of the past and "heritage" and the link between heritage and development in reconstructing of the antiquity of the nation and exploring means to capitalize on culture. Thus, the endeavor of cultural heritage preservation in China, like many nations worldwide, has come to mean the reconstruction and invention of cultural symbols for the

purposes of commoditization and economic development. Natural environments are now designated protected sites, cultural landscapes have become representative of a particular moment in history or form of cultural difference, and symbols of cultural and ethnic distinction are markers of regional and local identity and proclamations of authenticity under the branding process of “cultural heritage”, which not only assigns them a new value for preservation but also a new value for consumption.

This “cultural strategy” of preserving a sense of the past and cultural diversity of the present has led to a dramatic expansion of the heritage industry in China. Interestingly, while the Chinese recognize certain tensions between heritage preservation and economic development, specifically in terms of the balance of their application on the ground, they do not claim it as an inherently problematic relationship. Thus, the classification of cultural resources as “valued” heritage is for both for their protection and exploitation. What we see, therefore, is a seeming contradiction between a “desire for modernity on the one hand, and a desire to maintain continuity with tradition on the other”, with developers, officials, scholars and professionals, local populations, and other agents trying “to find ways to 'make culture pay'” (Oakes 1997; Sofield and Li 1998; see Anagnost 1993). Embracing these conditions, the contemporary museum in China has begun to take on new roles in both the safeguarding and industrializing of culture.

The Heritage Protection System in China

By the end of 2003, China possessed 29 World Heritage sites (WHS). Not even a decade later, in 2012, that number jumped to 43 with 50 sites on UNESCO’s tentative list (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/cn/>). China now ranks third in the world with the

most world heritage sites behind Italy and Spain. The listing of heritage items is not only at the global level. China has also launched a massive campaign to create a three-tier heritage listing management system. Identified and classified heritage across the country is listed as national (*guojia wenwu baohu danwei*), provincial (*shengji wenwu baohu danwei*), or city and county (*shiji, xianji wenwu baohu danwei*) protected heritage. This vertical scale places cultural and natural heritage in a hierarchical system of value. After a heritage item or site is discovered or identified it is to be registered at the local Cultural Relics Bureau (*wenwu ju*) or cultural heritage management department (*wenwu guanli suo*, literally cultural relics management department) (see Gruber 2007). The local level authority is then responsible for its protection and management and often attempts to propose such heritage to be listed on upper provincial and national levels. Heritage's value changes according to the level it reaches as it moves up the three level management system. With greater importance placed on heritage classification and protection coming from national government decrees since the turn of the 21st century, many local authorities have developed a heritage protection agency to manage the local heritage and to develop strategies to use heritage as an economic resource to develop a heritage tourism industry. Of course, a higher level of recognition within the heritage management system will garner higher acclaim among tourists and will attract support from upper level government and investment agencies. With the a high price set on reaching national status and the ultimate goal of listed by UNESCO as World Heritage, Chinese authorities at all levels have engaged in a complex process of searching and identifying distinct heritage and formulating heritage protection enlistment proposals, which involve great economic expenditure, intensified power relations, political maneuvering, and

collaboration with heritage professionals. This often results in the negotiation of different claims to heritage and the development of heritage protection practices and institutions, such as museums, to make promote the status and conservation of a heritage item (see Wang 2008; Hevia 2001; Svensson 2006).

A recently added component to the heritage discourse has provided a new way to think of heritage and to take advantage of local heritage forms to create local cultural economies. In 2003, through the *Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO introduced China to the global terminology of “intangible cultural heritage” (translated in Chinese as *feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*). China supported the new convention to safeguard “oral and intangible heritage of humanity”, and joined in 2004. As tangible cultural heritage is referred to in the 2006 Ministry of Culture report on the “Protection of Cultural Heritage in China”, as “cultural relics with historical, artistic and scientific values, including movable and unmovable cultural relics,”⁵⁵ conceptions of intangible cultural heritage follow in the UNESCO convention defined as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. The Chinese, too, have adopted categories to identify intangible cultural heritage, as (a) Oral traditions and

⁵⁵ Unmovable cultural relics include ancient cultural remains, ancient tombs, ancient architectures, grotto temples, stone carvings, murals, and important remains and representative buildings in the history of modern China”. Movable cultural relics refer to important artifacts, artworks, documents, manuscripts, publication materials and representative artifacts of different historical periods which are categorized into valuable cultural relics and common cultural relics. Valuable cultural relics are classified as first-class, second-class or third-class. So far, a total of some 20 million pieces or sets of movable cultural relics are collected in museums of mainland China and China has “nearly 400,000 registered sites of unmovable cultural relics” with “2352 sites under the state-level protection, 9396 sites under the provincial-level protection and 58,300 sites under the county or municipal-level protection” (Ministry of Culture 2006).

expressions, including language as a vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; (b) Performing arts; (c) Social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (e) Traditional craftsmanship.

Intangible cultural heritage was integrated into the same three-tiered heritage management system as tangible cultural heritage. In 2006, the State Council announced the first national list of 518 items, adding 510 more items in 2008, and most recently in 2011, 191 candidates were added to the list with China now regarding 1,219 cultural practices as “intangible national treasures” (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/10/c_13922918.htm).⁵⁶ China has also worked to enlist its intangible heritage at the global level and as of 2012 China has a total of 37 elements on UNESCO's list, with 29 elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2008-2011) and 7 elements on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (2009-2011) (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00559>).

Museums and the Heritage Discourse

The increase of identified heritage elements and forms has given more purpose to the establishment of museums in China. With the expansion of the heritage industry after the turn of the twenty-first century, the need to house the abundance of classified heritage became an important factor contributing to the recent museum development boom.

⁵⁶ “China's active embrace of UNESCO's new principle of intangible cultural heritage was seen as providing China with the opportunity to formulate its own guidelines on intangible cultural heritage and, in November 2004, Zhou Heping suggested at an International Symposium on the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Beijing that China should establish its own list” (<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/editorial.php?issue=002>). The national-level intangible cultural heritage list announced in 2004 officially brought the concept of 'intangible cultural heritage (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan*) into the public sphere.

Museums have become important sites for the institutionalization of newly defined heritage, substantiating their 'value', and framing them as part of a larger national heritage.

Although the heritage protection campaign in China started around the same time as the rise in museum development, the former should not be understood as fueling the start of the latter. Seemingly tied together today, they have undergone different historical trajectories. To put it simply, museum development has a historical precedence in the eyes of the Chinese, whereas the heritage protection movement is more of a recent phenomenon associated closely with engagements with the West. Chinese scholars and officials at the national level I spoke with stress that China has long cared for the protection of its cultural roots. While I do not mean to refute this claim, for most Chinese citizens it was not until the early 2000s that the term “cultural heritage” (*wenhua yichan*) became an accepted and commonly employed term. Thus, the heritage and museological discourses can be seen to have run parallel to one another in their process of development in contemporary China. Most recently, since the turn of the twenty-first century, they have become integrated and now seemingly overlap. Museum development has increased along with the proliferation of nation’s classified cultural patrimony. Heritage programs call on the formation of museum institutions and exhibitionary spaces for purposes of scientific research, display, and preservation.

Exhibiting Intangible Cultural Heritage

Folk customs are seldom given a sense of life in the exhibitionary space of museums in China. When China began to appropriate the notion of intangible cultural

heritage in the early 2000s, becoming the new wider umbrella term for all folk culture (*minsu minjian*)⁵⁷, the display of folk customs and traditions began to change from a static to a dynamic performative presentation. This was a transformation in the heritage discourse in China that “goes beyond a simple alteration of the system of nomenclature; it embodies a fundamental paradigm shift in how heritage and heritage conservation should be conceptualized and operationalized” (Lee and du Cross 2012: 107). In a context of an urbanizing and modernizing Chinese society that “appeared to be increasingly leaving its past behind”, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage enlivening China's appreciation of its past and present, particularly on the promotion of China's ethnic cultures, and to greater recognition of China's “non-elite cultural heritage” (McLaren 2010: 33).

The display of intangible cultural heritage in the museum context was put on the national stage in the “Exhibition on the Achievements of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection in China” held in the National History Museum in China (now the National Museum of China) between February 26 and March 16, 2006. The exhibit included standard display techniques of photographs and signage of various heritage items as well as shadow puppets, a large new year festival dragon, handcrafted carvings and murals, a large wooden loom for silk embroidery from Nanjing, and a collection instruments.

⁵⁷ Although the notion of folk culture (*minsu minjian*) has remained in common use in China, intangible cultural heritage (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*) has become the current hot topic. New government support towards intangible cultural heritage has led to instated conservation projects that no longer summon the *minsu* terminology. The Chinese Folk Arts Association and Folklore Association still remain but universities and government offices have integrated the intangible cultural heritage concept into their administrative structure. For example, the Central Fine Arts Institute in Beijing has developed a new discipline of intangible culture in the institution art education curriculum and established the Research Center of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2002. Local level governments across the country, from the provincial level down to the county level, have also established Intangible Cultural Heritage Centers since the UNESCO ICH Convention was ratified, in many cases establishing a new department completely within the local Cultural Bureau.

Instead of putting material embodiments of intangible cultural heritage practices behind glass cases, they were left out in the open for viewers to directly come up to. The exhibition also made an important contribution to museum work in China, forming a bridge between the historically static museum space and dynamic living heritage. Craftsmen, or cultural heritage “inheritors” recognized as masters of passing on cultural traditions, were invited from across the country and were part of the exhibition.⁵⁸ The exhibition for the first time presented cultural heritage as “living heritage” helping the public understand this new concept beyond the familiar notion of folk customs (*minsu minjian*).

Visitors to short exhibition reached record numbers, surpassing 350,000, with many consisting of guided school children. After visiting the show, Wang Canchi, an advisor for the Beijing municipal government, said that he felt a grave responsibility for saving and protecting the richness of the Chinese intangible cultural heritage and declared his support in enacting relevant laws or regulations and set up special research institutes to protect these national treasures (Xinhua News 2006). Li Changchun, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, too, stated, “The protection of intangible cultural heritage and maintaining the continuity of the national culture constitute an essential cultural base for enhancing cohesion in the nation” (Xinhua News 2006). For many, intangible heritage is closely associated with the spirit of the civilization distinct from the material (tangible heritage) essence of the nation.

⁵⁸ Performative displays included the making of new years prints (or *nianhua*), the performance of the four-string fiddle by a Pumi minority woman, Shaoling kungfu martial arts, Hokkien puppet shows, the crafting of clay figurines of Jiangsu, the music of the *guqi*, and Tibetan *thangka* painting from Qinghai Province.

Acclaim for the National History Museum's exhibition provoked an rise in curated exhibitions and choreographed displays on intangible cultural heritage throughout the country. Festivals were also held, such as the regional West China Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Held in Xian, Shaanxi (held annually since 2010), the China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition in Hong Kong's Heritage Museum from 2008-2009, the local China Huangshan Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition in Shexian county, Anhui province in 2012, the Exhibition of Essence of Tibetan Intangible Cultural Heritage in Macao in 2009, and the Chengdu International Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival (held biannually since 2007). Abhimanyu Singh, director the UNESCO Office in Beijing, recognized China's effort to promote intangible heritage at the Chengdu international festival stating: "To us it looks as if China is already in a position to set an example for other developing countries in this greater domain of protection of intangible and tangible culture" (Wang 2009). According to records collected by the Chinese national government, China has expanded its development in the domain of cultural heritage protection to include the establishment of intangible cultural heritage theme museums, folk custom museums and heritage transmission centers, with 424 intangible cultural heritage museums, 96 special exhibition halls, 179 folk custom museums and 1,216 transmission centers in different provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities (http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-06/02/content_20171387_2.htm).

Conclusion

Over the course of the history of museum development in China, culture has been framed within epistemic frameworks of nationalism, communist revolution, and

economic liberalization and commercialism. Many museums today under the massive museum development boom are seen as a repackaging of old state messages that defined the institution throughout most of the 20th century (Denton 2005). The massive museum development boom in the post-Mao reform era, and especially since the turn of the 21st century, has been characterized by a focus on size and scale, attempts to symbolize modernity through utility and form, the expenditure of rising affluence, and the breadth of research and collection of classified “cultural heritage”. (The pronounced call across the country for rapid museum development is partly a result of the recognizable surplus of heritage under a massive heritage classification and protection campaign.) These institutions, from new multi-million dollar monuments of modernity designed by world-renowned foreign architects to displayed collections of folk art and culture and historic memorabilia in private residences are engulfed in state meta-narratives at the same time as they are situated within a new social framework of neoliberalism and market reform. In contemporary China, these institutions are now grappling with a reconfiguration of the dimensions of the cultural field as the country embraces the global heritage discourse and undergoes an expansion of the cultural industry.

Because everything is happening all at once in a transitioning China, it is best to understand this contemporary context as a kind of laboratory for the experimentation of museum forms and practices.⁵⁹ At the same time, this has given rise to critical insights

⁵⁹ In a Columbia University GSAPP panel discussion “Boom: The Future of Museums in China” held in early 2013, scholars and architects discussed the recent museum development phenomenon in China and emphasized the perceived “over-supply” of museums in China and growing interest to expand the boundaries of the museum space into an all inclusive educational and leisure project including theater and performance, accommodations, parks, and dining facilities. Two examples of this I have explored are the China Yinchuan Contemporary Art Center, situated in the capital city of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, (<http://artradarjournal.com/2012/06/06/yellow-river-arts-centre-ambitious-museum-development-for-northwest-china/>), and the Wu Culture Park in Wuxi city, Jiangsu Province.

seen in the developing field of museology that reflect on (domestic and foreign) museum practices that meet current societal needs, and debates surrounding how to use the museum and apply it towards a clear vision and mission to serve Chinese society and respective audiences and communities that does not contradict socialist state narratives as the nation undergoes greater reform and opening up. Such a move, I contend, has placed the traditional museology paradigm under greater scrutiny and has led to an expanded scope of the museum and heritage discourse in China. As explored in the following chapters, I argue that new museums forms like the ecomuseum exemplify the tensions between furthering the reach of the governmental assemblage of the museum and the dynamic shift in China's museum and heritage-scape.

Adopted by the Chinese in the 1990s, the foreign ecomuseum concept implemented first in southwest China embodies a community-centered intangible cultural heritage discourse that works to musealize local cultural landscapes and create “living museums” of rural ethnic life and cultures. It steps beyond the confines of physical structure of the traditional museum and reorients the relationship between the museum and community as it manifests in peripheral rural ethnic locales, signifying a museological form and process that is has never before been seen on Chinese soil. Yet, in terms of the political framework in which they are implicated in as state-led initiatives, it is important to not take them at face value. In this study, I aim to critically analyze the political, economic, and cultural forces that shape these new experimental museums in China and the interactions between existing and emergent discourses and involved social actors that define different, often contested, meanings, claims, and interpretations of heritage, identity, and place. This study presents such an analysis through the investigation of ecomuseum cases in

southwest China, with a detailed investigation of the first ecomuseum in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum. The following chapters critically explore how this new cultural institution manifests in China's political climate and the new roles and capabilities it presents for museums in Chinese society.

CHAPTER 3

MUSEUMIFICATION OF THE BAIKU YAO: GUANGXI'S FIRST ECOMUSEUM

“... those who construct the display also construct the subject...”
(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 20)

Introduction

In June 2003, the Guangxi Culture Bureau and Guangxi Museum for Nationalities issued a report on the first prospective ecomuseum site in Guangxi. In the introductory paragraph, the official report emphasizes the tone and importance of implementing new museological initiatives:

The museum is the protector and advocate of the achievement of human civilization, an important symbol of social civilization and progress, and is a representative of regional history, culture, and modern civilization. With recent development and progress of the times, the museum concept has also been reshaped with more focus on active service and community and development. With the rapid speed of economic development, the protection of ethnic traditional culture has become a pressing concern for modern museums⁶⁰.

The Guangxi regional government has called the application of the ecomuseum a means to address cultural loss and safeguard a sense of “cultural authenticity” in a transforming China. At the same time, it signifies an innovative cultural strategy approach to instigate regional development in underdeveloped rural locales. In these terms, it aligns with the current state cultural policy which embraces nation-wide modernization while calling for the protection of China’s cultural roots and cultural diversity.

Nandan Lihu White Trouser Yao Ecomuseum (*Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Shengtai Bowuguang*), established in 2004, marks the first ecomuseum in Guangxi and the launch

⁶⁰ Translated from Chinese by author.

of a new provincial ecomuseum program in China. Similar to the previously established ecomuseum program in Guizhou province, discussed in depth in Chapter 4, the site for the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao ecomuseum was selected because it met certain criteria as a culturally unique, isolated ethnic village and population whose culture is deemed “comprehensive” (*wanzheng*), possesses “authentic” cultural traditions (*zhenshi de wenhua chuantong*), and is representative (*daibiao*) of a distinct ethnic group. These unwritten criteria instated by the Guangxi Culture Bureau administering the program not only focuses on cultural aspects of a place and population but also economic well-being and rural livelihoods. This is because the ecomuseum program in Guangxi and Guizhou is situated within a larger program of regional development and poverty alleviation. Ethnic minority populations in western and southwestern in China that are seen to have retained “rich” and “unique” cultural traditions and landscapes, and at the same time face high levels of poverty and economic disparity as the county undergoes rapid modernization, have become the main focus of the ecomuseum project implementation.

This chapter introduces the political nature of the ecomuseum development in China through the case of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao ecomuseum. It presents the ecomuseum as a government-led initiative guided by Chinese experts and museum professionals with stage objectives of safeguarding local cultural heritage, building a base of research on ethnic cultures, and promoting rural development through infrastructure improvement and tourism. In particular, this chapter exposes the path of ecomuseum development in the Baiku Yao village of Huaili by pointing to the initial stage of project construction and the theme of “curation” and “museumification”. I argue that from its inception the ecomuseum engages a process of exhibition and political economy of display of cultural

difference, whereby the ethnic village is transformed into a “living museum” and the way of life of the Baiku Yao is converted into “living heritage” and an exotic spectacle. In my investigation of the practices of curation and museumification of the ecomuseum exhibition and documentation center, the core facility of the ecomuseum, and ethnic village, I show that the Baiku Yao community, their ethnic culture, and cultural identity are reconstituted and entangled in the political theater of social life through the ecomuseum context (Handler and Gable 1997). In presenting how the Chinese government and experts' have orchestrated the ecomuseum project in Huaili, which is also seen across southwest China, I also illustrate how the production and consumption of museum messages in relation to broader state edicts occur.

It is important to note at the onset that with the diversity of interactions between social actors and discourses that take place and are incited by the ecomuseum throughout its ongoing development process, that this is not merely a discursive practice of governmental work to reconfigure and ossify ethnic identity and cultural difference as a preserved entity and spectacle of society. Moreover, it is a social “space” of mobility (de Certeau 1984) through which new and reemerging social relations create complex and nuanced “trajectories of histories, livelihood, and the politics of identity” (Jonsson 2000: 57). It is through these dynamic spaces that local village residents, shown in the following chapters, come to negotiate state narratives and discourses and the “traditional structures of power” in society and engage in defining themselves through different forms of cultural politics, regimes of value, and broader economic and political processes.

“1+10 Model”: the Establishment of the Guangxi Ecomuseum Program

In 2001, shortly after the first ecomuseum in China was established in Guizhou province, director Rong Xiaoning and vice-director Qin Pu of the Cultural Bureau of Guangxi composed a team of academics and museum professionals to conduct an exploratory investigation of the province's ecomuseum program. This trip to Guizhou was an important experience to understand the dimensions of new museological approach and to reflect on project development advantages and challenges. In conversations with Qin Pu, the vice-director stressed “learning from Guizhou” was the basis for exploring the potential of developing ecomuseums in Guangxi.

At the start of the Guangxi ecomuseum program development process, an official ecomuseum program team was established consisting of government officials and scholars ranging in disciplines from archeology and history to ethnology, anthropology, and museum studies. This team was formed to conduct field investigations, analyze Guangxi's resources and conditions, and develop a proposal for ecomuseum project development which incorporated topics on cultural retention measures, cultural research and exhibition, and rural development “in a manner to respond to the urgent task of protecting traditional *minzu* culture” (Qin 2009: 5). With the issuing of the first formal report for three pilots projects in 2003, the second regional program, and deemed “second generation of ecomuseums” in China (Su 2006), was underway.

Under the coordination of Qin Pu and Wu Weifeng, the vice-director Guangxi Museum for Nationalities, a structural format for ecomuseum development in Guangxi was established that was unlike the previous Guizhou program. In Guizhou, the ecomuseum program was administered by the provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and

developed in collaboration with the Chinese Society of Museums and the Norwegian government under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Partnership. After the completion of the construction stage of each ecomuseum project, specifically infrastructure building and the curation of the ecomuseum center, administrative power over the ecomuseum was bestowed on the respective county government where the ecomuseum site was located. Ecomuseum projects in Guizhou and their mission for heritage management and economic development were left solely in the hands of local county culture bureaus. Financial assistance continued to come from provincial government offices, but expert support and facilitation quickly became nonexistent. Later, with the retirement of Hu Chaoxiang, vice-director of the provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and coordinator of the Guizhou ecomuseum program, individual projects were claimed to be overseen by provincial offices as county government maintained maximum control.⁶¹

Qin Pu, Wu Weifeng, and the present Guangxi ecomuseum program coordinator, Lu Wendong, stressed to me that the Guangxi “model” is an attempt to alleviate discrepancies seen in Guizhou ecomuseum development, such as projects becoming static traditional ethnographic or folk museums, the growing distance between local populations and the ecomuseum project in terms of community participation and engagement, and the failure to address the local needs and interests of the community. In addition to community participation, Guangxi ecomuseum program developers agreed that on-going professional guidance and monitoring of ecomuseum development was essential for the sustainability of the project. Therefore, as a primary administrative organ

⁶¹ This is the basic structure of ecomuseum development in Guizhou. Exceptions do exist as in Tang’an, which later became control by a tourism management company, and Longli, where power over the project was transferred to local-level government authorities in the township and village. Both of these cases, including Suoga ecomuseum, are discussed in Chapter 4.

local government officials.⁶² On the ground, the administration and management of ecomuseum work is conducted primarily by the local county government, with GMXN playing more an auxiliary role of guidance.⁶³

Discovering Huaili and the *Baiku Yao*

Guangxi is an ethnically diverse region with 11 different ethnic minority populations⁶⁴ composing almost half, 19.67 million, of the regions total population. Between 2001 and 2002, the ecomuseum investigation team explored different ethnic villages across Guangxi and narrowed down potential candidates for prospective ecomuseum projects. Out of 20 possible sites, the research team selected three ethnic villages for the first ecomuseum pilot projects.⁶⁵ The ethnic village communities represented the three largest ethnic minority populations in Guangxi - the Zhuang, Yao, and Dong. The first to be developed was the Baiku Yao village of Huaili, in Lihu township, Nandan county.

⁶² In mainly ways this represents an improvement of ecomuseum project development in China from the first generation. First, ecomuseum's association with a central supporting government agency at the provincial level, not simply in name only, has demonstrated that an upper level government institute is fully and unceasingly involved in project development. Second, local level officials and researchers unaware of new museology and the ecomuseum concept are assisted by expert museologists and researchers from an established ethnology museum.

⁶³ In some ways this is similar to what the Smithsonian and Nancy Fuller are to the Ak-Chim ecomuseum in Arizona (see Fuller 1992).

⁶⁴ Eleven ethnic minority groups consist of the Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong, Mulao, Gelao, Yi, Maonan, Jing, Hui and Shui.

⁶⁵ The Dong area of Sanjiang and the Zhuang of Jinzhou, Jinxi county, were chosen for pilot ecomuseums and built in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Sanjiang had already become a major domestic and international tourist destination and was known as one center in China of Dong ethnic culture. The Zhuang of Jinzhou had also already become known as carriers of traditional southern Zhuang culture, recognized for their craftsmanship and production of hand-made of silk embroidered balls (*xiuqiu*), customarily used as an exchange gift between female and male to represent a woman's love interest in a man. Today, silk embroidered balls have become cultural symbols of the the Zhuang.

While Guangxi is a designated Zhuang Autonomous Region, the “Yao” are the second largest ethnic minority population in the region, with a population of 1,471,946.⁶⁶ The “Yao” population scattered across southwest China became one of China’s 55 ethnic minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu*) officially recognized by the Chinese government in the 1950s during ethnic identification program under Mao. Like other *shaoshu minzu* in China they have been situated in a discourse of cultural difference and marginalization and have become an integral part of a grand nation-building exercise to construct a unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation (Litzinger 1995). The Baiku Yao, one of over 25 distinct branches of the umbrella “Yao” ethnic minority nationality (*shaoshu minzu*), was chosen for the first ecomuseum in Guangxi. Unique to Guangxi⁶⁷, the Baiku Yao have a total population of 30,000.

The Baiku Yao inhabit the less traveled area of northwest Guangxi and are relatively unknown across most Guangxi and China. Although the five Yao groups - Chashan, Ao, Hualan, Pan, Shanzi - that inhabit Dayao Mountain in eastern Guangxi have a larger population than the Baiku Yao and are more historically well-known, especially as a result of the extensive fieldwork conducted by famed anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (see Litzinger 2000), often considered representative the “Yao” of Guangxi, the Baiku Yao are seen to possess undiscovered, “untouched”, “primitive” qualities as proclaimed by the Guangxi Culture Bureau and GXMN team determining ecomuseum project locations.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ The total population of Zhuang in China is 16 million of which 90% live in Guangxi. 60% of the total Yao population in China of 2.6 million people live in Guangxi. The Yao are also found in the provinces of Hunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou, and Yunnan.

⁶⁷ A population of White Trouser Yao are also found in Libo county, Guizhou province, on the Guizhou-Guangxi border.

⁶⁸ In fact, later in 2011, Jinxiu did build its own ecomuseum as the last installment of the 1+10 program. Part of the reason for selecting the Baiku Yao is linked to Guizhou’s choice of the distant and relatively unknown Miao village of Suoga (see Chapter 4).

For Chinese government officials I spoke with involved in the ecomuseum program, the Baiku Yao are identified as bearers of a “primitive” culture and lifestyle, and are considered “living fossils” in a modern China, exemplifying an ideal population to be integrated into the ecomuseum program. They possess essentialized stereotypes of Chinese ethnic minorities, i.e. isolated, poverty-stricken, rural, and rich in cultural traditions and customs that have been retained over generations (Blum 2001; Gladney 1994; Varutti 2010).



Figure 10. Distribution Map of Yao in China (He n.d.)

Figure 11. Map of Guangxi’s HeChi prefecture. The Nandan county is indicated. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_lines.township-level_divisions_of_Guangxi)

Nandan county and Hechi city government, were happy to welcome the Guangxi Culture Bureau ecomuseum investigation team’s decision to select a Baiku Yao village to launch Guangxi's first ecomuseum initiative. From the start of the project, Nandan county government was adamant about their support and provided significant financial investment in the project. They also assisted the investigation team in choosing a site in the townships of Lihu and Baxu where the Baiku Yao live in northwest Guangxi. Of the two townships, focus turned to Lihu because the Baiku Yao of Baxu did not meet the

“untouched” selection criteria. Baxu Baiku Yao were considered “hanified” and assimilated into mainstream modern society.⁶⁹ Lihu has the highest concentration of Baiku Yao in China, constituting of 67% of the total population and is often referred to as “China's White Trousers Yao Township” (*zhongguo baiku yao xiang*). For the investigation team, the 12 villages that make up the township, with a total population of 18,000 people, were seen to have retained most of their tangible and intangible cultural heritage and maintained a “Baiku Yao cultural landscape” (*baiku yao wenhua jingguan*).

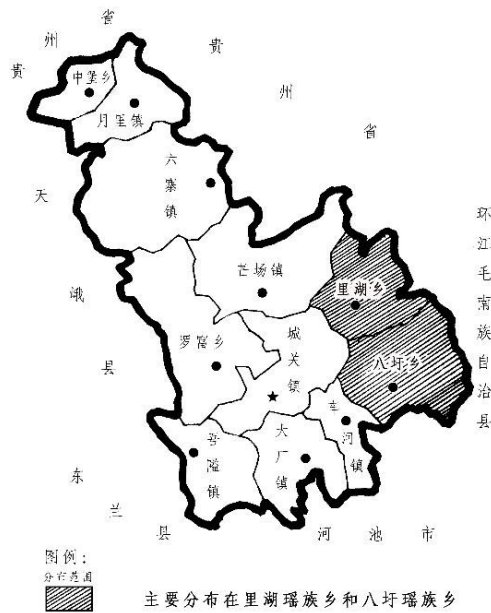


Figure 12. Map of Nandan county. Lihu township (above) and Baxu township (below) are indicated with striped (Courtesy of Nandan *Wentiju*).

Local county officials first suggested the village of Ganhe in Lihu township as prospective ecomuseum site. Ganhe village is located on the main road between Nandan and Lihu and has less than 50 households dispersed across the hill side with a picturesque

⁶⁹ An important factor related to this is Baxu township was the formerly a railroad stop through northwest Guangx, providing accesible conditions and connected the county to the outside, mainstream society. Lihu, conversely, was much more cutoff through a lack of infrastructure (personal conversation Wu Weifeng).

landscape of a river leading into one the many deep karst caves of Guangxi. Prior to launching the ecomuseum project in Nandan, the Nandan county Tourism Bureau in collaboration with a private tourism company acquired the land adjacent to the river and established Ganhe as a tourist cultural destination in 2002. The acquired area was transformed into a “model” ethnic Baiku Yao village with newly built adobe houses, wooden and bamboo stilted granaries, and small rice fields and gardens. Baiku Yao villagers throughout Lihu were hired to perform as village “residents” as they cooked, weaved, danced, sang, and played ceremonial bronze drums and wooden top throwing for visiting tourists. At the time discussion were taking place on the ecomuseum project in Nandan, Ganhe ethnic village had just been open to the public. The Nandan vice-mayor pressed for the establishment of the ecomuseum to be in Ganhe village promoting it as an already established heritage tourism site, displaying different “heritages” of the Baiku Yao. In the mind of the mayor and local county officials, with the “ecomuseum” label Ganhe could not only receive greater tourism development, but also national and international attention that would also be lucrative for the site and the county.

However, the coordinator of the Guangxi ecomuseum program and vice-director of the Guangxi Culture Bureau, Ms. Qin Pu, declared Ganhe unsuitable. She adamantly stated to Nandan local officials that the ecomuseum initiative was not about promoting ethnic tourism and commercializing culture; “the ecomuseum is not a mere tourist site, it is a research base, a site for cultural documentation and heritage protection that actively involves the local community” (personal conversation 2012). At the inception of the ecomuseum project in Nandan, it became increasingly clear of the misunderstanding that lined at the root of local ecomuseum implementation. Qin Pu and Wu Weifeng realized

that from the beginning their primary role was to “educate local officials on the philosophical and practical dimensions of the ecomuseum and community-based heritage protection” (personal conversation Wu Weifeng 2012). It was believed that only with regional and local level coordinators of the project possessing a common understanding of the mission of the ecomuseum could the project come to fruition.

However, the mission of the ecomuseum project for local leaders was rather ambiguous as it assumed an institutional function as a research base for cultural documentation and protection, and a utilitarian function for social and cultural development. While regional and local officials remained clear on documentation and research, how to protect ethnic villages and address community development was much less clear. Indeed, GXMN staff administering the project from the beginning believed that after infrastructure improvement from government investment and the construction of an ecomuseum exhibition center that the local community would actively begin to engage directly in ecomuseum work of heritage protection and management and gradually take over the project as their own. What remained to be seen from project inception, however, was local villager voice and involvement. This would ultimately curtail developer expectations and present significant challenges to the idea of a community-led project.

After discussing other possible sites in Lihu, the township leader, Li Zilin, brought the investigation team to the village of Huaili. The six Baiku Yao natural villages (*ziran cun*) that compose Huaili village found scattered across the 4 km mountainous area leading up from the center of Lihu was exactly what the investigation team was looking for. Villages only accessible on foot via small dirt and stone paths meandering between stilted granaries with thatched roofs and adobe residences inhabited by Baiku Yao

villagers wearing blue and white batik clothing speaking their native dialect of Yao⁷⁰ as they conducted agricultural work surrounded by rolling green mountains was identified as the ideal cultural landscape for the Guangxi Culture Bureau's ecomuseum project. Composed of 442 households (2166 people) across the six natural villages (*ziran cun*), including Manjiang, Hua Qiao, Hua Tu, Li Bai, Hui Le, and Huaili,⁷¹ the village also proved to be ethnically homogeneous Baiku Yao (or *dounou* in native Huaili Yao language).⁷² For the ecomuseum investigation team, Huaili represented an atypical Baiku Yao village and the center of Baiku Yao culture in Guangxi. It was soon declared by the Guangxi Culture Bureau the future site for Guangxi's first ecomuseum.



Figure 13. View of Huaili Ecomuseum villages, composed of HuaQiao (left), HuaTu (center), Manjiang (right). (Photo taken in 2004, courtesy of Guangxi Museum for Nationalities.)

Curating the Baiku Yao

Government-led work began quickly in establishing Huaili as an ecomuseum. Wu Weifeng, Lu Wendong, and others from Guangxi Museum for Nationalities met with

⁷⁰ The *baiku* Yao have a distinct Yao dialect said be indistinguishable to other Yao groups. The Huaili derivative of this dialect is often unrecognizable even to the nearby *baiku* Yao of Baxu county.

⁷¹ Huaili natural village is the largest and main village of Huaili where the village committee is located. The village of Huaili is pronounced *Veli* in native Baiku Yao language.

⁷² Only one households is Zhuang ethnicity. It is important to note that while only one household exist of non-Baiku Yao in Huaili, more than half of the current residents of Huaili are descendents of a Yao father and Han/Zhuang mother. Nonetheless, they all refer to themselves proudly as *dounou*.

officials from the local county culture office, the Nandan Culture, Sports, and Library Bureau, or *Wentiju*, to outline a plan for project development. Like other ecomuseum projects throughout Guizhou and Guangxi, the project followed a model to first construct and curate an ecomuseum exhibition and documentation center. Under Liao Danning, vice-director of the *Wentiju*, Xu Jinwen, head of the Nandan cultural relics management office, was placed as the local coordinator of the curation project because of his extensive experience conducting field investigation among the Baiku Yao in Nandan since the 1980s and strong rapport built with many Baiku Yao leaders and villagers. In conversations with Xu Jinwen, he expressed to me the importance of the ecomuseum. As a witness to the gradual loss of Baiku Yao culture as the local population had begun to appropriate many outside and mainstream society practices, Xu felt that in the very least, an exhibition and collection of Baiku Yao material culture, which he proudly expressed his involvement in, was an important act of “saving” this “distinct *minzu* culture”.

With an allotted amount of approximately 10 thousand RMB (approximately \$1220 according to the 8.2RMB/USD rate of 2004) from the Nandan county government, Xu began the intensive work of data and material culture collection for the exhibition center with GXMN staff. Xu Jinwen used his contacts in the Baiku Yao community to acquire different objects on Baiku Yao life in Huaili and Lihu township. He told to me that how he went to several Baiku Yao people he knew and explained to them he was looking for certain Baiku Yao objects, such as a bronze drum, four post loom, and Baiku Yao dress, to display in the ecomuseum. As a man who was invested in the area and had engaged in the dissemination of knowledge of the Baiku Yao, he attempted to make clear to local villagers his intentions in collection building, describing the significance of the

ecomuseum and the function of the Baiku Yao collection. Several villagers assisted him in obtaining these objects by taking him to specific households or searching themselves and even making suggestions on what items they felt he lacked. All of the collected objects were purchased through agreed amounts from local households. Importantly, Xu's work was the first time local Baiku Yao villagers were introduced to the idea of the ecomuseum, let alone understand the concept of the museum itself. Xu and the Nandan officials from the *Wentiju* and GXMN staff also consulted many villagers through interviews on the social and cultural life of the Baiku Yao. The material culture and data collection would be the first act of the ecomuseum in engaging the Baiku Yao community to think about the meaning and distinctiveness of their culture and place and a means to bring the Baiku Yao into the fold of the museological discourse.⁷³ Such initial work established a new ecomuseum-villager relationship and also allowed for building, according to Xu Jinwen, a “comprehensive collection” that was not simply expert-centered but included “local cultural knowledge” (*bendi wenhua zhishi*).

Collected material culture and information on the Baiku Yao went through a structuring and ordering process. The exhibition of Baiku Yao in the ecomuseum center displays the power of narratives (MacLeod et al. 2012) and how cultural heritage is caught up in an “authorized heritage discourse” whereby it is put under erasure through a set of politically-driven set of judgments (Smith 2006). Through processes of collection building and curation, Baiku Yao way of life was converted into heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). To understand the various political dimensions of the

⁷³ As will be discussed later in the study, the Huaili “ecomuseum”, like that in Haute-Beauce, discussed by Hausenfield, is seen less as a reflection of the reality of the Baiku Yao everyday life than representing a new element that has only gradually worked to win social acceptance through various promotional methods and activities.

curation process and the narratives embedded within, I draw the reader into the interpretative exhibition space and focus on its semiotics and semantics. Empirical evidence from the exhibition and conversations with curators, staff, researchers, and local people, aid in revealing how installations frame ethnic identity and the Baiku Yao as a “sign of tradition”, difference, and exoticism (Litzinger 2000). At the same time the articulations of Baiku Yao culture are examined in the present, I expose them as “variants within a unified field of representations” (Clifford 1997: 110) that are entangled in historically and socially situated discourses.

The ecomuseum center is located up from the main paved road leading between Huaili main village and Lihu township. The center is a concrete, square shaped structure covering 1079 square meters. Its facade is colored light tan with a tiled roof to resemble the Baiku Yao adobe houses that lie in the villages of Manjiang, HuaQiao, and HuaTu below in the valley. After entering the main doors of the ecomuseum center, the visitor is welcomed by a collage of photographs hung around the reception area depicting high ranking Chinese government officials' on visits to the ecomuseum. This creates a sense that the visitor too has reached an important site on the periphery of China, and a government sanctioned institution of culture. Opposite the main entrance is an opening to the outdoor square of the ecomuseum center, where a meeting room, office, and guest rooms are located. To the left is a door leading to the Baiku Yao professional curated exhibition.

A large picture is placed at the entrance of the exhibit with a Baiku Yao man surrounded by young children smiling as they play a large wooden drum together while youth women in the background dance along with played bronze drums. Next to the

image reads a sign in Chinese (*nandan baiku yao wenhua zhan*) and in English, “Exhibition of White-trouser's Yao Culture in Nandan”. The ecomuseum center exhibition is a permanent installation spread over one large space divided into three interlinked rooms. The space is linear and offers a general preferred route. The exhibit's message throughout does not depend on a sequential passage, but rather a set of objects and images associated with themed narratives.⁷⁴ The exhibition assumes a folk museum style incorporating the systematic use of photographs and unshowcased objects to illustrate a specific narrative on ethnic exoticism and everyday “primitive” rural life. Written text on each photograph creates an explanatory context for both image and object. Also, labels are placed accordingly on or next to each object. Each object is given a Chinese name to orient it for a Han Chinese audience.⁷⁵

The first room is circular in shape and the exhibition opens with a brief introduction of the local Baiku Yao. A collection of four poster signs situate the Baiku Yao in a narrative of cultural difference, cultural continuity, splendor, and tradition. This narratives complements the concluding installation in the exhibit at the other end of the long room that aims to legitimate the ecomuseum project and work to safeguard Baiku Yao culture.

The first sign at the start of the exhibit reads:

This is a mystical *minzu*, living in the mountains of the northwest Yunnan-Guizhou plateau creating a simple (*gupu*) and magnificent (*guli*) *minzu* culture; it is a strong nation, with its roots in the infertile mountainous Guangxi-Guizhou border, diligently carrying on (*chuangcheng*) and following (*yanxi*) passed generations' way of life. Because of large mountain barriers, her

⁷⁴ This conception of museum space is drawn from Clifford's (1997: 118) interpretation of museums of the northwest.

⁷⁵ In 2011, the author assisted in translating labels to English to include both Chinese and English on object labels and thus signify the exhibition as being more “international-oriented”. In 2005, for the Guizhou Ecomuseum International Forum, Huaili ecomuseum was selected as one site for international scholars to make a field visit. At that time, English text was added to complement Chinese for signs throughout the exhibit.

splendid (*canlan*), enchanting (*miren*) *minzu* culture residing for a long time in the deep mountains is rarely known to anyone (*xianweirenzhi*). Today, she is slowly lifting her mysterious veil, making the outside world (*waijie*) shocked (*zhenjing*) and moved (*gandong*)! She is a golden Phoenix (*jin fenghuang*) coming out of the mountains, and each of her body feathers are one aspect of her colorful culture: clothing (*fushi*) culture, marriage (*hunlian*) culture, folksong (*geyao*) culture, funeral (*sangzang*) culture, the bronze drum (*tonggu*) culture, wine (*jiu*) culture, top (*tuolou*) culture Her *minzu* culture have been preserved so completely, with its properties so abundant and rich (*fengfu*), and as a matter of course Guangxi's first ecomuseum has been built here. Seeing is believing (*baiwenburuyijian*), let us, in this fresh and natural (*qingxin ziran*) environment, go on a wonderful (*qimiao*) cultural tour, enjoying delicate flavors (*xixipinwei*) and being slowly enchanted (*manman taozui*). Her name is – White Trouser (*baiku*) Yao.

Not only do the gendered Baiku Yao exude mystery and wonder, as explained by this introduction, but embody a plethora of “intact” cultural traditions. The following introductory signs explaining the surrounding area of Huaili and Lihu and demographics of the region also point to the Baiku Yao and Huaili as sustainable “signs of tradition” in the display of three specific photographic images with attached text: an image of the stone entrance of the village of Manjiang has a description that claims this as “an ancient enclosure”, “a strategic location of defense”, and “one part of the record of the area's ancient history”; an image of Baiku Yao villagers walking along a wooded path with accompanying text that reads, “Huaili's “ancient road” was once the village’s only connection to the outside world”; and an image of a Baiku Yao villager carrying buckets of water over his shoulder up narrow stone steps claim this is as “an ancient well that from ancient time to the present has provided an endless supply of water helping the cultivation of generation after generation of children”.

One of the first installments to catch the visitor's eye when entering the exhibit space is a large wooden four-post floor loom and a cotton de-seeder positioned in the center of the first room. A large curved wall covered with images of Baiku Yao women in

hand-made batik and embroidered dress forms the backdrop to place the two instruments in the context of the Baiku Yao dress-making. The signs of age and usage of these wooden instruments evoke a sense of the past and tradition and create for the visitor a context of cultural difference and a dichotomy of tradition and modernity (see also Smith 2008: 246). The curved wall displays images of women spinning cotton, drying soaked thread, “running the thread” (*paosa*), weaving, embroidering, extracting wax from the indigenous *zhanggao* tree, and creating batik. Around the base of the wall are more instruments used for dress making, including a *zhangao* board for painting indigo for batik, cotton spools, and different types of wooden cotton spinners. Tucked behind one of the instruments is a silver plaque with the embossed symbol of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in the left hand corner, and declaring Yao ethnic dress a national intangible cultural heritage, bestowed in 2006.



Figure 14. First room of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum exhibition.

Before entering the next section of the exhibition, visitors can stand in front of one of the only showcases in the exhibit. Behind the glass, Baiku Yao male and female everyday and ceremonial clothing is hung on a wall. This display presents cultural

symbols familiar to most Han visitors that have frequented China's *minzu* museums or exhibits in traditional museums. By presenting ethnic minority dress at the front of the exhibition space, visitors are quickly brought into the narrative of cultural difference and the imagination of the ethnic “other”. The faded clothing and images above the showcase displaying men, women and youth clothed in Baiku Yao dress add to this exhibitionary practice and accentuate the exoticism for the Baiku Yao and the notion of a living “tradition”.

The next room is composed of an abundance of images, objects, and themes. One wall leading across the huge room and into the next is covered with brightly colored green bamboo (creating a sign of life) with an assortment of overlaid poster boards featuring images and text on subsistence and production (*shengchan*) of the Baiku Yao. They explain the arduous agricultural practices, such as growing two staple crops of rice and corn and a variety of vegetables and fruits in this difficult mountainous terrain of “30 percent soil and 70 percent rock”. Poster boards also display the importance of livestock - chickens, black pigs, and brown cows - to the Baiku Yao's rural livelihood. Similar to the previous room's installation, agricultural instruments such as bamboo baskets, a rice steamer, shoulder carriers, a plough, and a tiller, and a bird net line the base of the wall.

In the same room on an adjacent wall is an installation of inside a Baiku Yao residence. Under a wooden canopy that represents the residence roof, short wooden stools encircle a cooking pot, with a iron rice cooker, a wash basin, and a sour vegetables fermentation pot scattered around them. In a separate “room” next to the dining scene is a small wooden table, with legs wrapped with red strips of paper. Atop the table is bowl filled with ash and a few sticks of incense and a long sword. Hanging from the wooden

beam of the canopy behind the table are water buffalo horns. A small blue label on the table explains the sacred nature of the objects as a “performing sorcery table” (*guishi shifa zhu*). This is the only part of the entire exhibition that uses material culture to present the ritual system of the Baiku Yao. Located in different parts of the exhibit, a few pictures depict forms of religious ritual, such as a female shaman (*weiyua* in Baiku language) “reading an egg” as an act of divination and a male shaman (*nomhao* in Baiku language) sanctifying the bronze drum during times of funeral. But, like the sorcery table display they do not offer a clear explanation on their significant to ritual life of the Baiku Yao. While identifications of the “sacred” and engagements with the “supernatural” are becoming more accepted in Chinese society since the opening up policy in the post-Mao era, such display practice are not uncommon, especially in state-run cultural institutions. A pejorative tone still exists for indigenous ritual activities often deemed “superstitious”. To maintain a cozy feeling about the exotic and different ethnic minority, such ritual life is often excluded from folk displays.

The next section of the large middle room covers various aspects of Baiku Yao life, entitled “Living: Content and Leisurely”. The sign board beginning this section states:

“The Baiku Yao people are happy and content with their life. In their lives, their handiness (*congming lingqiao*), romanticism (*langman qinghuai*), and carefree nature (*ziyouzizai*) can be seen everywhere. Under difficult conditions, the simple/sincere (*pushi*) Baiku Yao people still have a merry life (*kuaille de shenghuo*), creating many unique, fascinating cultures (*dute miren wenhua*), such as *xihua* antiphonal songs (*duige*), spinning top (*tuolou*) competitions, *ganwei* marriage, etc. These folk customs have gone through yeas of changes, yet they have remained considerably intact, and have fused together (*rongweiyiti*) with this beautiful nature.”

With a sentiment that combines local satisfaction, cultural richness, and conservation, the Baiku Yao are brought into a common portrayal of ethnic minorities in China as simple,

joyous, and in a state of harmony (see Gladney 1994; Blum 2001; Oakes 1997; Schein 2000). This is furthermore suggested through pictures of adobe residences and stilted granaries shown along with Baiku Yao youth singing and happily engaging in pre-marriage customs, and villagers playing different types of instruments (*lali*, ox horn, leaves, bamboo drums), bird watching, wine making, and market going. Bird cages, rice and wine measures, food carriers, and other daily tools are placed under these images to give tangible substance to the theme. In the center of the large middle room, and in front of this display, are large objects. A model of a stilted granary (*liang cang*) with bamboo siding and a thatched roof about 1/3 the original size is situated opposite the description of Baiku Yao residence and structures. A large square meter threshing bin leans against the stilted granary facing the section on subsistence. And a large wine brewing kiln and rice pounder are located in front of the section on “living”.

In the third room, focus turns to back to more exotic elements of Baiku Yao culture with themes of ritual funeral ceremonies and the “mystery” of “ancient” burial caves. Wall-size photographs and supplemental text document the process of funeral service. In the same circular room, said by curators to represent the shape of the ceremonial drum, is a bronze drum placed on the floor under a wooden arch where it would normally be hung when played. Photographs of Baiku Yao men beating bronze drums also fill part of the room. Although a sign situated on a small dividing wall between the second and third rooms explains the inherent relationship between the bronze drum and funeral customs,⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The sign reads: Among the all the Baiku Yao people, over 200 bronze drums have been collected. The bronze drum is precious spiritual tool of the Baiku Yao, and the *minzu* spirit is entrusted in the instrument. Ordinarily during funerals, the bronze drum must be played and is played together with the dynamic bronze drum dance. The drum beat is grand and solemn, so to alarm the heavens, to weep to the gods/spirits (*guishen*). During funerals the Baiku Yao still hold the ceremonious “opening the cow” (*kai niu*) ritual, “bull crying” (*ku niu*), “eulogize the bull” (*song niu*), to “cut the bull” (*kan niu*), all to

many visitors miss it and are left to interpret the juxtaposition of the two image displays.⁷⁷



Figure 15. Second main room of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum exhibition.

Next to pictures of the bronze drum is a collection of large photographs displaying a mountain cave with a row of human skulls inside. Entitled “Cave Burials: Unsolved Mystery”, the poster sign reads:

In ancient south China, cave burials are one common type of funeral custom, ordinarily found located mid-way up or at the base of limestone karst mountains. There are tens of such cave burial sites in Lihu, Nandan. These cave burial sites have existed for hundred or thousands of years. Yet, questions remain on what relationship they have with the Baiku Yao; it remains a mystery. The mysterious secrets of these funeral customs are clearly hidden within these mountain caves.

This installation links the Baiku Yao with the past and highlights the mysteriousness and primitivity of their culture. Words from the explanatory text provoke a sentiment of wonder and curiosity in posing a question of uncertainty concerning this discovery. In

commemorate ancestor's hardships and to urge the future generations “to carry on the past and open a way for the future” (*jiwang kailai*) (translated by the author).

⁷⁷ In fact, no image within the room presents bronze drums being played at funeral services.

accompanying photographs, Chinese (outsider) men in modern dress and baseball caps are peering and pointing into the cave with heads tilted to one side exuding a sense of bewilderment, further accentuating spectacle of the site. As the second to last installation in the exhibit, the “cave burials” provides an exotic gaze of the Baiku Yao and the bifurcation between “us” and “them”, which often remains with the visitor after leaving.

The final section of the exhibition turns to the ecomuseum and project development in Huaili. Composed of four signs, different aspects of the ecomuseum are presented. The first, entitled “Ecomuseum: The Road to Sustainable Development” in Chinese (*shengtai bowuguan – kechixu fazhan zhi lu*) with accompanying English title, “Eco-museum: Harmonious Development”, explains the aim of the ecomuseum to bring “benefits to the exploration of *minzu* cultural protection and inheritance” and to offer “opportunities for academic research”. The second sign introduces the ecomuseum as a new Western concept and method in the preservation of local natural and cultural heritage in the local context and a means to engage the local population in safeguarding their own heritage. The third sign defines the spatial domain of the Huaili ecomuseum, consisting of the three natural villages of Manjiang, Hua Tu and Hua Qiao, with pictures of each village. It also clarifies governmental support in project development coming from county, city, and regional levels. Finally, the fourth sign outlines work under the ecomuseum to display, collect, research, and manage local heritage through the ecomuseum center and in the local villages. In this final section of the exhibition the ecomuseum center is present as not the ecomuseum, rather as a facility of the larger ecomuseum project that includes the distinct cultural landscape of the three Baiku Yao villages. Even though this is presented

in Chinese for Han Chinese visitors, this holistic notion of the “ecomuseum” is often lost in translation.

Visitors to the ecomuseum I questioned on their understanding of the ecomuseum after viewing the exhibition believed the center was the ecomuseum itself.⁷⁸ Some called the ecomuseum a kind of “*minzu minsu bowuguan*” (ethnic nationalities folk museum). Over 80% of visitors I recorded over the span of the four years of my fieldwork in Huaili, from 2008 to early 2013, did not set foot in any of the three villages. Upon leaving Huaili, many I spoke with claimed that they were unaware where the villagers were and that they were part of the ecomuseum. In fact, visitors lack of awareness of what the ecomuseum constitutes is compounded by accompanying tour guides failing to offer this explanation or even knowing themselves and is tied to guides’ efforts to escort tourists to their next destination as soon as possible, taking a very typical Chinese tourism approach to fit in many sites in one day. The issue of translation not only impacts tourists’ understanding of what the ecomuseum is, but also villagers themselves. Both hear the term “*shengtai bowuguan*” (*shengtai* = ecology, *bowuguan* = museum) and associate it directly to the ecomuseum center with a professionally curated exhibit on Baiku Yao culture. “Museum” is linked to collection and display. This is why, when villagers do speak of the ecomuseum they recognize is as a form of outside intervention, and use the foreign Chinese term “*bowuguan*”.

For ecomuseum projects across Guangxi and Guizhou province, the common procedure of project development begins with the construction of the ecomuseum center in the selected site. The center is presented as a tangible fixture and marker of the

⁷⁸ Villagers acknowledging the ecomuseum center as the ecomuseum itself is seen across many ecomuseums sites in China (see Nitzky 2012).

ecomuseum project and a core for activities, cultural research and documentation, and exhibition of local culture. The application of the ecomuseum center is “model” in China tied to the first generation of ecomuseums in Guizhou under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Partnership Program. Chinese ecomuseum developers adopted the Norwegian approach to establish the documentation center in every site. According to the Norwegian museologist John Aage Gjestrum (1995), it represents the “brain” of the ecomuseum, functioning as an exhibition space to showcase the various elements of local cultural heritage and landscape beyond its walls, a site to welcome visitors, and a place to catalog documented and recorded work on the local culture. Whereas Gjestrum (1995) pushed a “decentralized system” of the ecomuseum, where the center is only one element of the network of museological units, or “departments” composing the ecomuseum space, the Chinese has closely held to the centralized method of focusing on the center as the main facility of the ecomuseum. For ecomuseums in Guangxi, including Huaili, the center is the main site for visitors to interact with Baiku Yao culture, and a forum for activities directed by ecomuseum staff and government agencies. In China, as ecomuseum center has come to embody the ecomuseum project itself, it has signified a “mirror” for the local population to view itself through the lens of the Chinese state and academic, a “window” for outsiders to view and experience the local culture and for local population to engage with the outside world, inviting dialogue and exchange, and a “showcase” for tourism displaying various elements of local cultural heritage and landscape that exist outside its walls under a narrative meant for consumption (Riviere 1985; Maure 2006).

Historically and Socially Situated Narratives of the Baiku Yao

Similar to what Litzinger (2000: 90) describes for the Yao “space” of Jinxiu in his book *Other Chinas*, and in Oakes’ (1997, 1998) work on ethnic minority villages in Guizhou, Huaili has come under government strategies to constitute it as “a repository of traditional culture”, and the Baiku Yao cultural landscape has become a symbol of cultural permanence and difference. Once Huaili was selected as an ecomuseum site, the Baiku Yao cultural landscape was “institutionalized in a more intricate and multifaceted museum system and structure in which they acquired new meanings as they were *applied* within a process of interpretation” (Rassool 2006: 303). Drawing on the work of de Certeau (1984), we can understand the ecomuseum as a mechanism of defining localities of cultural distinction, reproducing a “practiced place”. In addition, it is a dynamic social “space” where interactions transpire among local and non-local actors, and where there is an “intersection of constantly mobile signifying elements, meanings, social processes”.⁷⁹ As the ecomuseum has become an important appendage of the Chinese and global heritage discourse, it has been used as an important site for “draw[ing] distinct boundaries around local customs, fixing them in time and space and insuring that they remain encased as exhibits for the modern metropolitan world to observe and appreciate” (Oakes 1997: 49; see also Varutti 2010). Through the museological process seen through the curation of the ecomuseum center exhibition and subsequent village museumification, discussed below, Baiku Yao culture is thus reconstituted within a space of posited meaning (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). These posited meanings are closely tied to narratives that are historically and socially implicated around notions of cultural

⁷⁹ See also Notar (2006) for an application of de Certeau for the tourist destination of Dali, Yunnan province.

difference, class, and ethnicity. Drawing on Jonsson (2000, 2005), Litzinger (2000), Cushman's (1970) research on the Yao and other scholarship examining ethnic and indigenous peoples through the application of ethnohistorical research approach, I turn here to an exploration of how practices of curation and museumification of the Baiku Yao seen through ecomuseum development are historically and socially situated. "The past", as Litzinger (2000: 33) suggests, "is a temporal frame to which one can turn for an explanation for the conditions of the present and a vehicle for action and change in the world". What follows is a content analysis⁸⁰ of the historical discourses that have situated and imagined the Baiku Yao on the "margins" of a transforming China, as a "people without a history" (Wolf 1982).

In the foreword of Alberts' (2006: xv) text, *A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China*, Barend ter Haar states, "the 'Yao' as a people are very much the result of interaction with and construction by imperial Chinese politics and culture".⁸¹ Indeed, these interactions and constructions have changed since the imperial era under new

⁸⁰ Although historical documents exist on the history of Guangxi and relations between the Han and the universal label of the "Yao", as outlined in detail most recently by Litzinger (2000), historical accounts on the Baiku Yao are minimal. Wading through scholarship on the Baiku Yao, I have come to find some accounts that present pieces of a Baiku Yao history composed mainly by non-Baiku Yao Chinese scholars. In an effort to draw together a history of the Baiku Yao in terms of ethnic relations and identity constructions, I draw on these sources, and studies on the larger "Yao" population written in Chinese and English, and interviews I conducted with scholars studying the Yao and Baiku Yao in Guangxi and specifically in Nandan county, as well as Baiku Yao elders in Huaili.

⁸¹ It is important to note, that constructions of ethnic identity are not limited to state written narratives and do ethnic groups do not necessarily adhere to certain identifications and classifications. Rack (2005) uses an actor-centered and interpretive perspective to argue for the importance of not reifying and essentializing entities through terms like "group", "category", and "boundary", to claim that the construction of identities for the peoples such as the Miao of south China, who she researches, is a dynamic process of on-going interaction. As such, Rack (2005: 15) explains, "People's ethnic identification of themselves and others may be brought into play differently in different situations" and nuanced identifications arise outside of administrative and scholarly descriptions. Rack points to the fact that 1) people classified as a *minzu* or branch of a *minzu* should not be thought of as viewing themselves or claim belonging to that classified group or use such terminology (2005: 19); and 2) exploration of the interactions between peoples introduce alternative ways to understand constructions of difference among local populations and dominant authority.

political regimes of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the contemporary post-Mao reform period. The construction of the ethnic minority is a result of making the nation-state (Gladney 1996; Fiskesjo 2006) and identity formation has been intricately tied to a transforming political system of power and control. In explorations of the history of the people known as “Yao” in China and Southeast Asia, scholars have recast the notion of the complexity in determining *a* history (Litzinger 2000; Jonsson 2000). The various narratives of Yao history combined with multiple groups and diasporas that are ascribed as “Yao” and/or claim this ethnic title, complicate claims of a clear Yao history. Cushman, who has conducted probably the most comprehensive investigation of the ethnohistory of the Yao, argues in his dissertation *Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts: Problems in the Ethnohistory of the Yao*, that multiple problems exist through this effort of composing a Yao history. It is not my intention here to redress the detailed account of Yao “history” outlined by Cushman (1970), and others including Lemoine (1982), Litzinger (1995, 1998, 2000), Jonsson (2000, 2005), Alberts (2006) and in Chinese by scholars such as Pan and Gu (?) and in volumes like the *Concise History of the Yao (Yaozu Jianshi)* (1983) and the more recent *General History of the Yao (Yaozu Tongshi)* (Feng 2007).⁸² Rather, I aim to draw from their work and other sources to examine how

⁸² Histories of the “Yao” in China are predominantly drawn from imperial and government documents written by Chinese elites and officials. Histories that are not from the dynastic period or Chinese government circles, have also been constructed by European and American scholars aiming to develop ethnohistories of the Yao that often define an ethnic group in constant struggle with imperialist regimes. Histories written by “colonial” administrators and proponents of the state were not only important in classifying peoples, informing citizens of “self” and “other”, and “assuring its citizens both of their common origin and their progressive development” (Mark 2005: 22), but also played a role in imagining the nation and legitimizing the nation-state. Throughout historical texts written by Han Chinese, emphasis has been made on distinction of groups associated with geography and the divide between Han and non-Han groups, and in particular on the Han people's path to ascendancy in terms of progress and battling to civilize the periphery. Furthermore, ethnic minority scholars must not be disregarded in their attempts to construct ethnohistories of their own. Accounts by Yao scholars for example demonstrate that texts on Yao history are not simply confined to acts of dominant state power

the Yao and more specially the Baiku Yao have been imagined and how they are represented today in institutions like the ecomuseum.

Cushman (1970) describes that the theory of Chinese society as the Middle Kingdom (*zhong guo*) defined spatial cosmological zones and differences between ethnic groups and classes forming a Chinese typology of non-Han ethnic groups based more on geography than categories derived from ethnolinguistic relationships of those groups. Through this structuration of the social domain “particular alignments of social and ecological categories” were generated “that reshaped in fundamental ways the politics of social identities” and formed regional and social divides and hierarchies (Jonsson 2000: 66-67). In Jonsson's extensive research on the Yao and Mien of southern China and Southeast Asia, he claims that “as states were reproduced, and as various rural populations engaged with structures of the state, people came to be defined, and to define themselves, in terms of such relations” (2000: 67). It is through this complex set of relations that we come to understand the multiple articulations of ethnic identity of the “Yao” and Baiku Yao.

Chinese scholars have drawn on historical records to connect the Yao to the classifications of ancient ethnic groups. Cushman (1970), explains that the Yao have been traced back to around 220 A.D. defined under the category *nan man* meaning “southern barbarian”.⁸³ From the Han to Tang dynasty and into the Song dynasty, new smaller

(see Litzinger 2000; Jonsson 2000). Interestingly, minority scholars efforts to write specific ethnic groups into history of the nation has resulted in both alternative discourses which contest popular representations and reproducing Han Chinese depictions of the Yao and even led to certain silences of Yao history (Litzinger 2000).

⁸³ This pejorative umbrella classification described in the *Shi Ji*, the official histories of China, divides this group into two geographical categories: 1) the *xinnan yi*, or indigenous populations of present-day Yunnan, southern Sichuan, and western Guizhou, and 2) *nan man*, or the indigenous populations of present-day Guangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, and eastern Guizhou (Litzinger

ethnic classifications of southern ethnic groups emerged mainly focused on geographical distinction (Litzinger 2000: 57). Discovery of the document, *the Register for Crossing the Mountains (guo shan bang)* or the *Kia Shen Pong* in Mien language, which documents the origin of Yao people as descending from the dog king Pan Hu, became added evidence to the linkage between the Tang dynasty introduced term *mo yao*, meaning “not subject to corvee labor”, and the distinct ethnic group of the Yao (Litzinger 2000: 58; Jonsson 2000: 68; Cushman 1970: 55-59). Association with the larger categorization of “southern barbarians” and the *mo yao*, framed the Yao peoples scattered across southern China as an ethnic “other” to the Han Chinese. This is one aspect of how the Yao, throughout Chinese historical records, have been entrenched in “Chinese practices of seeing and naming the periphery as a zone of both exotic fascination and fear” (Litzinger 2000: 45).

Drawing from a collection of records from the Ming dynasty, Cushman (1970) illustrates the official stereotypical views of the “southern non-Chinese ethnic groups”. Cushman (1970: 35) states that they were seen on the one hand as “barbarians” but able to be “civilized” and integrated into the Chinese social order and, on the other hand, were “independent and hardy people who, acting on uncivilized premises, might revolt at any time”. (Interestingly, in contemporary China a similar contradiction exists based on a dialectic of alterity and ethnic identity; at the same time there is a policy to “civilize” ethnic minorities and bring them into mainstream society, there is also an agenda to present them as “primitive” and “traditional”. Under a new heritage discourse, effort have been made to preserve their traditional ways and life and maintain their positionality as

2000: 57).

ethnic “other” using institutions such as the *minzu* museum and ecomuseum.) Historical accounts of minorities in the Ming dynasty actually saw a shift in perception due to greater social interaction among groups that moved away from usage of generic “barbarian” terminology to more detailed accounts of specific groups and names (Barlow 2000). Change in nomenclature actually resulted in greater emphasis on representations of ethnic difference. Examples include the well-known 18th century *Miao Albums*, which was a strong indication of Han Chinese perceptions of ethnic minorities of the south. Composed of prose, poetry, and illustrations to describe the diverse ethnic groups of China, the *Miao Albums* was specifically used to educate officials on how to govern the frontier regions more effectively (Deal and Hostetler 2006). Cushman explains that in the *Miao Albums* the “Yao” received three illustrations focused on primitivity, isolation, and wild behavior. “The Yao as Tiger Hunters” illustration, for example, depicts two Yao men with knee-length pants and tied-up hair chasing a tiger with sticks and spears as they traverse a mountain landscape.⁸⁴ The attached narrative to the image reads:

The Yao are by nature ferocious and consider themselves the descendents of P'an Hu. They cultivate the fields themselves and eat the produce thereof. They seldom go into the cities and markets They mostly live in the deep mountains. They like to hunt and are skilled in capturing tigers and leopards with their hands... (Cushman 1970).

Through historic interactions and engagements with state structures we see outcomes that impacted particular formations of social identities of the Yao. Two important elements in the historical construction of a Yao identity were agriculture and ecology and and warfare. Jonsson (2000: 67) states: “Across this region, states declared their power to

⁸⁴ While there is no proof that this is a depiction of specifically the Baiku Yao subbranch, the style of knee-length pants and long tied hair of males is unique to the Baiku Yao among the Yao population in southern China, and Baiku Yao villagers elders also expressed in conversations with me that their ancestors did hunt tigers that did previously roam areas they have inhabited. The now endangered South China tiger lived in southern China, including part of Guangxi and Guizhou.

tax the proceeds of wet-rice fields, and to corvee the producers, in return for protection. Dry-rice fields (swiddens) were outside this scheme”. Yao's forced subsistence patterns of “uplander” swidden agriculture situated them outside the state structure of tribute and services, and consequently led to pejorative representations of them as living in the “wilderness” of the forest and “not fully human” and excluded from the “civilized domain” (Jonsson 2000: 71-72). Agricultural adaptations, conditions of tax and corvee labor, and Han migration southward was also seen to contribute to intensified relationships between the Yao and Han and also the Yao and local rulers, which led to frequent conflicts (Litzinger 2000: 60). Although Yao rebellions are claimed by Jonsson (2000: 70) as best understood not as only actions against the state, “in the sense that there was an anti-state agenda that was shared among the Yao”, as individual incidents of Yao groups' feuds with particular local rulers and administrators were more common, in Chinese state written history a universal recalcitrant Yao is placed against the entity of Chinese rule.⁸⁵ In such accounts the Yao are described as “ferocious and mountainwise”, “stubborn”, “crude and barbaric rebels” (Litzinger 2000: 60).

Their struggle with the social and political order led to “a life of migration” with Yao groups “driven into the mountains forced to carve out an existence on marginal land” (Litzinger 2000: 52). Thus, we see a vicious cycle of being driven to upland regions and forced to practice swidden agriculture and defined as outside the state in terms of not engaging in tax or corvee, which led to greater pressure by local rulers and unrest and conflict, and ultimately forced migration and marginalization. These historical

⁸⁵ Faure (2006) gives a detailed account of “Yao wars” throughout the Ming dynasty.

interactions, placing the Yao outside the state, gave rise to constructions of Yao ethnic identity which have shaped contemporary representations.

The few historical accounts found on the Baiku Yao of northwest Guangxi and the Guangxi-Guizhou border region, offer similar depictions of forced migration, oppression, and unrest. In southwest China, including Guangxi, the *tusi*, or native chieftain system was in place between the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasty (1644-1911).⁸⁶ In Guangxi, as the Zhuang clans controlled large portions of the region, they were constantly engaged in negotiating the *tusi* system and struggled with Han expansion efforts and other indigenous and migratory ethnic groups over land control (Barlow 2009).⁸⁷ Recorded Baiku Yao interactions with the *tusi* system and local rulers date to the late Qing dynasty when the Zhuang Mo clan *tusi* in the Qing dynasty controlled parts of Guangxi, including the northwest territory, where the Baiku Yao are claimed to be living at that time (Barlow 2009). According to Ma Zhiwei's (2008: 77):

The Baiku Yao experienced ongoing suppression by the Zhuang Mo clan *tusi* system and the two groups conflicts became more acute. Sometimes in efforts to resist the *tusi* system of the Mo clan, acts of violence would erupt. Resistance would often result in even more oppressive rule over the Baiku Yao, and therefore, the Baiku Yao would escape into the deep mountains for survival and isolation. In the 31st year of the Qing emperor reign of Guangxu (1905), the *tusi* rule under the Zhuang Mo clan weakened and gave way for rule under the Han in the Baiku Yao inhabited region. Although tensions between the Baiku Yao and class rule began to ease, exploitation and oppression still continued. After the formation of the Republic of China, the *bao-jia* system [an administrative system organized on the basis of households] was established in the Baiku Yao region. However, the Baiku Yao were unable to take part in appointing own their town and village leaders, and compared to the previous rule the *bao-jia* system was even worse (*you guo zhi er wu bu ji*), as it created a feudalistic system. Throughout history from Zhuang *tusi*

⁸⁶ This was a system, explained by Took (2005), as a form of indirect rule employed by the Chinese state as a pragmatic means of exercising political control over the tribal chieftains who exercised power over China's frontier regions. Tribal chieftains who submitted to this system were able to maintain their rule while the Chinese state extended its influence in "alien territories" (Took 2005; Barlow 2009).

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Barlow's (2009) offers extensive research on the Zhuang throughout imperial China and Took (2005) has written on the *tusi* system in southwest China.

system rule to the Republic period, the Baiku Yao have survived through calamitous (*weinan*) circumstances.⁸⁸

The famed legend of Li Shuibao, native to Baxu township, Nandan county, also highlights unrest and conflict between the Baiku Yao and outside powers. He (2001) writes that Li Shuibao became entrenched in the social inequalities of the times as an educated man and local leader and became increasingly concerned of the oppression of his Baiku Yao people by outside powers. He built an army of Baiku Yao villagers and “rose up against the Qing *tusi* system” (He 2001). On several occasions Li Shuibao's tenacious army fought against local authorities resulting in an increase in government forces to quell the uprisings, which ultimately led Li's death in 1887.⁸⁹ This written story depicts Li Shuibao not only as a hero of the Baiku Yao people against outside oppressors, but also as a martyr of “feudal” *tusi* system praised as a “revolutionary spirit” under socialist Chinese state ideology.

Similar to other Yao groups, tense relations between the Baiku Yao and the Han and Zhuang led to constant movement in southwest China. According to some Baiku Yao experts, the Baiku Yao of Nandan migrated from Hunan province to the east of Guangxi⁹⁰. For one of the oldest members of the Huaili Baiku Yao community, Lu Linyang,⁹¹ however, the Baiku Yao of Huaili (*ve-li* in local Baiku Yao language) came to their

⁸⁸ Translated by author.

⁸⁹ It is claimed by He (2001) that during Li Shuibao's effort to rebel against local rulers he was declared Yao king (*yao wang*). Some oral accounts link the five finger blood imprint on the pants of Baiku Yao men to Li Shuibao's final battle with the Mo clan.

⁹⁰ Some claim this migration route cut across southern Guizhou and into northwest Guangxi. Others state the Baiku Yao traveled westward across Guangxi (Li Shizhong personal conversation). Another origin narrative, from Huaili ecomuseum archives, claims the Baiku Yao migrated from Jiangsu south to Dushan, Guizhou and into Libo on the border of Guangxi. The Baiku Yao of Libo then migrated south to Manjiang.

⁹¹ Local villagers' names have been changed to protect anonymity, unless village residents have opening consented in the author using their original names.

present location on separate occasions and along different routes.⁹² Specifically for the Lu clan of Manjiang, which he is part, Lu Linyang stated to me that they migrated from nearby Jimen to Huaili.⁹³ The story Lu Linyang recalled for me on why the Baiku Yao came to Manjiang from Jimen reflects the difficult interactions between the Baiku Yao and Zhuang and Han in the region:

In Jimen, our ancestors lived together with the Zhuang/Han. One day a Zhuang/Han man came up to a Baiku Yao man who was setting a trap for a tiger, which roamed the forests at that time. After discussing the trap and the probability of the Baiku Yao catching a tiger they both returned to the village together. Later that day, the Zhuang/Han man brought his own wife to the area where the trap was planted. He guided her over the trap which was set off and killed her. After some time, the Zhuang/Han man returned to the village to inquire if the Baiku Yao man caught anything in his trap. The Zhuang/Han then said to the Baiku Yao man, “Let's go see, I think you might have caught something in the trap”. Although feeling unconvinced, the Baiku Yao went along with Zhuang/Han man to check. They came to the trap and saw the Zhuang/Han man's wife laying there dead in the trap. The Zhuang/Han man turned to the Baiku Yao man and said, “Your trap has killed my wife, you must give me a new wife in return”. Stunned by the sight and disturbed by the fact that the Zhuang/Han man would lead his own wife to her death, the Baiku Yao man became overcome with fear of the Zhuang/Han and left Jimen coming here to Manjiang.

In conversations with Lu Linyang and other elders on the history of the Baiku Yao, memories were stirred on historical events that involved perceptions of Zhuang/Han “cruelty” and deception and Baiku Yao forced efforts of survival. For example, 81 year old Lu Jinhong, father of the Party secretary of Huaili, and other elders spoke to me of intense banditry during the warlord period after the fall of the Qing dynasty and until the

⁹² Unlike the Lu clan of Manjiang, the Baiku Yao of the main village of Huaili and Hua Qiao and Hua Tu share a common surname of Li and are composed of two Li clans, said to have come from the northeast area of Yao Shan after the arrival of the Baiku Yao of Manjiang. After the two Li clans entered Huaili, one clan moved into Hua Qiao and Hua Tu, next to Manjiang. Two other Baiku Yao elders and Lu Chaojin, vice-director of the ecomuseum and Baiku Yao from Manjiang, who has conducted extensive work on Baiku Yao oral history and legends, confirm these migration tendencies and demography of Huaili.

⁹³ After arriving in Manjiang area, the Baiku Yao from Jimen paid the previous inhabitants of Manjiang (who moved to what is now nearby Dongjia village) several water buffalo and chickens as payment for the land and natural well.

start of the Communist liberation.⁹⁴ They recalled the horrific violence during this “chaotic” period, stating that, “We were so poor and they wanted our money; we were taxed heavily and ended up running to nearby mountain areas of Dongjia and Baxu. They stole our things and destroyed our crops. When I was 17 [in the late 1940s] bandits (*tufei*) came here and set fire to the villages and killed our bulls because we welcomed the Communists”. Through these difficult historical interactions with outsiders the Baiku Yao have built a strong sentiment of ethnic division.⁹⁵ In fact the lack of beneficial and harmonious cross-cultural exchanges throughout history has underpinned Baiku Yao villagers current hesitation in dealings with the Zhuang and Han, such as in engagements in government-led projects.

Under a new state structure and political narrative of the nation, the Baiku Yao were written into the history of the People’s Republic of China under Mao Zedong as integral members of a united and diverse multiethnic nation-state and social advancement of the Chinese civilization (Litzinger 2000: 63). An important state program that conditioned ethnic identity under the new political regime was the mid-1950s Ethnic Classification (*minzu shibie*).⁹⁶ As Harrell (1995: 276) states, “This process [of ethnic identification and

⁹⁴ Although the Warlord Era was said to exist in China from 1916-1930, many warlords held power up until the liberation in 1949.

⁹⁵ For the Baiku Yao, attitudes toward the Zhuang/Han are affirmed through the Baiku Yao’s own construction of terms of social boundaries between “us” and “them” (Jenkins 1996). For example, in the Baiku Yao native terminology there are clear markers for *non-baiku* Yao (or *non-dounou*), referred to as “K” in native *dounou* language, and “*zong*” for the Zhuang. These articulations of ethnic and cultural difference are not fixed through these signifiers. Rather they are representative of a complex, on-going negotiation, which becomes more acute through moments of historical transformation.

⁹⁶ After the establishment of the People's Republic of People in 1949, with the effort to construct People's Congresses, the Chinese government conducted a registration of ethnic minorities across the country. Overwhelmed by over 400 applications during the 1953-1954 census, the government soon declared that surveys on the social history and diversity of the masses were to be conducted (Mullaney 2004). Research teams with scholars such as Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yuehua, Xia Kanghong, and Wen Tuqian were sent into minority regions to conduct field investigations on the diverse peoples of China. The Chinese government employed Stalin's criteria for defining a “nationality” - “common language, a common

classification] was an attempt to impose a scientific, state-determined, and relatively fixed order on the messy and fluid local realities of ethnic identity and interaction and to use this scientific classification as a basis for the distribution of resources and responsibilities to local or regional groups and their members”. The *minzu* classification system not only created comprehensive umbrella-like ethnic nationality titles, but also constructed ethnic representations minorities as subaltern subjects for the new state cultural policy. Territorial isolation, marginal subsistence, “primitivity”, and “bizarre” and “exotic” customs and colorful dress, were combined with a “revolutionary spirit” to frame a “Yao” ethnic identity (Litzinger 2000: 64).

In the post-Mao reform period of the 1980s, with a call for “socialist modernization” China turned away from class struggle and focused more on an examination of local histories and cultural distinctiveness. State support for cultural revival in the wake of the Cultural Revolution created openness to the exploration of the past and tradition in a move to rethink how ethnic groups have been studied and written into history. The promotion of cultural distinctiveness and diversity, was not seen in opposition to a path to modernization, but rather complementary in distinctions of social progress across groups and the drive for regional development through the commercialization of cultural difference. The desire to know, highlight, and recover the “traditional” in minority areas met its modern counterpart of the market economy. Cultural distinction and exoticism quickly became an important new asset for regional economic growth (see Oakes 1998).

territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture” (Gladney 1991; Harrell 1995). (Although Dreyer (1976), Gladney (1991) and several other scholars suggest that the applicability of such criteria for defining a *minzu* remains quite suspect and scientifically unsatisfactory, it continues to be part of the official discourse on ethnicity in China (Diamond 1995: 92; McKhann 1995)). The program culminated in the classification of 55 umbrella-like ethnic minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu*). For the Yao *minzu*, Litzinger (2000: 9-10) provides an in depth description of the process of classification.

Historical narratives of the “Yao” and Baiku Yao conditions representations of them in the contemporary China. Written historical accounts and depictions as peripheral, “backward”, “primitive”, and “traditional” constructed through centuries of interaction with the Chinese government and Han has been strongly reproduced in recent years (McKhann 1995: 42). McKhann (1995: 45) noted that in an odd reversal of the objectification process and evolutionist paradigm, customs formerly deemed “primitive” and “traditional”, with strong pejorative undertones, are today often touted as having positive social and commercial value (see also Oakes 2006). Notions of minority peoples being more in touch with spirituality and nature, sexually expressive, enjoying a sense of freedom from the humdrum of society, having a strong sense of place and community, and as carriers of exotic, mysterious cultural customs now enjoy a kind of mystique in Chinese society. According to Oakes (1997), a profound aspect of the anxiety, ambivalence, and disorientation which modernity has brought to China has been

a popular fascination with ethnic minority culture as an exotic and primitive source of vitality for modern China as it faces the cool onrush of global capitalism and the McWorld. Tourism has been a major factor in directing China's gaze toward minority culture and in standardizing that culture into a set of “authentic” markers which are readily recognizable for public consumption.

With the explosion of the tourism industry, attention has focused on the commoditization of ethnic culture and the articulation and construction of cultural symbols.⁹⁷ Colorful and elaborate dress, song, dance, and festivals, and a “harmonious” connection with nature, have become standardized cultural markers of ethnic minorities in China and are disseminated through mediums of literature, television, film, the internet, and

⁹⁷ For example, studies on the Mongols discussed by Khan (1996), Tibetans (Upton 2000), Miao (Schein 2000), Dong (Oakes 1997), Dai (Davis 2005), and Mosuo (Walsh 2005), all discuss romanticized images of ethnic minorities that have been emphasized in the popular media and continue to be reproduced through developing cultural industries.

institutionalized cultural theme parks and ethnic villages in China (see Oakes 1997; Gladney 1994, 2004; Baranovitch 2001; Schein 2000; Litzinger 1998). A more pronounced tourist search for “cultural authenticity” and “fantasy” has brought forth increased commercialization of minority culture, or what Swain (1989) calls the commoditization of ethnicity.

Ecomuseum development and the expansion of the cultural tourism industry to now the far reaches of Guangxi have meant both the identification and exploitation of local cultural assets of the Baiku Yao. The curation and museumification process of Huaili ecomuseum led by state agencies has contributed to constituting Baiku Yao culture and identity in Huaili and for the public sphere. It draws from historical narratives of the Baiku Yao and general stereotypes of peripheral ethnic minority communities in southwest China. It has made such an impact that now visitors come to Nandan and Huaili expecting to encounter what the media has illustrated and proclaimed as “isolated mountain people”, “human civilization's living fossils” (*renlei wenming de huohuashi*), and a “*minzu primitive society lifeway within modern society*” (*yuanshi shehui shenghuoxingtai zhijie kuaru xiangdai shehui shenghuoxingtai de minzu*) (<http://www.beihaiu.com/wordall.asp?id=800>; http://www.gx.xinhuanet.com/2012-03/21/c_111686863.htm). In fact, even before arriving in Huaili, visitors engage with such imaginaries in viewing several billboards lining the streets of Nandan county.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ These signs have become not only an important part of the ethnic tourism domain for representing the Baiku Yao but have also formed one part of a visual cultural reconstruction of the county city of Nandan. Starting in 2007-2008, Nandan received a significant surface make-over. The county government decided to make Nandan representative of its rich ethnic culture, particular the Baiku Yao. The facades of buildings lining all major streets were all painted white and decorated with bronze drum motifs. At the top of street lamps were placed small carved ox heads with their horns wrapped around a small golden bronze drum. Street signs, too, depicted ox horns atop a long brown pole holding between them street name. Murals on the sides of buildings depicted thatched roof ganaries on the hillside or massive

They depicts dark skinned Baiku Yao men wearing knee-length white pants, a dark blue jacket, and a head turban exuding strength and virility holding a bronze drum over one shoulder or trumpeting a massive ox horn high into the air standing alongside young alluring Baiku Yao women donning pleated skirts and revealing some skin under their loose fitting embroidered blouses as they carry a bamboo basket and dance happily surrounded by a cloud covered mountainous landscape.



Figure 16. Sign of Baiku Yao in Nandan, “Forming a place of traditional culture, featuring an ecological village in a new Nandan”.

The Museumification of Huaili Village

Hua Qiao, the second largest of the three villages composing the ecomuseum site of Huaili has approximately 43 households and 148 people, and is located closest to the ecomuseum center. A steep stone path leads down into the village from the main road and turns into stone steps that meander between the stilted wood and bamboo granaries, red roof-tiled adobe residences and newly built brick and concrete houses less than a decade old. At the base of the steps, a narrow stone path to the right that is noted by villagers as

circular images of stars of the center of bronze drums.

the oldest in Huaili connects Hua Qiao to the largest village of Manjiang. While one-story adobe style homes remain in Manjiang, year after year the number has been dwindling as many of the 87 households have attempted to rebuild larger and taller homes using brick and concrete paid for with income from migrant labor. Consequently, the proximity of homes has increased, giving a feeling that Manjiang is a more tightly packed village community than the other two. Following the “ancient” mountain path to the left from Hua Qiao continues for kilometers to many Huaili residents’ rice and corn fields and to the township of Lihu. Walking straight down from the base of the stone steps in Hua Qiao, through the trees, is the lower part of Hua Qiao village. Thirty years ago, Hua Qiao residents lived in the lower part of the village. However, after a major fire many households have become more spaced out and have settled in the upper part of village. A dirt road leads passed the lower part of Hua Qiao and several stilted granaries on the mountain side and onto Hua Tu village. Hua Tu is the farthest from the ecomuseum center and main road. Out of the three natural villages, it has undergone the least amount of physical change and engagement with the ecomuseum project. Of the 29 households in Hua Tu, only 1 has a home made of concrete (sponsored by the government instated *weifang gaizao* program to repair dangerous homes in disrepair). The three villages form a semi-circle across the small mountain valley with Hua Tu, to the north, sitting at the back, Hua Qiao to the east, and Manjiang to the west. While relations between villagers across the three villagers remains close and interactive, with many intermarriages across villages, there is distinct division between village clans and associated rituals associated with each clan.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Households of Manjiang are all part of the Lu clan, and a common ancestor, except for the 1 He clan

Up a short flight of stairs, less than two meters high, up from the livestock pens, the Baiku Yao adobe home opens to an expansive large room. Sections of the home are separated by large wood pillars that support the structure, and inside walls are often an after thought of the original construction process. If walls do exist within the home they are often made of thin wood and bamboo to create private bedrooms or storage areas. Some homes do have, however, a bedroom made of adobe added to the side of the house for the parents or oldest male sibling.

Homes are empty and villages are desolate during daylight hours between the months of March and June and September to November. Huaili Baiku Yao villagers are farmers and over generations have adapted to the harsh rocky mountainous terrain walking kilometers to their dispersed low producing rice and corn fields to take care of yearly harvests (one harvest per year). During these months, both men and women are busy working in the far off fields. With the expansion of the village population and difficulty of caring for crops a distance from their homes, several villagers have moved to the rice fields, now commonly referred to as *niu peng*, or cow shed, a location where cows are often brought to graze.

Outside the cultivation and harvest period, many Baiku Yao women are often seen working to manage small vegetable gardens near their homes, taking care of livestock,¹⁰⁰ or engaging in the task of making handmade batik and embroidered clothing for the

household. Hua Qiao villagers are part of the Li clan, and Hua Tu villagers are part of Li, He, and Wang clans, with most households part of the Li clan.

¹⁰⁰ Villagers raise livestock, such as pigs, chickens, and cows, and house them in the lower rock-walled level of their adobe homes, although pigs and chickens are often seen roaming freely throughout the villages. Many villagers raise livestock to make supplementary income for sale in the local market held in Lihu. Although the Baiku Yao do consume meat from livestock or purchased, it is often saved for special occasions such as welcoming guests, weddings, funerals, and New Years. Thus, Baiku diet is primarily centered on the stable rice crop (corn is fed to livestock) and vegetables.

household. Dress making procedures are conducted either alone in the home or together with a group of women, often of the same ancestor clan, from the wife's or husband's family. Men, too, are often working throughout the day, watching after grazing cows, raising livestock, or outside the village trying to earn money from rented rice fields from county Han Chinese or conducting forms of migrant labor. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, young Baiku Yao men and women, like most of rural China, have been engrossed in migrant labor in urban centers. Interviewed villagers explain their experience in often heading to Guangdong, Shenzhen, or Hunnan for work, leaving for months or years at a time with other members of the household taking care of their children. Throughout the year, the village comes more to life after nightfall as families return to their homes from the fields, visit relative clan members or friends, and try to relax by eating together, chatting about current or family affairs and drinking homemade rice and corn wine.¹⁰¹

The three villages of Hua Qiao, Hua Tu, and Manjiang, have become deeply entangled in the museological process introduced through ecomuseum development. The very selection and branding as an “ecomuseum” bestows a value of distinction to the village that strongly rests on the supposed permanence and uniqueness of the total culture (Giovine 2009). Acknowledging this permanence and tradition, has involved the reciprocal, and often problematic, process of opening up the village. As a result of the creation of the ecomuseum, Huaili has undergone a process of museumification, whereby the assemblage of narratives on the Baiku Yao is not only encased in the ecomuseum

¹⁰¹ Throughout my fieldwork in Huaili between 2008-2013, I spent days and nights in the three villages of Hua Qiao, Hua Tu, and Manjiang and other Huaili natural villages. My extended time in Huaili and as a welcomed addition to a Lu family of Manjiang allowed me to witness the interactions between villagers and clans, conversations on daily affairs, gender division and roles, everyday life and rituals, and intense negotiations of processes of modernity impacting Baiku Yao rural livelihoods through ecomuseum development.

center exhibition, but extends to the Baiku Yao village-scape. This has led to the reordering and recontextualization of tangible and intangible heritages and also conceptions “ethnicity” and local identity (Dellios 2002). Drawing on the work of Bennett and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), we can understand the ecomuseum as an exhibitionary complex that encompasses the closed center and open village space and has converted Baiku Yao lifeways into “heritage”. The present-centeredness of heritage construction revalues Baiku Yao culture in a new system of marketability and aestheticization.¹⁰²What we see in Huaili is an ordering of things, practices, and space (Fyfe 1996), which comes through clearing in making Huaili a “living museum”.

At the same time the ecomuseum center exhibition space was being curated, so was the ecomuseum territory of Hua Qiao, Hua Tu, and Manjiang. The museological process began with the placement of signs throughout the village by GXMN staff. Wood signs such “Ancient Gate” (*gu zhai men*) at the stone entrance of Manjiang village, “Ancient Road” (*gudao*) leading between Hua Qiao and Manjiang, “Ancient well” (*gu jin*) located in Manjiang, and “Burial Caves” and “Washing Pool” (*xi fu chi*) (natural spring for clothing) between Manjiang and Hua Tu, described and demarcated specific local cultural and natural heritages and “symbols” of the Baiku Yao. Some signs also offered descriptive explanations of each village, for example, the Manjiang sign located in the center of the village reads:

Manjiang natural village is composed of 87 households, 348 people. It is a Baiku Yao village and one of the most special Baiku Yao villages. The whole village is of the Lu

¹⁰² Specifically this takes place through the curatorial practices of the museum in deciding how to exhibit, such as culturally, to reconstruct or provide information on a cultural context of objects, or aesthetically, by focusing on their beauty, skill involved in their construction, and their value (Morphy 1994). The notion of heritage value and negotiation of regimes of value that also exist outside the exhibition space is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

clan. Here we can see hundred years ancient road, hundred year ancient well, food, and mysterious Baiku Yao *minzu* folk customs.

The process of creating an exhibition of the quotidian and making accessible this cultural landscape of “protected ethnic culture” to an outside public led to a dramatic push to launch village infrastructure improvement initiatives in the beginning years of ecomuseum construction. Investment from multiple regional, city, and county government departments quickly flooded in to convert the ethnic village into a new cultural destination for prospective tourists. An initial infrastructure project focused on the accessibility of Huaili and transforming the narrow dirt mountain path leading to Huaili from Lihu into a two lane paved road. The road was finally completed in 2008. Because Huaili is situated 800-1000 meters above sea level surrounded by towering mountains, phone signals in the villages are spars. The Guangxi regional government attracted support from a major China telecommunications company, and a new telecommunications line was built providing phone service for the ecomuseum and villagers.

Sanitation was also a big factor concerning the developers of the ecomuseum. Qin Pu recalled for me that during her first visit to Huaili in 2003 she saw large stone water tanks, situated throughout the village where Baiku Yao villagers collected water for drinking and cooking that was green from contamination. Added to this was livestock roaming freely throughout the village and abundance of animal excrement left on pathways in the villages. These conditions were seen as both unhealthy to the local community and unsuitable and uninviting for visitors. In fact, cleanliness and lack of water has posed serious problems for Baiku Yao in Huaili for many generations. For example, according to Liu's (2008) records, Huaili faced a local break out of cholera in 1992. Huaili is

plagued with severe run-off and a lack of surface drinking water due to limestone mountain terrain and the excess of sand in land soil. As long as villagers can remember, the Baiku Yao of Huaili have resorted to accessing natural wells for drinking water and recently since the mid-1990s they have also collected water from these large water tanks financed by the local government. For laundry cleaning, villagers either walk 4-5km or more to riverbanks near Lihu or use the limited water from a natural spring between Hua Tu and Manjiang villages. With the establishment of the ecomuseum project, the county government drew the International Red Cross and European Humanitarian Commission's attention to Huaili in an effort for well-being support. In 2005 with 2.4 million RMB allocated from the Commission, 2.5 million RMB from the Guangxi regional government, and 160 thousand RMB from Hechi city and Nandan county governments a hygiene project was launched to construct a major water pipeline from Lihu to Huaili bringing potable water to five villages in Huaili and the construction of 422 pit (dry) toilets for households across the three ecomuseum villages and the main village of Huaili.¹⁰³

These improvements have aided in establishing Huaili as a new tourist cultural destination. A year and a half after its opening, the ecomuseum already received thousands of visitors. With an upcoming New Years festival in the township of Lihu fast approaching in 2006, the Nandan county Tourism Bureau declared path access into the

¹⁰³ Since I began fieldwork in 2008, I observed most villagers carrying buckets across their shoulders filled with water from water tanks or natural springs into their homes. Today, although a tap protrudes from the walls of most residences in the three villages, they produce no water. The combination of broken pipes leading into the villages and their disrepair and the high price for tap water leading from Lihu township, which is quoted as over 3 RMB per ton of water compared to 2 RMB in Lihu township has resulted in a lack of potable water and a stronger sentiment among villagers of failed promises by the Chinese government. For the pit toilets, many villagers believe the project was a wasted effort built on poor decision-making and a lack of village consultation. Villagers continue to feel uncomfortable using them, claim the minimal waste produced is not worth its usage, or have chosen to convert the small brick toilet room into a storage space, with one villager I redecorating as a small bedroom for his overcrowded house.

ecomuseum villages unsuitable for the onslaught of tourists they were predicting. Consequently, the Tourism Bureau allocated funds for new stone and concrete pathways to be built leading into upper Hua Qiao and the two entrances to the larger Manjiang village as part of ecomuseum village improvement. Villagers were called on to supply paid labor for rebuilding the path. Over the course of the New Years celebrations car and bus loads of tourists arrived in Huaili and entered the ecomuseum villages eager to encounter and photograph the the Baiku Yao and the ethnic village they had just learned about through regional media and initial stops at the ecomuseum center exhibition.

The county Tourism Bureau in partnership with the *Wentiju* also erected signs at the entrance of the village to complement other earlier signs placed throughout the village by the curatorial team of GXMN. At the base of the driveway leading up to the ecomuseum center a wooden stake with arrow signs offers directions for visitors ecomuseum experience. One arrow points to the upper “Exhibition Center” (*zhanshi zhongxin*), another points to the villages below defined as “Original Villages” (*yuanshi cun luo*). Before entering HuaQiao village, located across the road from the ecomuseum center, other arrow signs offers more detailed description, pointing in the directions of “Hua Qiao”, “Hua Tu”, and “Man Jiang”, the “Ancient Village Gate” (*gu zhai men*), the “Ancient Road” (*gu dao*), and “Village Office” (*cun bu*). The Chinese term *yuanshi* used in the first sign for “Original Villages” holds a much deeper connotation than the English translation presented on the sign. While *yuan* is used in Chinese to mean “originality”, *yuanshi* holds a connotation of “primitivity”. Even before entering the village, such signs using terms like “primitivity” and “ancient” help frame visitor imaginations of the cultural landscape of Huaili. Irony, however, first appears at the sight of two brick and

concrete, not adobe, residences standing next to the wooden signs at the entrance to the village. They do not resemble the images of the traditional and primitive Baiku Yao presented in the ecomuseum center's exhibition, but signify the modernity of a transformed landscape.

An important part of the museumification process was also the selection of specific Baiku Yao families and homes as “cultural model households” (*wenhua shifan hu*). According to the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities, this is an honorary title bestowed upon specific households by the ecomuseum program team and county Culture Bureau. The notion of the “model household” has had a long history in China. Specifically, during the Mao era, model villages for agriculture and industrial production were established, such as Da Zhai, and select households which represented the ideal farming family were also included in this propaganda strategy and used as a model for the rest of society. Under former president Hu Jintao, the notion of promoting the “model” has seen a revival in the 2006 large-scale Rural Socialist Countryside Construction program to redefine the Chinese countryside. “Model households” have been selected under this campaign as a means to promote and strengthen the rural sector through areas of culture, technology, and agriculture by acknowledging and promoting the efforts of local community members. In regions like Xinjiang, Gansu, and Zhejiang, “cultural model households” has been used to fulfill government motives to create a “harmonious” society. For Guangxi ecomuseum projects, “model households” have been more about selecting specific families for their efforts in carrying out local folk cultural traditions, their possession of tangible cultural heritage, and their ability to promote cultural activities and inheritance in the local community. According to ecomuseum construction documents

composed in 2006, “cultural model households” are also seen as a pedagogical tool for villagers to publicize the notion of “cultural heritage” (or cultural relic *wenwu*) protection (*baohua*) and inheritance (*chuancheng*). Thus, it is a means to disseminate the framework of the heritage discourse at the local community level.

In Huaili, two representative families were selected as “cultural model households” at the inception of the ecomuseum project, one in Hua Qiao and one in Manjiang. For the GXMN selection process, several qualities made each household suitable for the title and role. Both households lived in traditional adobe homes and the head of the household was a middle-aged male well regarded in the community who could converse in Chinese, not only in the Baiku Yao native language or the *Gui-liu* dialect commonly used across Guangxi. Reasons for Mr. Lu Zhizhong to be chosen were also linked to him being a *duizhang*, or section cadre, of the village¹⁰⁴ and an “elder” of a strong ancestral line of the Lu clan in Manjiang, which consequently presented an important role for him and his family as care taker of all the Manjiang communal village ceremonial bronze drums, identified as a key cultural symbol of the Baiku Yao.¹⁰⁵

For the ecomuseum project, the “cultural model household” is understood to perform two important roles: 1) act as a village representative for ecomuseum project scheduled meetings; and 2) act as a village representative to welcome visitors. In interviews with Lu Zhizhong on his selection as a model household, he emphasized his pride in being chosen as a “representative of the Baiku Yao in Huaili”. In our discussions, he focused solely on his role as cultural liason in hosting visiting tourists and government officials to Huaili. Since the opening of the ecomuseum, his home had become a frequent stop on tours of

¹⁰⁴ Currently there are 4 sections or *dui* in Manjiang. Hua Qiao and Hua Tu have one each.

¹⁰⁵ The significance of Baiku Yao bronze drums are discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

the village led by ecomuseum staff. He stated: “I would welcome outsiders brought to my home and serve them food and wine, which they paid me for, and I discussed Baiku Yao life and culture with them”. Mr. Lu, however, claimed that his role as model household ended there, with no mention on the promotion of cultural activities among Manjiang and Huaili villagers or efforts to enhance the protection on ceremonial bronze drums beyond what he had done for years for his own community drums.¹⁰⁶ Lu Zhizhong’s home had become a facility of the ecomuseum project, intertwined in a government strategy of promoting welcoming characteristics of the Baiku Yao as signs of local well-being and the strong local consciousness on the celebration and retention of ethnic lifeways and traditions.

The Nandan county government has taken notice that the three ecomuseum villages are indeed changing as processes of modernity have intensified since ecomuseum establishment. Stilted granaries (*liang cang*),¹⁰⁷ located close to each residence in Huaili, are a noted “special form of architecture” (*tese minju xingshi*) of the Baiku Yao and symbol of the local culture and the “ecological landscape” (*shengtai jingguan*) (Liu 2008). Throughout Lihu and Baxu townships, Huaili is one of the only Baiku Yao villages to have retained the use of this vernacular heritage. However, with the development of the local economy, increase in villager incomes mainly due to migrant labor, change in the construction of Baiku Yao residences, and depletion of thatch for granary roofs, many villagers have decided to store harvested corn and rice in their home for added

¹⁰⁶ Throughout Huaili village and other surrounding Baiku Yao villages, bronze drums are commonly placed in the safest place in the home and protected from the elements. They are covered or wrapped with a sheet or cloth and often placed in the bedroom and under the bed of the head of the household.

¹⁰⁷ Granaries are commonly used in the storage of corn and rice from yearly harvests and a form of protection from mice, fire, and dampness. According to ecomuseum documentation records and my own fieldwork, the three ecomuseum villages have over 70 granaries.

convenience, letting their home's adjacent granaries slowly decay and fall into disuse. For the county government and experts, the loss of the granaries is seen as a detriment to the “traditional” cultural landscape of Huaili and the retention of Baiku Yao vernacular heritage, which is also recognized to impact the outlook of tourism development of Huaili as an “authentic” Baiku Yao village.¹⁰⁸ As a result, in collaboration with ecomuseum staff, the county *Wentiju* in 2011 allocated funds to the ecomuseum project for the cultural protection of Huaili’s granaries. Ten households were engaged in the restoration project offering each 200 RMB (\$35). With the help of family members and neighbors thatch and necessary materials were gathered and granaries were repaired, which is declared by the county as a community act of “saving” Baiku Yao culture.

Conclusion

The creation of the ecomuseum in China represents the engagement in global processes that have enabled the tactics of new museological approaches in China. Indeed, what this chapter begins to reveal is how the “traveling” ecomuseum institution is reproduced and dependent on local structures and conditions in southwest China (Buntinx and Karp 2006). The case of Huaili, and other ecomuseum projects discussed in the following chapter, provides a vivid example of what Buntinx and Karp (2006) call “museum tactics”. It not only signifies a context that enables the tactics of an “ecomuseum” project in poverty-stricken ethnic villages, but also where the configuration of the Western ecomuseum approach affects the institutional tactics carried

¹⁰⁸ The transformation of Baiku Yao residences in Huaili from adobe red-tiled roof home to brick and concrete two and three-story structures is also seen as detrimental. Chapter 6 explores a government initiative to maintain the “protection” of Huaili’s universal physical landscape by proposing new residences for households and how villagers have responded to it.

out, and their implications for rural locales (Buntinx and Karp 2006: 209).

This chapter has exposed the museumification process that the village of Huaili and the Baiku Yao people have been engulfed in since the establishment of the ecomuseum project. Extra-local actors, including regional and county government agencies and Guangxi Museum for Nationalities museum professionals, brought the ecomuseum concept to Huaili, developing the region's first ecomuseum, and transforming an isolated, poverty-stricken ethnic village into an iconized cultural landscape, and a new cultural destination under the guise of cultural heritage protection (*wenhua yichan baohu*). This chapter has presented key museological tactics of ecomuseum development and the associated exhibitionary processes that have led to community and identity formation and heritage construction (Buntinx and Karp 2006: 208). Taking the reader through the initial stage ecomuseum development in Huaili, I reveal the underlying political currents of its construction, which are seemingly tied to state-led productions of cultural difference and forms of development.

The ecomuseum center represents the main facility of the ecomuseum in Huaili and also across other projects in China. With its own collection of Baiku Yao material culture, the ecomuseum center exhibition produces an intimate quality of a folk museum. According to Lu Wendong, the present director of the Guangxi ecomuseum program and assistant coordinator of the construction of the Huaili ecomuseum exhibition, "the overall tone of the museum is to reflect the local culture of the Baiku Yao through accurate portraits of their life and customs". The ecomuseum center's curatorial approach aims to introduce how select local life, cultural practices and material culture are and were used in their original context (Ames 1986: 40). The exhibition does this in a classic way of

continuously juxtaposing object and image, using both to present a contextualist approach of displaying “representatives of a cultural context” (Ames 1986: 40). In the process of building a collection and exhibition of Baiku Yao life and culture “objects of ethnography” have also been created (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). This has been done through a process of *defining* and *segmenting* material culture, *detachment* by purchasing them from the Baiku Yao, and *carrying away* by removing them from their local context and placing them within the culture of ecomuseum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 2), discussed above. Instead of maintaining the inalienability of such objects and the retention of their identity (see Weiner 1992) through exhibition space of the center¹⁰⁹, however, these objects have been alienated from the local individual and population. They have become ethnographic objects not only “by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 2), but importantly, how they have been *positioned* within the government and discipline structured exhibit. This suggests, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 3) claims, that “ethnographic objects are made, not found... [and] *became* ethnographic through processes of detachment and contextualization”. Even with the community living right outside its walls, as Baiku Yao material culture is situated within a “space of posited meaning” a disjuncture is formed between object and local community.

The center's exhibition reflects that the power of display - the statement being made through descriptive narratives and images and the assemblage of objects - holds

¹⁰⁹ While the term inalienability has not been applied in literature on community museums and ecomuseums throughout Europe and South America, scholars claim that within the museum institution objects in their collection continued to be owned by the local community (see Crooke 2006; Fuller 1992). Waterton and Smith (2013: 90), drawing from Weiner's notion that a objects' reified identity and value confers a particular status in its possession, argue that in the museum's control and management of objects it inherits an authority and power over people, thus being able to make rhetorical claims about social inclusion and community cohesion.

considerable weight over interpretations of the Baiku Yao (see Benedict 1983: 52 cited in Ames 1986: 42; Garoian 2001: 234). The exhibition attempts to offer a record of the local life and culture of the Baiku Yao community by situating folklife in the discourse of scientific investigation. Baiku Yao cultural symbols - material and immaterial - are thus categorized, labeled, and described in themes of history, subsistence, home and residency, religion, and everyday life. Although the professionally curated exhibition purports an anthropological “objective knowledge” (Ames 1986: 37), what comes through in the exhibition is more a refashioned cultural context of the Baiku Yao, resembling a shared exhibitionary repertoire of the ethnic minority “other” under a state meta-narrative of cultural difference based on presenting “permanence”, “primitivity”, “difference”, and “exoticism” (see Varutti 2010). Therefore, it is no wonder that through such a display of the Baiku Yao, Han Chinese visitors to the ecomuseum exhibition stated to me that as they were encountered a distinct display of Baiku Yao culture through the ecomuseum center it shared close commonality to what they had already seen in other *minzu* museums. This demonstrates that even as a community-based heritage institution, the ecomuseum is inherently a performative site linked to the socially and historically dominant narratives of the “ethnic other” that shape cultural representations across China.

In Chinese ecomuseums, including Huaili, with attention focused on the ecomuseum center and the operational work that goes through it, “satellites”, or museological units of the ecomuseum village (Davis 1999; Ohara 2008) are not clearly defined as a network of local cultural elements. Indeed this calls into question the very form of the ecomuseum as a holistic and integrated approach to the local museum space, encompassing the entire natural and built heritage of a place (Davis 1999), possessing as its “collection” a variety

of defined tangible and intangible elements within its territory. While the museological process of erecting signs throughout the village does distinguish certain natural and built heritage elements of the Baiku Yao cultural landscape, they function not as marking facilities or “satellites” such as those found in the Gjestrum’s directed Toten ecomuseum in Norway including an old milk factory, an art gallery, an open-air museum, and an old school, or in Italy’s ecomuseums like nature trails, a church, a farm and grape vineyard. (Current signage found throughout the ecomuseum village are now seen to be broken, cut in half and completely missing from the erect wood post, with many villagers stating apathetically they didn’t know how this has happened or blamed local youth for breaking them.) Satellites are sites that both draw tourists, as they are outlined in ecomuseum maps and brochures and with signs on site, and what village residents come to engage with as a network to bring together the community and what they find important to them and instills a sense of belonging and pride. However, ambiguity of what constitutes the ecomuseum space in the village in the case of China, has greatly limited the ecomuseum's ability to function as a “decentralized” institution (see Gjestrum 1995; Ohara 2008). In fact, for many visitors the lack of clear “sites” or defined “things to see” in the village have dissuaded them from even entering the village. Moreover, it negatively impacts the capacity for community engagement, interpretation, and experimentation of local heritage management, which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.¹¹⁰

Even with a lack of defined “satellites” in the ecomuseum space, an ecomuseum experience has been created through the museumification process framed around a differencing narrative. The museumification process that engulfs the Baiku Yao Huaili

¹¹⁰ See Davis (2004) and Davis and Murtas (2009) for examples of forms of “democratization” and community engagement within the ecomuseum space.

village-scape transforms the living village into an idealized representation of itself, wherein everything becomes “considered not for its use but for its value as a potential museum artifact” (Giovine 2009: 261; Dellios 2002). It is a tactical process motivated by different extra-local agendas. It brings the institutionalization of culture and ethnicity to the local context and attempts to ossify ethnic culture through the “protected” museum space, fixing boundaries of cultural difference and proclaiming the retention of cultural diversity. It is also a way to put distant ethnic culture on the tourism map, creating a new cultural destination and associated cultural economy to draw revenue from tourism and improve rural livelihoods and address economic inequality and poverty. By positioning the community and the local territory in the museum domain, culture is not extracted from but reinscribed into a symbolic and revalued cultural landscape.

The ecomuseum is commonly cited by government officials and experts as proof of the authenticity of local culture and place. Through the establishment of the ecomuseum the bronze drum has received heightened attention as an identified “cultural heritage” and as a valuable cultural symbol of the Baiku Yao. This is seen to have taken place through the ecomuseum's ability to evoke processes of exhibition and cultural production that convert rural locations into destinations and make them economically viable as exhibits of themselves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 151). Huaili went from receiving the rare carload of tourists or government officials prior to the establishment of the ecomuseum to over 10,000 visitors per year after its opening. In following Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 149), this is attributed to the collaboration between heritage and tourism industries and the “political economy of display”. Authorization by upper level government and experts as an “original”, “unspoiled” and “distinct” ethnic minority

locale and as a declared tourist destination has added values of pastness, difference, and indigeneity to Huaili and Baiku Yao culture (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149).

Consequently, this has established new objects of the “tourist gaze” (Urry 2002 (1990)).

The ecomuseum does not simply keep with the object-centered focus on collection and preservation. Rather, it marks a shift in contemporary museology to offer a “museum experience” - “an engagement of the senses, emotions, and imagination” - whereby service and the relationship with its audience has become more important than just its product (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 138). Indeed, in China the focus on the “visitor experience” more than the local population experience demonstrates the importance paid to agendas of ecomuseum developers and how the institution has come under certain market forces. Efforts to promote “development”, proclaimed as an investment in village infrastructure and the construction of the ecomuseum center and museumification of the village, is in fact a means to create a new museum experience and to model the project on tourism. Although local heritage management and cultural protection is promoted as the ecomuseum's primary goal (see Su 2006), initiatives in China, and many found throughout the world, have a paramount economic dimension of tourism (see Corsane et al. 2007; Davis 2008). Ecomuseums in today's market-driven Chinese society have become strategies for opening new local cultural economies in rural locales. As mentioned above, local government authorities throughout Guangxi and Guizhou recognize this all too well, when in the selection of ecomuseum sites they announced to local leaders and populations that “the ecomuseum is an avenue for tourism development”.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ In the seven ecomuseums I have conducted fieldwork, in Nandan Lihu White Trouser Yao Ecomuseum,

The ecomuseum creates a constructed display of local culture and presents popular representations of the Baiku Yao ethnic minority as an ethnic other and “living fossil” (see Oakes 1998; Varutti 2010) as it offers a journey into the everyday life of the ethnic village. Huaili, like other ethnic villages, is ensconced in the museological process and a rhetorical narrative of “pastness” and “primitivity”. Yet, the creation of the village “living-museum” does not depend on “virtualities” (Kishenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 169). Villagers in the village are not purposely dressed in period clothing or required ethnic dress. They are not performing rehearsed historical reenactments or cultural practices, and they do not assume host-in-waiting poses for gazing tourists, similar to that found in popular sites like Colonial Williamsburg (Handler and Gable 1997), Plimouth Plantation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), Beamish (Bennett 2004), and the multiple ethnic theme parks in China (see Oakes 1998). The ecomuseum does not so much re-create the the village-scape as a form of “staged authenticity”. Rather it is an an exhibition of actuality, narrated through political rhetoric of difference. It is presented as a “protected” site, an “exhibition of the real world”. This is what separates the ecomuseum destination from other efforts to encapsulate rural ethnic life and heritage in a single “living” environment.

Integrating the natural environment, village, and local community, the ecomuseum steps outside the boundaries of traditional exhibition to articulate a “drama of the quotidian” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 47-51). Distinct from the staged re-creations of cultural performances that we often find in tourist ethnic villages across China, the living

Linquan ChangGangLin Commerical Route Village Ecomuseum, Longsheng Longji Zhuang Ecomuseum (in Guangxi), Liuzhi Suojia Miao Ecomuseum, Huaxi Zhenshan Buyi Ecomuseum, Liping Tang'an Dong Ecomuseum, and Jinping Longli Ancient City Ecomuseum (in Guizhou), villagers explained that during the announcement of ecomuseum construction, government officials presented the project as a form of tourism development.

museum space takes the everyday life of others as the subject for exhibition, rendering spectacles of everyday life (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 47). With the lack of a mounted “hermetic aesthetic space” of a stage or defined parameters of a destination, the ecomuseum village denotes a rather confusing space for both visitor and resident. It is not a site of performance, where visitors encounter “locals” in period dress conducting actions and activities to be viewed, similar to Colonial Williamsburg and Plimouth. Rather, it is a site of performance in that every action is considered by visitors as performative for their tourist gaze and camera lens. Performance here is associated with spectacle, which is produced indirectly through the designation of the “ecomuseum village”, complete with museological signage and “model cultural households”. What the ecomuseum project does is thus blur the lines between front and back stage, as explained by MacCannell (1976). Interactions that take place through the exhibiting of the quotidian, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 48) states, produces a self-reflexive process for both the local population and the visitor: “The everyday lives of others are perceptible precisely because what they take for granted is not what we take for granted, and the more different we are from each other, the more intense the effect, for exotic is the place where nothing is utterly ordinary”. Through the interactive exhibitionary space, by virtue of being observed as an object now of public visual interest, the cultural landscape and social lives of the Baiku Yao is changed. This is not only a physical change through efforts to improve village infrastructure, but moreover a transformation in how people look at their own immediate environs (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 51), how they see themselves through a process of identity work (Rounds 2006).¹¹² The following chapters

¹¹² Rounds (2006) explores how museums are powerful social agents and instruments of “identity work”,

interrogate these processes through the transformative agency of the ecomuseum institution in rural China.

the “processes through which we construct, maintain, and adapt our sense of personal identity, and persuade other people to believe in that identity”. Rounds explains that museums are important devices through which the world is laid out in order with clear identity boundaries and distinctions so to assure that life makes sense: “They provide vantage points from which the order that’s invisible in quotidian life becomes intensified and visible in the space of an exhibition” (2006: 140). The creation of the ecomuseum works to establish such order for both visitors and local populations to reflect on and negotiate. According to Maure (2006: 116), the ecomuseum is thus a “consciousness-raising instrument” which “force [people] to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of [their] own quotidian world, allowing [them] for a brief moment to be spectators of [themselves]”. While museums do set clear identity boundaries, in the ecomuseum social space this process of identity work is an ongoing through the constant and changing interactions and negotiations of related actors. In looking at identity as a process in the museum context, we recognize that an examination of how and what Baiku Yao identity is exhibited is only part of the picture. It is important to also switch our perspective to explore how the ecomuseum space enacts engagements in identity work. This allows us to understand how the museum is used by those who engage in it to construct, maintain, and alter identities for themselves.

CHAPTER 4

ROLES OF ECOMUSEUMS IN RURAL CHINA: MEDIATING DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVATION

Introduction: Shifting Museology

Ecomuseums represent an innovative approach in China to satisfy the current state cultural policy by linking heritage protection and economic development. Framing local cultures through museological processes of remembering, forgetting, and imagining (MacDonald 2006; Varutti 2010) in the local context, ecomuseums have begun to play an important role in constituting cultural and ethnic difference and the “community” and belonging, as well as educating the citizenry on the *idea* of the nation and its heritage (Crooke 2006; Watson 2007). With the implementation of state-led ecomuseums in rural locales in China and embodying agendas of heritage protection and rural development, local populations are confronted with new interpretations of social mobility, meanings and values of culture, and the formation and reconfiguration of social relations between diverse social actors. In this context and at the heart of the ecomuseum development process is the question of what exactly do ecomuseums resemble in China and how does this adopted Western concept translate in the Chinese context? Specifically, how do ecomuseums (*shengtai bowuguan*) manifest in rural locales as they mediate practices of heritage preservation and rural development?

This chapter steps away from the main case study of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum to profile a range of ecomuseum cases in southwest China’s Guizhou province. Drawing on my extensive ethnographic fieldwork across ten ecomuseum sites between 2007-2013, I present three ecomuseum cases from the “first generation” of

projects in Guizhou province, to illustrate the complexities and political dimensions that shape most ecomuseums in China. Each case demonstrates a different course of development with distinct outcomes as they assume a similar framework for implementation under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Partnership Program. It is important to approach the ethnographic study of ecomuseums as one component of the multiple economic, political, and social forces affecting local populations and village livelihoods. Thus, this chapter will trace the implementation of China's first ecomuseum projects, pointing to how they are implicated in different state and regional agendas of poverty reduction, economic development, and heritage preservation. As Oakes (2006) demonstrates, rural cultural heritage has become an untapped economic resource for regional development. As shown in this chapter and in more detail throughout this study, the initiative of the ecomuseum signifies a new approach to fuel the creation of new cultural economies and also to establish reconstituted ethnic cultural landscapes and livelihoods as they are converted into "living heritage". Exposing the localization of the global concept in China, I argue that the "ecomuseum" exists more as an untranslatable foreign concept because it remains detached from its Western conception as a Chinese state-led and expert-guided project. This chapter attends to what seems to be a fundamental question regarding the application of the idea of "ecomuseum" in China, that is if it is to be an internationally adopted and a locally applied method for community development, participation, and engagement in serving local population needs and interests (Davis 1999), then how does this square with Chinese state agendas that often extend beyond the community.

From Concept to Project: China's First Ecomuseums

Su Donghai, standing member of the Chinese Society of Museums and editor-in-chief of its' journal *Chinese Museums*, and executive secretary, An Laishun, first encountered the ecomuseum concept with the flood of Western insights and trends coming into China from its post-Mao open door policy. The scope of museology and cultural heritage protection practices was greatly influenced by Chinese academics interested in exploring new areas of their disciplines and foreign practices. When I met with them in 2008, Su and An both mentioned how the 1985 special volume on ecomuseums in the UNESCO-ICOM journal *Museum* (now *Museum International*) was a turning point in museology in contemporary China. Edited by Georges-Henri Rivière, the volume introduced the “new museology” philosophy and various international cases on ecomuseum and ecomuseological practices. Su Donghai and An Laishun were so inspired by the international volume that they decided to translate several seminal articles along with other international studies on ecomuseums into Chinese. These Chinese articles were then published in their *Chinese Museums* journal's 1986 volume and the term *shangtai bowuguan* (literally “ecology museum”), translated by An Laishun, was born in China. The new ecomuseum concept complemented the growing scholarship in China on the integration of the environment, landscape and the museum¹¹³.

Although the ecomuseum concept was introduced in China in the mid-1980s, it took

¹¹³ At this time other museology journals in China, such as from the Jilin Institute, began disseminating Western new museological approaches. Published works across such journals noted by Su Donghai (1995) include: *The Museum and Environmental Science* by Hu Yanyan published in *Chinese Museum* in 1986; *Museum and the Quality of the Environment* by Zhao Songling; *Environmentalism and the Museum* by Zhen Shuonan; *My Humble Opinion of Museum Ecology* by Liu Shaoming; *The Relationship Between the Museum and the Community Cultural Environment* by Tu Xiaoyuan.

over ten years for the first project to be implemented. In October 1986, several Beijing museum and cultural experts, including Su Donghai, were invited to Guizhou province to offer consultation on the Guizhou Province Cultural Relics and Museum Development Program (*wenwu bowuguan fazhan guihua*). Su presented a paper on international approaches for museum development. In his presentation he mentioned for the first time in a public forum the ecomuseum as a new museum form that differed from traditional museums in embodying a holistic approach to museology encapsulating the “living ecology” of a place. The ecomuseum concept purported by Su struck a cord with assistant editor of *Guizhou Daily*, Hu Chaoxiang. Only a few years later, as deputy director of Guizhou Cultural Relics Bureau (*guizhou wenwu ju*), Hu Chaoxiang would call on the help of Su Donghai to redress cultural heritage protection through the ecomuseum method in the ethnically diverse region of Guizhou.

Su Donghai saw great potential in the ecomuseum approach for China and quickly became a spokesman of the concept. He emphasized the ecomuseum as a means to address the pronounced severity of the nation's ecological imbalance and destruction of the environment under pressure from rapid industrialization (personal conversation 4 June 2008; see also Su 2008). He also saw, with the rise in museum development in the post-Mao era, that the notion of the ecomuseum presented a new way to rethink the protection of China's diverse cultural heritage. Following Western scholars advancing “new museology” (Vergo 1989), Su suggested that the ecomuseum represented a dramatic shift in the museological paradigm, as a “remedy to the defects of traditional museums”, that could aid China in embarking on a new path for museum development for the benefit of society (Su 2008).

In the early 1990s, China became more engaged in the global museum community with its membership in ICOM. Su and other Chinese museologists became closely involved in building social networks with well-known museologists involved in shaping the “new museology” discourse, such as Dr. Peter van Mensch, Andre Desvallées, Nancy Fuller, and Dr. Vinos Sofka, who had made trips to China at this time. In 1994, China hosted the ICOFOM symposium “Museums and Communities” welcoming several foreign museologists and scholars, including the Norwegian John Aage Gjestrum. The symposium acted as an important forum for raising awareness and understanding of new museological theories and approaches, like the ecomuseum, among the Chinese academic and professional community. Importantly, the meeting was a springboard for the establishment of collaborative relations between museologists, Su Donghai and John Aage Gjestrum. Their ongoing dialogue on ecomuseological approaches and practices would eventually lead to an international partnership and the establishment of China's first ecomuseum projects.

International partnerships for such a program required sites for implementation. In Guizhou, Hu Chaoxiang longed to expand the minimal development of museums in the province as well as create a legacy for himself in establishing an innovative strategy that met provincial government objectives of heritage preservation, rural development, and poverty alleviation and the pressing issue of integrating “backward” (*luohou*) ethnic minorities into the fold of a modernizing nation-state. Hu Chaoxiang's predecessor in the Cultural Relics Bureau, Wu Zhengguang, was a leader in local-level cultural protection approaches in China under the tutelage of the prominent museum studies scholar Lu Jinmin, discussed in Chapter 2. Wu was the first to introduce the concept of the “village

museum” (*cunzhai bowuguan*) to China in 1984. These “museum” projects developed in a handful of ethnic minority villages in Guizhou, such as Langde village in Leishan county, did not resemble European approaches of open-air museums (*lutian bowuguan*) in re-creating cultural landscapes. Rather, they were declared protected ethnic villages noted for their ability in retaining cultural traditions and landscapes. Consequently, these sites were placed under the exhibitionary gaze and deemed new cultural destinations for tourism. (Since this time, Langde how become *the* Miao ethnic group cultural destination hot spot in Qiandongnan.) Hu Chaoxiang, like many Chinese officials, did not want to continue the legacy of his predecessor. Instead, he aimed to develop a new project that would gain both domestic and international attention and notoriety and would employ the terminology and functionality of the “museum” institution.

Hu Chaoxiang explained to me that he went to meet with Su Donghai in Beijing in 1995, who at that time was an established expert consultant for Guizhou Cultural Relics Bureau. “I turned to Mr. Su”, Hu said, “and I asked him to help me develop a new museum project in Guizhou. Mr. Su replied, We will develop China's first ecomuseum in Guizhou” (personal conversation 16 August 2011). Su Donghai was particularly adamant in experimenting with the ecomuseum approach. He suggested to draw on international expertise to assist in the task of ecomuseum program planning in Guizhou and told Hu Chaoxiang that John Aage Gjestrum should be invited as the Guizhou ecomuseum “research group scientific adviser” (Hu 2011: 4). The next year in 1995, Gjestrum led by a small research team including Su Donghai, Hu Chaoxiang, An Laishun, and government associates from the Guizhou Cultural Relics Bureau met in Guiyang, the

capital of Guizhou Province, to discuss the feasibility plan and begin their evaluation of potential ecomuseum sites across Guizhou.

Su Donghai specified to Hu to select prospective sites for the evaluation program that have “high academic content (*hengao de xueshu hanliang*), not famous scenic areas (*fengjing mingsheng qu*), even if they possess status or a grade of a scenic site (*jishi shi fengjing mingsheng qu ye yao fendengji*)” (Hu 2011: 6). Su wanted to make clear that the ecomuseum project was not about spectacle or beauty but of retaining distinct ethnic cultures of China. With 17 ethnic minorities inhabiting Guizhou and 12,000 natural villages (*ziran cun zhai*) (the administrative level under the status of “village” (*cun zhai*)), Hu guided the research team to 20 rural locales. Hu (2011) later wrote in his recent published manuscript, *Guizhou Ecomuseum Record* (*guizhou shengtai bowuguan jishi*), that “ecomuseum site selection and ethnic village site selection have common aspects, but there are very large differences. A difference is that it is not only a village but is a cultural community....this cultural community can consist of one, two or many villages... according to a county or provincial boundary, so long as its the same culture characterized by a geographical area”. According to Hu, the ecomuseum is closely associated with “place” and a common, shared “culture”. But, Hu adds that cultural retention is also of importance for the selection process. For the research team cultural retention was determined through a particular sites’ isolation, rural livelihood, practices of traditional customs, and accessible conditions. Those sites with proximity to urban centers and townships were considered as possessing a “relatively high degree of hanification” (*han hua*)” and were deemed unsuitable for the program. (Hu 2011: 7).

The research team ended their evaluation tour with the selection of four ethnic villages. Suojia village, situated at the top of a mountain peak in western Guizhou, Liuzhi County, is home to the poverty-stricken “longhorn Miao” (*changjiao Miao*), or Qing Miao ethnic group with a population of 4,000 inhabiting 12 villages. The Miao of Suoga were seen to have retained their native language and cultural customs, vernacular architecture, and elaborate batik and embroidered dress with women clad in headdress adornments of a pile of black hair with protruding wooden horns on either side and was recognized as in need protection under the ecomuseum endeavor. Zhenshan village, in Huaxi County, near the provincial capital of Guiyang was a familiar site to Hu Chaoxiang. He had declared the ethnic Buyi village, dating back 17 generations to the Qing dynasty, an open-air museum and “Ethnic Cultural Protected Village” in 1993 (*minzu wenhua baohu cun*), and later a “Guizhou Province Cultural Relic Protected Unit” (*guizhousheng ji wenwu baohu danwei*) in 1995 under the Guizhou Cultural Relics Bureau. Liping County recommended the Dong village of Tang'an under the administrative Zhaoxing township. Tang'an represented an ideal cultural and scenic landscape as it possessed old wooden Dong *ganlan* style houses, and drum tower and rain and wind bridge (*fengyu qiao*) atop a mountain surrounded by lush green rice terraces. Jinping County's Longli “ancient” village (or *gucheng*) was highlighted by Hu Chaoxiang from his previous knowledge of the village's rich 600 year old cultural history as a military garrison inhabited by descendants of Han soldiers sent to the ethnically diverse region of eastern Guizhou during the Ming dynasty.

Soon after sites were selected, John Aage Gjestrum delivered the program proposal to Norway's Ministry of Culture and pushed for the Norwegian government's support for

the project. The proposal was seen as an innovative project to add to Norway's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties with China in the areas of trade, and investment in environment and human development.¹¹⁴ Also, it marked an effort to protect local cultural heritage and promote environmentalism and community development in poor ethnic minority regions, which the Norwegians, specifically The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), had been strongly supporting worldwide. NORAD decided to sponsor the feasibility plan¹¹⁵ and the ecomuseum program was listed as part of the Sino-Norwegian cultural exchange program, which was officially signed by the Norwegian King Herald V and then Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 1997. The ecomuseum program marked the first cultural project between the two countries.

Ecomuseum Project in China: Case Studies

To date, over 400 ecomuseums exist worldwide, mainly seen throughout France, Italy, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal. Ecomuseums also are established in Asia outside of China, such as in Japan (Ohara 2006; Navajos 2010; Davis 2004) and most recently in Vietnam (Galla 2002). It is easy to see the spread of the ecomuseum concept

¹¹⁴ Since the opening up and reform period, Norway has eagerly extended bilateral ties with China, building on its long relation dating back to 1950 when the Norwegian government recognized the People's Republic of China. Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik stated in an effort to urge more cooperation with China that: "The Norwegian government attaches great importance to the economic and trade ties with China and is willing to discuss new ways of cooperation in fields of environmental protection, telecommunications, chemical industry, hydropower and education" (People's Daily 2002). By the mid-1990s, the Norwegian government and NORAD had already begun developing bilateral relations with China specifically on issues of poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and human rights. NORAD's "humanitarian" efforts for the promotion of community-based development projects and heritage conservation can be seen across Europe and Africa. Norway's interest in cultural heritage dates back to the 1980s as initially part of the country's support of environmental management. "Norway in the period 2000 – 2008 has supported 60 cultural heritage projects (mostly in Africa and Asia) with a budget contribution of close to NOK 275 million.. Funded project place a strong emphasis on social, economic and community development, "where cultural heritage is seen as a resource for development" (NORAD 2009 3-4).

¹¹⁵ Huang and Liu (2011) provide a detailed account of the distribution of invested funds by both Norway and the Chinese government on each of the four ecomuseum projects.

and community-based heritage preservation practices as assemblages of globalization with nations and local communities becoming more interconnected through appropriations and localizations of the global heritage regime. Local communities and organizations throughout the world are ever more engaged in global connections as they negotiate the different global, national, and local heritage discourses and come to recognize the “value” of conserving and preserving their tangible and intangible heritage.

China is an important addition to the international ecomuseum movement in that it signifies a case of how quickly a nation has responded to the global “heritage-scape” and “museum-scape”¹¹⁶; how through the transnational flow of ideas it has adopted foreign ideological concepts and approaches of heritage and museums. Ecomuseums in China also represents a case of how the ecomuseum has been localized within an authoritarian state system, existing more as a government and scholar-led endeavor satisfying objectives of extra-local agencies at different levels. As the case of China shows, the transmission of the ecomuseum philosophy across borders involves a process of localization or indigenization that has transformed the ecomuseum approach into something much different than its original conception.

Since the launch of the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Project, China has experienced a nation-wide ecomuseum movement (See Table 1). A total of sixteen officially named “ecomuseums” exist in southwest China alone. Five ecomuseums now exist in Guizhou province, four under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Project and one established by a

¹¹⁶ This use of “scape” draws from Appadurai’s (1996) work on the productions of globalization. “Heritage-scape” is used by Di Giovine (2009) to refer to the new social system according to UNESCO’s heritage goals that knows no geopolitical boundaries, and that exists among people who interact with the global heritage discourse through sites of World Heritage, for example. I extend Di Giovine’s scope of the term in not being limited to World Heritage sites, where other sites such as ecomuseums and community heritage succumb to the global heritage regime.

private corporation in the Dong minority village of Dimen. Ten ecomuseums have been established in the adjacent Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region with the most recent opened in 2011. Ecomuseums also exist in Yunnan Province, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.¹¹⁷ Several other “heritage sites” and ethnic villages have also embraced the ecomuseum brand, such as the popular tourist destination of Xijiang “One Thousand Household Miao Village”, in Leishan county, and Yunlong county “Family Ecomuseum”. Most recently, in 2011, the National Committee for Ecomuseum and Community Museums convened¹¹⁸ and announced its support, under the State Administration of Culture Heritage (SACH) (*guojia wenwu ju*), of a nationally recognized ecomuseum and community museum program¹¹⁹. In 2011-2012, three ecomuseums - Tang’an (Guizhou), Longji (Guangxi), and Anji (Zhejiang) - were distinguished as national “China” (or “*zhongguo*”) ecomuseums by SACH. The national government is also currently supporting the development of several ecomuseums in China's eastern and northern regions, such as in Shanxi, Anhui, Hebei, and Shandong province. Although these projects do not focus on ethnic minority cultures and populations, they share a common mission with ecomuseums

¹¹⁷ Although six Ethnic Cultural and Ecological Villages in Yunnan province sponsored by the Ford Foundation are not called “ecomuseums”, they are rooted in ecomuseum principles of community participation and community-based heritage protection. Today only three of the six original Ecological Ethnic Cultural Villages exist under this project, as the other three were converted into tourist destinations administered by the local and regional government (Yin Shaoting 2011 personal conversation).

¹¹⁸ A National Ecomuseum Development Commission was established in 2006 with an ecomuseum survey conducted from 2006 to 2007, and the China Ecomuseum 10 Year Development Investigative Report issued on September 27, 2006. A nation-wide ecomuseum development program was initially planned to commence in 2008. However, the May 12th Sichuan Earthquake sidelined the program and State Administration for Cultural Heritage (SACH) funds went instead to reviving cultural heritage and museum development in Sichuan (Pan Shouyong personal conversation 2011).

¹¹⁹ SACH hosted the National Eco- (Community) Museum Forum in August 2011, followed by an announcement of the first five “national ecomuseums” (*guojia shengtai bowuguan shifandian*).

developed in Guizhou to preserve “a lifestyle which has come under considerable pressure from outside” in specifically rural locales (Su 2006).

Ecomuseums in Southwest China

Province	Name	Established
Guizhou	Liuzhi Suojia Miao Ecomuseum	1998.10
	Huaxi Zhenshan Buyi Ecomuseum	2002.7
	Jinping Longli Ancient City Ecomuseum	2004.10
	Dimen Ecomuseum	2005.1
	Liping Tang'an Dong Ecomuseum	2005.6
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	Nandan Lihu White Trouser Yao Ecomuseum	2004.11
	Sanjiang Dong Ecomuseum	2004.11
	Jinxi Jiuzhou Zhuang Ecomuseum	2005.9
	Linquan ChangGangLin Commerical Route Village Ecomuseum	2005.12
	Hezhou Lingtang Kejia Weiwu Ecomuseum	2007.4
	Napo Black Clothing Zhuang Ecomuseum	2008.9
	Dongxing Jing Ecomuseum	2009.7
	Rongshui Antai Miao Ecomuseum	2009.11
	Longsheng Longji Zhuang Ecomuseum	2010.11
	Jinxiu Ao Yao Ecomuseum	2011.5
Yunnan	Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Area Zhanglang Village Bulag Ecomuseum	2006.2

Table 1.

The second half of this chapter explores three ecomuseum cases in Guizhou province, southwest China, under the Sino-Norwegian Partnership Ecomuseum Program. These case studies illustrate different roles of each project and different outcomes of development under government agendas of rural development, poverty alleviation, heritage preservation. While these ecomuseums share a similar “model” for project development, each site has undergone a distinct process of cultural, economic, and political change. This has not only affected the ecomuseum initiative, but more importantly the local cultural landscape and social lives of residents, in particular how local communities understand and value their heritage, their sense of 'community' and

belonging, understand claims of cultural ownership, and participate in processes of modernity instigated through ecomuseum development.

Suoga: Poverty and the Ecomuseum

Ecomuseums in Guizhou province are ensconced in efforts to address problems of regional economic disparity. As China has experienced a path of expanding economic development across the country with the tide of liberalizing market economies rising since the 1980s, challenges of unequal modernization in China's periphery have significantly intensified. With the abundance of its wealth and capital and foreign direct investment (FDI) found in eastern regions, the economic gap between the east and west, as well as urban and rural sectors, has gradually widened (see Knight and Song 1999; Wei 2000). China continues to face a mounting problem of poverty and underdevelopment in the rural sector, specifically in ethnic minority inhabited regions. To account for this paramount issue posing a challenge to the economic growth of the nation, the Chinese government has instituted different development policies and strategies over the past few decades. For example, former president Jiang Zemin in 1999, announced the Great Western Development Strategy (*xibu da kaifa*) to focus on developing China's interior.¹²⁰ The Great Western Development strategy was “a highly publicized state commitment to correcting, once and for all, the imbalances between eastern and western China” (Oakes 2004)¹²¹ by focusing on building infrastructure in poor, western regions

¹²⁰ This was an effort to complement Deng Xiaoping's first call to develop the eastern coast in his “Coastal Economic Development Strategy”.

¹²¹ Oakes (2004) also claims that significant state investment began after the Asian Crisis of 1997, prior to the 1999 start of the Great Western Development strategy. “The western development program [was] merely one small part of this larger economic trend [of state spending]”, including the south-north water diversion (approximately \$59 billion), the west-east natural gas transfer (\$17 billion), the West-East

and attracting foreign investment.¹²² Poverty alleviation was an important component of the strategy and “improv[ing] the lot of the minority population in border regions” (Hendrischke 2003). After Jiang Zemin, president Hu Jintao continued the Western development policy and added a new campaign aimed at bringing development to China's countryside, linking the rural and urban sectors through the “New Rural Socialist Reconstruction” Movement (*xin nongcun shehuizhuyi jianshe*), which was launched in 2006 (Day 2008; Chio 2009).

These and other strategies for economic growth have contributed to an increase in rural incomes and have moved many rural populations out of absolute poverty. National programs, like that under the State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOP), along with the market-oriented reforms, development of the household responsibility system and township enterprises (TVEs), improved terms of trade for agriculture (Stern 2001), and greater government-led investment in infrastructure have specifically aided in reducing poverty in China from 250 million people in 1978 to 26 million in 2004¹²³. However, considerable rural poverty in remote ethnic minority regions still remains, such as in Guizhou, Guangxi, and Yunnan (Cho

Electricity Transfer project (\$12 billion), and the Qinghai-Tibet railway (\$3.2 billion) (Oakes 2004).

¹²² Lai (2002) also points to the ecological and security concerns of the national government as objectives of the Great Western Development Program.

¹²³ “According to official statistics, the number of rural people living in extreme poverty dropped from 250 million people (30.7% of the population) in 1978 to 85 million (9.4% of the population) in 1990. It then fell further, to 28 million or about 3% of the population by year-end 2002. Based on the international poverty line of US \$1 of income per day, the number of China's poor is estimated to have dropped from around 490 million (49%) in 1990 to 88 million (6.9%) in 2002” (United Nations 2004). “The population of low-income group (people living above poverty line but under low-income line) is 56.2 million (6.0%)” (National Bureau of Statistics 2004). “In 2000, the poverty line was adjusted upward from 300 yuan per capita to 635 yuan per capita. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has recently added a new poverty line... of 865 yuan per capita [which] is close to the US\$1 (PPP 1985) per day but the previous one, demarcating extreme poverty, remains the one which is primarily used (United Nations 2004). While China's statistics in the reduction of poverty may be debated (see Park and Wang 2001), they have shown China as the leading county in the world in poverty reduction.

2011; Donaldson 2007). This is highlighted in a recent article (Yin 2012) on the LGOP's updated list of 592 counties under the national program to reduce poverty, which states over 230 impoverished counties are located in provinces or regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, with Yunnan (73 counties) and Guizhou (50 counties) topping the list. With ethnic minorities making up approximately 40% of the remaining absolute poor (Stern 2001), the Chinese government at multiple levels has continued to explore alternative strategies to induce economic development in disadvantaged poverty-stricken ethnic minority regions.

According to Su Donghai and Zhang Jinping (personal conversation 2012), the ecomuseum endeavor in southwest China is linked to poverty alleviation of ethnic minority communities. It is seen as a new community-based method to boost social and economic development in rural ethnic minority villages. Ecomuseums established in Guizhou, one of the poorest provinces in China, are thus implicated as a projects for heritage preservation of isolated, distinct ethnic cultures and associated with the larger move to rid modern Chinese society of poverty in the rural sector. The ecomuseum endeavor in Guizhou has involved a two fold process of social and economic transformation of poverty-stricken communities involving building infrastructure and cultural heritage tourism.

Suoga Miao village, located 40 km from the county seat of LiuZhi, in western Guizhou, in the harsh and rocky terrain approximately 1600 meters above sea level, represents one of the most isolated and poverty-stricken sites for ecomuseum development in China. Suoga was selected as an ecomuseum site as it is home to the only settlement (4,000 people) of “longhorn” (*changjiao*) Qing Miao in the world, spread

across 12 natural villages (*ziran cun*). And, like most ecomuseums in southwest China, Suoga has been recognized for retaining its rich and original cultural traditions as it is “almost cut off from modern civilization” (Su 2006). Recognizing the extreme poverty facing the local Miao community, the government-sponsored ecomuseum project made poverty-relief work a “top priority” (Su n.d.). One of the most important concerns of the poverty-relief program in Suoga was the community’s lack of potable water and electricity and accessible conditions to the village. The ecomuseum project brought investment in pumping water up the mountain for easier access as well as the diversion of electricity to each household. Development through the ecomuseum project also brought dramatic change to the physical landscape of Suoga with the construction of a new paved road running 4 km up the mountain from the village seat to the ecomuseum natural village of Longga¹²⁴ and the development of a new “Project Hope” primary school¹²⁵. Across from the school, a new village residence settlement (*xin qu*) was also established with lines of stone and concrete homes, resembling little of the local Miao’s upper villages with sod homes with thatched roofs scattered across the mountainside. Government and public attention on Suoga as a result of ecomuseum development provoked greater financial input from the government for the Restoration of Dilapidated Home program (*weifang gaizao*) instated in 2004-2005.¹²⁶ Many of the families from the

¹²⁴ Suoga Ecomuseum consists of twelve natural villages with the main village, Longga, seeing the most economic development and tourist attention, as it is the most accessible to the main road. The other outlying eleven villages are only accessible by dirt road.

¹²⁵ A brief description of the conditions of this transformation in Suogo is offered at the start of this chapter.

¹²⁶ Under the Restoration of Dilapidated Home program, the government allocated stipends to support households for home restoration or rebuilding. Liuzhi County government allocated these funds and, according to the angered ecomuseum vice-director, did not implement a stipulation for the Suoga ecomuseum to require village builders to conserve the style of the “original” home. Instead villagers have torn down old sod homes and rebuilt concrete home with flat roofs (*pingfang*).

upper original village were moved into the new housing settlement because their old homes were recognized as in disrepair under this government program. In addition, many of the wood, sod and thatched roof homes in the upper village and surrounding eleven villages had been rebuilt using concrete under this program, which I observed in my visit to Suoga in 2007.

Ecomuseum development has also led to the construction of an ecomuseum center in each of the four Guizhou sites. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ecomuseum center and professional curated exhibition represent for the Chinese government and visitors the tangible product of ecomuseum and justifies its operational function. Like the ecomuseum center in Suoga located in the village of Longga, the ecomuseum center aims to maintain architectural “harmony” with its surrounding physical and cultural landscape. In Suoga, the architecture of the center resembles the old Miao houses with a wood facade and dried grass thatched roof. Of course, with the poverty-relief project, the center has come to exemplify vernacular architecture of the Miao in Suoga that longer exists.

After the opening of the ecomuseum in 1998, project coordinator of the Sino-Norwegian Partnership Program, An Laishun, decided to launch a collaborative “memory-project” with the local population. As part of a larger cultural documentation project for the ecomuseum, the aim was to incite villagers' cultural awareness by putting cameras and recording equipment in their hands and letting them “discover” and “capture” their heritage. An recalled for me that, “After over one month villagers were beginning to really get involved in the project and enjoyed collecting valuable recorded materials from each other” (personal conversation 2011). Folklore, oral history, and craft-making methods and their native Miao language were recorded by villagers

themselves, and cataloged in a computer database at the ecomuseum center. However, An explained that, “this soon came to an abrupt end when villagers saw the flow of tourists to the village. Cameras and recorders used to conserve and document culture were left behind to focus on selling culture” (personal conversation 2011).

For ethnic villages like Suoga the ecomuseum has provided a new way for raising the profile of the place (Maggi 2008) as a noted unique and distinct site of ethnic culture. According to interviewed Suoga ecomuseum staff and directors as well as Hu Chaoxiang, the regional director of the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum project, tourism development is not seen as problematic for the ecomuseum initiative. Rather, it is understood that tourism development and poverty-alleviation should be combined through the mechanism of the ecomuseum for purposes of local rural and community development. Thus, the establishment of ecomuseums in ethnic villages is perceived by local and extra-local actors as an attempt to establish what Oakes (2006: 14) calls “vibrant commercial economies in the rural sector”. Established as the “first ecomuseum of China”, Suoga was quickly placed on the cultural tourism map. It became promoted as a cultural destination in tourism websites catering to both domestic and foreign tourists, and was listed as a key stop on ethnic minority village tours throughout southwest China.

Suoga represents one of the many ethnic villages in China that has engaged in cultural tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation and revenue generation (Sofield and Li 1998; Oakes 1998, 2006: 19; Donaldson 2007; Wen and Tisdell 2001). For the 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups in China, constituting 8% of the Chinese population, totaling approximately 105 million people, who are seen as “lagging behind” the rest of the country in terms of income and economic growth (Gustafsson and Ding

2007), culture has become an important “untapped” economic resource for regional development and the improvement of living standards. Since the 1990s, rural tourism into the national campaign of poverty alleviation, has displayed significant results across the country¹²⁷. For example, Gao (2008) states, “According to statistical data reported by provincial tourism authorities to the CNTA [China Tourism Administration], 10,000 villages nationwide had lifted themselves out of poverty by developing tourism in 1996”. In the 1990s, Guizhou province was quick to link tourism development and poverty alleviation and introduced the slogan “the tourism industry promotes openness to the outside; use tourism to promote poverty reduction” (*luyou ye cunjin dui wai kaifang, yi luyou cunjin tuopin zhifu*) (Donaldson 2007: 342). With ethnic minorities comprising one third of the provincial population of Guizhou, ethnic minority culture, according to Oakes (1999: 320), has become a fundamental component of Guizhou’s tourism industry “both in terms of using exotic cultural representations as enticements for potential investments, and as a feature of market socialism’s potential for rural development in minority regions”. For government agencies, heritage tourism is recognized to stimulate quick and cost-effective results for economic development for areas that lack other economic resources, opportunities, and developed infrastructures. Local government agencies’ recognition of rich local tourism resources often results in government support for infrastructure development and forms of cultural branding, and is seen to contribute to tourism development and ultimately to poverty reduction and income enhancement in rural locales (see Donaldson 2007).

¹²⁷ See Gao et al. (2009), Oakes (1998), Donaldson (2007), Wen and Tisdell (2001) for a more comprehensive exploration of the impact of rural tourism and development of tourism policies in China as an instrument of modernization and poverty alleviation.

Ecomuseum projects across China have become a mechanism to define key cultural symbols of the local ethnic villages and a village's worth. With the selection of Suoga as an ecomuseum, cultural attributes such as elaborate batik and embroidered ethnic dress, vernacular architecture, and festivals have become proclaimed heritage assets. These combined with perceptions of "backwardness" (*luohou*) of the Miao population, has led to the creation of a new cultural market in Suoga and its transformation into a cultural destination. Specifically Han urbanites venture to western Guizhou's Suoga ecomuseum eager to encounter the remote ethnic minority "living fossil" (*huo huashi*).

Since the establishment of the ecomuseum in Suoga tourists numbers have been increasingly high¹²⁸ and villagers have gradually appropriated tourism's call to experience and capture China's ethnic spectacle. The village leader of Suoga recalled for me when a Dutch visitor came to the village shortly after the ecomuseum was established and he "bought as much ethnic textiles we could give, spending over 10,000 RMB!" Experiences like this have made villagers come in touch with the economic side of tourism and learn of its benefits. As a result, there has been a growing drive to satisfy tourist desires. When they are not in school, young girls now stand near the entrance of the village or work on embroidering waiting in their elaborate batik and embroidered clothing for visitors to come and pay to take pictures of them. This often leads to young

¹²⁸ Tourist visits to Suoga are infrequent throughout the year, drawing larger crowds at seasonal Miao festivals. Tourist numbers are hard to come by as there is no entrance ticket and ecomuseum staff do not take roll of visitors. Some reports have stated that numbers have reached 100,000 from 2001 to 2010 (China museum website). It is important to note that prior to the establishment of the ecomuseum tourism development did not exist in Suoga.

girls conducting short choreographed performances for paying tourists in front of the ecomuseum center.

The rise in tourism has also resulted in the sale of Miao handicrafts. In addition to women selling crafts outside their home, the rise of this new market has interestingly resulted in the creation of a new collaborative project among villagers to establish a handmade Miao dress collective. The village leader consulted the director of the ecomuseum, who is the director of the Liuzhi county Culture Relics Bureau, to convert the unused welcome center at the front of Longga village (the natural village of Suoga where the ecomuseum center is located) into a village store. At this time, the village leader organized a group of female villagers, including his wife, to produce local Miao traditional embroidered and batik ethnic dresses and textiles for sale at the store. The new store acted as both a convenience store for locals and a place for the sale of local handicrafts made by the female collective. On my second visit to Suoga in 2010, the village store was lined with dozens of local Miao dresses hanging from the wall as a showroom for interested tourists. When I spoke to the village leader, he stated that the collective was not only to promote the sale of ethnic dress to tourists, but a means to regulate the degree of tourism exploitation of handicraft consumption in Suoga. According to many participating women, the collective helped them establish a “high and stable price” for their hand-made products. Also, the village leader claimed that this was a community-based project for the management of local products and a means to provide an avenue for economic growth in the community that also promoted the conservation of Miao cultural heritage. The villager leader's close work with the ecomuseum was clear as

he stressed key ecomuseum tenets of community involvement, development, and cultural inheritance.

In Suoga, the Miao have learned how to make a small profit through the sale of their culture where only a short time ago they did not have a monetary economy, based solely on bartering. These activities reflect Suoga villagers' interaction with tourism and its many ramifications. The ecomuseum development has indeed led to the ethnic and cultural branding and commercialization of the Miao of Suoga. Through experiences with tourism, villagers also come to learn and understand the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990), which transfers to local engagements in new forms of cultural expression and production of culture and ethnicity (Wood 1998). Indeed the emergence of tourism through the ecomuseum has worked to reinforce prevailing patterns of ethnic stratification (see Wood 1998), and ethnic stereotypes of a “living fossil” through “protected site” of the ecomuseum . Although ecomuseum development has altered the meaning of culture and its value for the sake of tourist consumption, it should not be disregarded, as Cohen (1998) argues, that cultural commoditization can induce greater cultural pride among the local population in their cultural traditions and, in fact, help preserve a declining tradition. In Suoga, the ethnic-dress making collective presents one such instance of this blending of tourism and conservation. In addition, with the gradual loss of traditional culture as more and more Miao migrate to cities for work, ceremonial headdresses are now primarily worn by young Miao girls marketing ethnicity.

Tourism development in Suoga is also seen to lead to a transformation of social relations within a given community. Placing the ecomuseum center in Longga village and

building a road from the township to this “head” village has demonstrated a degree of spatial ordering of the government project and tourism practices, and has produced a “socio-spatial hierarchy” among the 12 villages of Suoga (Chatterton and Hollands 2003: 184, cited in Su and Teo 2009). Today, few visitors venture to the other 11 villages and most are unaware of their existence, mentioned only briefly in the ecomuseum center cultural exhibition. This has resulted in Longga village experiencing the main brunt of tourism development and also intensifies a divide between Suoga villages.

Designation as an ecomuseum has proven to be a catalyst for social change in Suoga. For many villagers, they view the ecomuseum as an opportunity for welfare enhancement and tourism development. However, fieldwork in Suoga and interviews with villagers reveal that the ecomuseum's aim of heritage preservation seems of little importance to villagers when more pressing issues of subsistence, poverty, and public health exist. Because ecomuseum staff, who have little knowledge of the local language and customs, are hired from outside the community by the county government Culture Relics Bureau, there is a lack of rapport between village residents and staff. This has also resulted in local villagers experiencing very little engagement in operation of the ecomuseum. After three visits to Suoga, it was plain to see that while some cultural documentation work is conducted, along with the occasional meetings with leaders on sanitation and community events, ecomuseum staff mainly focus on welcoming and hosting guests to the ecomuseum center. For villagers, the ecomuseum center was understood as the “ecomuseum” itself, referring to it as the “*bowuguan*” (or museum). And, they emphasized their distance from the ecomuseum project calling it a “place for tourists not the local community”.

Even though the local Miao population of Suoga may not be actively engaged in the ecomuseum project, they are now presented with a new challenge as they are embedded in the museumification process. They are now forced to negotiate the processes of modernity while appropriating and “domesticating” (Herzfeld 1991) the rhetoric of constituting “living fossils” to meet tourist demands and define cultural difference. The negotiation of state ethnic and heritage discourses and the dynamics of tourism is a theme we will see come out more in the following cases.

Tang'an: A Corporate Dong Ecomuseum

At the entrance of Tang'an, signs display the village's title as a Dong ecomuseum alongside a notice for visitors on principles to follow in respecting the cultural and natural landscape of the “protected” village. Walking along the newly paved road through the village, developed after the ecomuseum was established, a posted sign points up towards the “museum of Dong people's culture”, or “documentation information center” (*ziliao xiaoxi zhongxin*) perched on the hillside. Although the signs at the village gate explain the ecomuseum as “no particular building, extending the focus to the whole village community life and surrounding environment”, for most local Tang'an villagers unaware of the mission and function of the ecomuseum, the documentation and exhibition center represents the establishment of the ecomuseum project itself.

Tang'an is the final ecomuseum installment of the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum collaborative program in Guizhou Province. Since its designation as an ecomuseum in 2004, tourist agencies and the provincial and local government have promoted Tang'an as

“the most authentic and primitive Dong village”. Situated 6km up Mt. Longbao from Zhaoxing town, in LiPing county, in the southwest corner of Guizhou, the small quite village of Tang'an contrasts with the bustling tourism center and market town of Zhaoxing below. Its 180 households composing five surnames (Lu, Pan, Lan, Wu, Yang) live in *ganlan*-style Dong wooden tiered homes (see Geary et al. 2003) surrounding a single nine-story drum tower, with a wind and rain bridge tucked between green layered rice terraces covering the mountain¹²⁹. The picturesque landscape is claimed by Hu Chaoxiang and former ecomuseum director Hu Guanhua as an ideal spot for an ecomuseum, exemplifying the harmonious relationship between man and nature.

Like Suoga, the development of the ecomuseum in Tang'an has incited greater domestic and international attention and has positioned villagers as fixtures of a developing cultural economy and state narrative on heritage preservation and cultural difference. Yet, unlike Suoga, the ecomuseum did not initiate the expansion of the cultural industry in Tang'an. Rather, it complicated it. Tang'an experienced tourism before the ecomuseum was built in the early 2000s. Tourists were trickling into the village from Zhaoxing township, which was receiving more and more domestic and international attention as a “center of Dong minority culture”.¹³⁰ Shortly after announcing Tang'an as a future ecomuseum site, a Hong Kong-based company began work in the village in 2002. From the beginning, the company claimed that their focus was community-based cultural protection. They held community-wide meetings to discuss with villagers their

¹²⁹ The drum tower was built in the years of the Jiaqing of the Qing Dynasty (1795-1820) and repaired several times and rebuilt in the 1980s. Like all drum towers, a drama stages is located opposite the drum tower in Tang'an. The Wind and Rain Bridge was originally built in the year of Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty (1875-1908) and later rebuilt in 2002.

¹³⁰ Zhaoxing was discovered by French travelers to eastern Guizhou in the 1980s and publicized abroad. International attention soon gave way to domestic attention and the growth of tourism development in Zhaoxing.

cooperation in the preservation of local Dong cultural practices. However, an undertone of tourism development persisted throughout their work. This became clear when, according to one villager, “they asking us to keep the village clean and wear our traditional clothing. [The company] said because you going to be ecomuseum villagers, you should speak friendly and kindly to visitors and welcome them”. Between 2002-2004, the company launched several cultural events in Tang'an, including developing a platform for recording villagers' Dong music and training 20 local “Cultural Inheritors”, as well as drawing tourists to Tang'an to attend organized song and dance and Dong opera theater performances conducted by local residents. Villagers, young and old, dressed in traditional Dong clothing were paid for their participation in these tourism activities by the Hong Kong company. According to villagers, they held a good working relationship with the company as they saw incomes increase from the company’s tourism initiatives and collaboration on cultural inheritance work. A close relationship was also made between the company and the developing ecomuseum project, with the company collaborating with Hu Guanhua in supplying funding for various tourism activities. Because the company was working in Tang'an at the same time as the ecomuseum project was being developed, many villagers later expressed their confusion on who administered the project. Many told me that it was through the work of the company, not the Chinese government and Norwegian state, that the ecomuseum was established.

In 2003, another tourism management company, based in Guiyang, launched a grand tourism development scheme for Zhaoxing and the surrounding Dong villages. With a large investment, the company obtained a 50-year lease of Zhaoxing township from the county government and gained a relative monopoly on tourism development in the area

(see also Cornet 2009)¹³¹. Although the tourism company received tourism development rights in seven of the eight villages of Zhaoxing under contract, Tang'an village remained a government-led project and separate from the company scheme. Hu Guanhua explained to me that the county and provincial government did not want to give over administration of the ecomuseum because 1) it represented a joint international project between China and Norway, and 2) they did not want the ecomuseum to simply become another tourist destination. That being said, the Hong Kong company, under a project of “cultural protection” was able to remain in Tang'an.

The ecomuseum label, however, represented an important asset for tourism development for the new tourism management company. And, in 2005, after persistent persuasion, financial leverage, and a proscribed claim to adhere to ecomuseum project principles outlined by the county cultural management office overseeing ecomuseum development, the Guiyang-based tourism company acquired administrative rights of Tang'an. Consequently, the Hong Kong company was forced to leave (Hu Guanhua personal conversation 29 June 2011). Tang'an has since been publicized through company issued brochures as a prime destination for visitors to the “heartland Dong culture”.

As both a potentially lucrative tourist site under the grand tourism scheme of the management company and a “protected site” under the ecomuseum project, Tang'an was closely monitored. According to the company director, who I spoke with in 2011, keeping the “original” physical landscape is essential to retain and present Tang'an's ethnic Dong

¹³¹ Since 2005, the company has invested in several development projects in Zhaoxing and the surrounding Dong villages, such as road construction, hotels, and a song and dance troupe. Future plans for development under the tourism company management, such as an entrance ticket and construction of a walking street however, have been thwarted by the county government as it attempts to push the tourism company out of its contract. For an earlier comprehensive overview of the politics tourism development in Zhaoxing see Cornet (2009).

“authenticity”. However, the effort for protection and retaining a harmonious, or ethnically universal, landscape has been met with increasing tension among Tang'an and Zhaoxing residents. For example, because *ganlan* Dong style homes are made of wood, villages are prone to frequent fires. Within the last five years, Tang'an experienced a massive fire that destroyed 50 homes. Drawing on money earned from migrant labor or borrowing, many villagers have resorted in replacing their old homes using new materials such as brick and concrete. Villagers consider such “modern” materials more cost effective and safer. However, with legal support by the local government, the tourism company has instated strict housing restrictions requiring all homes made of wood, or with wood-wrapped facades (*yong mu baofang* ch.), to retain the original *ganlan* and *diaojiailou* Dong style architecture. If villagers do not meet such requirements their new home will be susceptible to bulldozing by the government. It is also important to note here that villagers are required to cover the cost of wood and labor to maintain the old home style themselves, with no stipend allotted by the tourism company even if requirements are met. This has led to loud complaints by villagers that they have no control over the landscape and home in which they live¹³². It has also led to many interviewed villagers to express their frustration over the disconnect between their interests and that of the tourism company concerning village development.

With the take over of Tang'an ecomuseum, the tourism company renovated the ecomuseum exhibition center in the village in 2008. The exhibition offers a brief overview of the local Dong minority through a collection of photographs and panel descriptions presented on divided wall sections under professional lighting. The wall

¹³² See Oakes (2006: 30) on a similar situation in one *tunpu* village in Anshun.

panels follow a determined route starting with a description of the philosophy and purpose of the ecomuseum, and then through a series of identified and defined cultural markers of the Dong, such as Drum Towers, Village Gates, Embroidery, Ornamental Silver, Mud and Lusheng Festivals, Sacrificial and Worship Rituals, Handicrafts, and Marriage and Funeral Customs. The exhibition culminates at the presentation of three signs, including a detailed map outlining Tang'an's elements of the “tangible cultural heritage” and “intangible cultural heritage” that the visitor has just learned about. Even without tangible objects on display the display acts as “an interface and thereby transforms what is shown into heritage” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7). As one facility of the ecomuseum, the center exhibition assumes that the visitor will encounter such “heritage” in the village through their ecomuseum experience. These elements of Dong culture and even the ecomuseum itself are situated in a grand heritage discourse, and constitutes heritage through a narrative of continuity and also potential crisis and loss.

My visit to the “new” ecomuseum center in Tang’an with the villager leader was similar to other ecomuseum centers throughout southwest China in that it required contacting someone to open the locked door to the exhibition. In Tang’an, we had to call the phone number written on the front door of a tourism company staff. According to my experience and that of interviewed tourists, viewing the exhibit was mainly by appointment only. The once free documentation center now administered by the tourism company requires a 10 yuan entrance fee and adds to the company's profits of booming tourism in Zhaoxing. (The Guiyang tourism company owns two hotels and runs the nightly Dong performance in Zhaoxing.) Sitting with many villagers under the village drum tower after my visit to the center, I learned that they had never visited the center.

One village frankly stated to me, “it is in our village, but the “museum” remains closed to us and the public”. When I inquired on use of the center, villagers were quick to state “it was built by the Hong Kong company but the Guiyang company runs it now. It is not ours.”

While Tang'an has received thousands of tourists each year in search of the “exotic” Dong of southwest China, the village has experienced little economic growth in comparison to the thriving Zhaoxing. An owner of one of only three guesthouses recently developed in Tang'an explained me in 2010:

We only see visitors coming to take photographs of the surrounding rice terraces and of our village, including our drum tower and wind and rain bridge. They sometimes visit the museum. Although we welcome tourists to our village, our guesthouses (*nongjiale*) often remain vacant. [Tourists] only stay a few hours or half a day only to return to Zhaoxing to eat and sleep.

The majority of villagers interviewed were quick to compare experiences under the two tourism companies. They adamantly expressed their enthusiasm in participating in the Hong Kong company activities and praised the company's work in bringing tourists and economic benefits (*xiaoyi*) to the village, when they saw clear, yet minimal, economic benefits. Conversely, the Guiyang-based tourism company was stated as being “harmful” and “exploiting” their culture for commercial purposes, and “having done nothing for the community”. With a lack of tourist consumption and employment opportunities in the village in the past decade, there has been a rise in Tang'an youth leaving for work in urban centers. Data collected from my fieldwork in Tang'an in 2008 and 2011 is in line with Cornet's (2009: 202) statement that roughly half of Tang'an's population has left the village for migrant labor leaving only elders and children to inhabit the village.

Under a World Bank loan to launch the “Guizhou Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection and Development Project” in 2009, Zhaoxing was selected as one of 22 sites throughout the province to “[increase] economic benefits to local communities through increased tourism and better protection of cultural and natural heritages” (World Bank n.d.). As a designated ecomuseum and “protected site”, Tang'an village became an important part of this project. On my 2011 trip to Tang'an, signs describing the World Bank project had just been posted throughout the village on residents' doors. Village meetings had begun to be held to discuss financial support for infrastructure improvement and the construction villager guesthouses, specifically to increase opportunities for resident households. The World Bank project presented a new approach to bring greater tourism development to Tang'an administered by county and provincial powers higher than the tourism company. Several villagers stated to me they were relieved to see government investment finally coming to Tang'an. One villager expressed that, “Now we will start to really see the benefits of tourism”.

The case of Tang'an draws attention to the fact that the ecomuseum in fact exists in name only. Although signs surrounding the entrance of the village present the visitor with the idea that the whole village itself is a living museum and embedded in ecomuseological principles of community heritage management, the reality that takes place does not match the ideal. This leaves the question of what then is the ecomuseum. According to many villagers that “inhabit it”, the ecomuseum constitutes the exhibition center which they have not even seen. Launched at a time when attention was concentrated on ethnic cultural tourism development in the county and township, the ecomuseum has become usurped in commercialism. For money hungry county and

township government officials, the ecomuseum is more an economic enterprise than a new method for collaborative community development or cultural protection. Heritage protection of the cultural landscape is seen as a means for economic generation through tourism. With villagers positioned as subjects and objects of a grand tourism scheme conducted by outside actors, the ecomuseum comes to represent more a brand than anything else. It is thus ironic that Tang'an has been officially named in 2011 by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage as one of three national ecomuseum “models” (*guojia shifan dian*), earning accolades as promoting the Chinese ecomuseum approach of heritage protection and economic and social development. While the ecomuseum has opened an opportunity for economic development in Tang'an, processes of production and consumption has been underpinned by a complicated politics of corporate governance.

Longli: Preserving An Ancient Village

Billboards placed along the highway from Kaili to Jinping, in Guizhou's Qiandongnan region, display the ancient stone walls of Longli's Ming dynasty military fortress and highlight its status as a national historic and cultural village (*zhongguo lishi wenhua cun*). Longli represents a unique site in Guizhou as a Han village in that has retained its physical and cultural landscape dating back to 1385, in a region with 85% of the surrounding population belonging to different ethnic groups. Longli was established as a military garrison under Ming Dynasty Emperor Hongwu who sent Han soldiers from mainly Shandong and Jiangnan provinces of Anhui and Jiangxi¹³³ to suppress ethnic

¹³³ Originally the Han community of Longli had a total of 72 surnames originating from 9 provinces

(*tuzu*) uprisings and consolidate imperial power.¹³⁴ Today, the descendants of these soldiers inhabit the village. Although the walls of the ancient military fortress have been knocked down as a result of family expansion during the Mao era, much of the original design of the garrison remains intact. In 1999, Longli, referred to as an ancient city (*gucheng*), was selected for ecomuseum development and “opening its doors” in 2004.

In 2008, upon my first visit to Longli, the township leader handed me a 100-page heritage protection and restoration plan drafted by the Jinping county People's Government Office (*renmin zhengfu*) in 2000. He pointed out that the plan represented the foundation upon which the current large scale heritage preservation work in Longli was based. The government protection plan called for “holistic protection”, and upheld Liang Sicheng's slogan of “restoring the old as the old” (*xiu jiu, ru jiu*). It outlined two main themes: protection and restoration and tourism development and improving residents' living standards and environment. Under the plan, Longli was divided into three spatial sectors: the “Definite Protected Area” including the area within the fortress walls and representing the “core area reflecting ancient cultural values” and the “primary component of the ecomuseum”; the “Strictly Controlled Area” directly surrounding the fortress wall; and the “Coordinated Area” of the natural landscape surrounding the village. For local government leaders and villagers, the plan was the first time the concept of heritage protection (*yichan baohu*) and the spatial parameters of the village was defined, let alone claims of what village's cultural and historical assets were.

The Jinping county and township government saw the introduced ecomuseum

including Shandong, Shanxi, Gansu, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, Fujian. It is said that the 72 wells found throughout the military fort account for each surname of Longli.

¹³⁴ Longli represented the eastern counterpart of the province's western military garrison in Anshun, home to *tunpu* culture (see Yan and Gao 2003; Oakes 2006).

approach by Hu Chaoxiang and Su Donghai and the Norwegian museologist John Aage Gjestrum as a “suitable method” for the heritage protection for Longli. According to the Longli township leader, through the ecomuseum the “the relationship between the local natural and cultural environment could be made clear and protected, and villagers could participate in cultural heritage management of their hometown” (personal conversation 1 July 2008). Unlike other ecomuseum cases in Guizhou, the ecomuseum project in Longli was seen as not simply a title or form of government and foreign investment. With a strong sense of cultural pride and belonging running through the Han community of Longli, the ecomuseum became more of an approach to reorient the proposed historic preservation of Longli to be more community responsive and inclusive.

Like all ecomuseum projects across China, ecomuseum work began with the construction of the ecomuseum center. The center was built in the center of the village on the same site where a garrison temple once stood, destroyed earlier under the Mao regime to erect a square for viewing propaganda movies. To maintain “architectural harmony” with the surrounding Ming and Qing dynasty style homes, the center was built with white wash and painted stone walls and up-turned eaves on the roof. Led by the county cultural management office, local material culture was collected and records of Longli's ancient history was added to the ecomuseum exhibition center.

After center construction, the county government began to focus more on the heritage protection plan. It first concentrated on restoring the front east gate (*qing yang men*) and its drum tower and part of the fortress wall, visible from the main road. However, with the county government directing the project from afar, restoration work was slow to develop and, according to interviewed county leaders, reached only moderate

success. This resulted in a rapid departure from other county level government-directed ecomuseum projects in Guizhou. Longli experienced a dramatic shift in local governance in 2006. The country government decided to hand over administrative rights to the township and village government for heritage protection and ecomuseum development. A locally-run heritage protection management office was established in Longli village in an attempt to create a more effective local mechanism for heritage work.

For the first time, the ecomuseum in China was beginning to adhere to international ecomuseological principles of community development and participatory heritage management. The actions and words of the Longli heritage protection management office staff make this clear. The director explained to me that the project promoted “horizontal collaboration” among villagers, village representatives, the local town and village government, and the management office staff and “effective heritage protection work and tourism development could only take place if importance was placed on villager participation” (personal conversation 1 July 2008). Many interviewed villagers I spoke with claimed that they held a new collaborative relationship with the township government-management office. Villagers were now included in decision-making practices over the ancient village’s protection. Frequent village meetings were held inviting resident households to discuss and consult on infrastructure maintenance and improvement, home renovation and reconstruction, sanitation, and tourism development. Through such meetings and work with the heritage protection management office, villagers gradually understood the significance of the ecomuseum project and the importance attributed to historic preservation of Longli.

Even though greater transparency and collaboration between different local actors was reached, heritage protection and development work in Longli has faced considerable challenges. In a time of rapid social change in China, especially since the turn of the 21st century, many Longli residents, similar to villagers in Tang'an and Suoga, were eager to replace their old stone, sod, or wood homes with “modern” structures. With a “primary aim to protect, restore, and rescue old residencies” under the heritage protection plan, the local management office was posed with the difficult work of enhancing villagers' understanding of the historical and cultural “value” of their old homes and trying to convince them that historic protection outweighed rebuilding. The practice of persuading villagers to change their thinking is often referred to in China as *sixiang gongzuo*. Challenges posed with persuasion, however, resulted in the heritage management team resorting to implementing strict housing construction and restoration regulations, similar to those in Tang'an.¹³⁵

Working closely with villagers and with support by the village government association (*cun wei hui*), the management office has seen some positive outcomes of this initiative. Unlike in Tang'an, the Longli government has realized that incentive is important for villager cooperation. They decided to allocate 4000 RMB for additional construction costs attributed to meeting certain architecture requirements. And, they encouraged villagers that which the facade of their homes should be retained, the interior could be renovated. Mr. Wang, for example, who consulted with the protection management office for the construction of his new home, used brick and concrete and built a “modern” interior, yet was approved by the management office and was allocated

¹³⁵ Villagers are required to build their new home in the old style in keeping with Ming dynasty architecture characteristics so as to keep the “visible” ancient village landscape homogeneous.

financial support because his house's exterior retained a similar Ming dynasty architectural style. When asked why he had rebuilt his house, Mr. Wang proudly stressed to me that he was keeping with the ancient Longli style and stated that “this is an ancient village...before our houses were like this...my son didn't agree with me to build like this, but I decided to do it anyway.” Mr. Wang is just one villager among many in Longli who has been able to find a balance of maintaining the ancient landscape of Longli while enjoying the conveniences of a “modern lifestyle”, mixing, according to local leaders “tradition” and “modern”.

Importance placed on Longli as preserved “ancient village” and ecomuseum has brought considerable attention to the village. In the region of Guizhou, where paramount ethnic diversity exists, cultural tourism is primarily centered on encounters of the exoticism of ethnic minorities. Thus, Longli offers sometime quite different in terms of cultural destinations in the region. Rather than signifying cultural difference of the present, which most ecomuseums in China focus on, Longli’s attraction is built on cultural difference of the past. Longli, along with the village of Chang Gang Lin, in Guangxi, are the only two Han villages out of nineteen ecomuseums in southwest and have been chosen because they are centered on a Han Chinese ancient cultural past. They do not focus on the “living” culture of the present and the intangibility of heritage, but highlight the “ancientness” of their local Han culture through immovable, tangible culture and a touristic experience of returning to days passed (see Anagnost 1997; Graburn 1995; Frow 1991). They both create a exhibitionary experience utilizing historical symbols and forms of remembrance for urban Han visitors. For example, Han visitors to Longli I met and observed mainly from the nearby counties of Jinping and Liping on weekend outings

or from the provincial capital of Guiyang mainly expressed a sense of connection to the Han village through feelings of remembrance and a shared history. This was cultivated through collections of Han material culture and from the ancient northern Han architecture found throughout the village. Local residents have created avenues for visitors to even embody the past through for-hire knight armor clothing, which allow tourists to act like warriors of the dynastic era while taking pictures in front of the refurbished 600 year old stone military fortress gate. And, several households have converted part of their historic residences into guesthouses so visitors can stay over in an ambiance of the ancient Ming and Qing dynasty China. Tourism in Longli has been by virtue of the preservation of the historic and physical significance of the *gucheng*.

Even as Longli has become to offer many touristic activities and goods, historic preservation continues to outweigh the potential of tourism exploitation. Work to produce an historic touristic image and landscape which appeals to the needs of the urban Han tourist has so far been relatively minimal compared to other Han Chinese historic and cultural destinations in other parts of China, such as Pingyao, Fenghuang, and Xitang and Zhouzhuang. Unlike other ecomuseum sites, Longli residents attempt to overly capitalize on offering nostalgia tourism for their own economic advantage is not paramount (see Dann 1994). This can be attributed partly to Longli villagers higher level of income attributed to the abundance of farming, which puts less of a demand on earning profit from tourism. And, is also tied to the low number of tourists traveling to the eastern far reaches of Qiandongnan throughout the year. Although Longli sees a flooding of tourists

during their festive lunar new year celebrations¹³⁶, tourism has not proven to be significantly lucrative for most households.

As Longli has shown promise in building an effective community-based approach for heritage preservation, efforts to expand the heritage protection project to restore the ancient village has led to new promises and contestations. A proposal to develop a new village settlement behind the ancient village, launched in 2008, has placed greater stress on the initiative for heritage protection in Longli and on the relationship between villagers and the local government. The new village was explained by the village leader as complementary to the ancient village protection; it would allow the ancient village to remain protected and less populated and for villagers to benefit from historic preservation. Villagers were initially supportive of the new village plan. Many villagers even consented in selling the right of their rich agricultural land to the county government, who acquired approximately 100 mu (16.5 acres), for the development of the new settlement. The plan has called for 160 households to be moved to the new village. It has also suggested the demolition of resident houses built on the location of the once standing fortress wall for purposes of wall restoration.

However, in addition to the plan to relocate households currently living on the former wall line, tensions have risen among villagers because no steps has been taken for new village development since the 2008 land purchase. Agricultural land has laid dormant for now four years and villagers are getting anxious. Furthermore, tensions between the village community and the local government have been exacerbated since

¹³⁶ During the lunar new year, Longli hosts a large holiday festival involving traditional face painting, Han opera, and dragon dancing. Longli receives the highest number of tourists during the year at this time with all of the available guesthouses booked.

Longli was selected, like Zhaoxing, for the World Bank loan project. Jinping county was allocated 100 million RMB (roughly \$15.5 million) specifically for Longli heritage protection and development. Yet, according to village representatives and village leaders no outside investment has been seen, claiming that this money “has yet to reach the village” (*meiyou dao wei*). Knowledge of this outside financial support combined with a clear lack of noticeable investment and development practices in the new village has resulted in extreme agitation among most villagers, with some stressing to me that “the government has cheated their road to development”. Compounding this is a recognition among township leaders that with the new World Bank loan and more provincial focus on Longli, the heritage protection project has become “too big” for local leaders to handle. Consequently, the administration of the heritage protection management office and the ecomuseum project has changed hands again, from the township and village to now the county government.

Although the management office under county government control has continued its work with villagers on house renovation and tourism development, many villagers feel that decision-making control has shifted away from the villager. With direct consultation and collaborate with villagers considerably minimized, villagers feel that they are now required to merely satisfy upper-level government declarations. Many elders who typically sit inside the four ancient archways of the stone garrison gates to cool from the hot summer sun adamantly agreed with village elder Liang when he stated to me that “heritage protection and development of Longli has become now the responsibility of the government”. For Longli, efforts to enhance the capacity to preserve and regenerate the historic village and develop heritage tourism since the ecomuseum project was initiated

in 2004 has come with significant changes in power relations. The shifting between “community heritage” and government-led management signifies how heritage protection and development is constantly in flux and caught in a web of state bureaucracy.

Conclusion

The Western ecomuseum philosophy declares that ecomuseums are to be established for communities, and conceived of, managed, and built by local people themselves (Davis 1999; Huang 2006). However, in the process of localization in China, the ecomuseum has been transformed into something much different than its original conception. Although they resemble “fragmented museums” and “museums without walls” in encompassing a local place and cultural landscape as the museum domain, ecomuseums in China seem to foster agendas that often extend beyond local community needs and interests. Such government and expert focused objectives supersede efforts for active community involvement, with decision-making power predominantly in the hands of extra-local developers. Indeed, as Huang (2006) argues, in China ecomuseum continue to face a challenge in linking idealism with reality.

The above cases in Guizhou illustrate how ecomuseums in China have distinct characteristics as they are shaped by broader political, economic, and cultural forces and situated in a political framework of state control. This chapter has introduced different ecomuseum cases to highlight the various roles of the ecomuseum institution as a mechanism for social and economic change through avenues of rural development, poverty alleviation, tourism, and heritage preservation. Although the ecomuseum appears as a potential tool to promote the protection of cultural diversity and community

development by utilizing “valuable” heritage assets in the eyes of its strongest proponents - Chinese museologists - on the ground, project development takes on a clear political and economic focus on upholding cultural difference and creating cultural destinations for tourism. Indeed, the ecomuseum brand has been used to accentuate cultural distinctiveness and exoticism to attract attention to these rural locales.

As a new product of modernity and global processes in rural China, ecomuseum implementation has worked to iconicize ethnic villages. For each ecomuseum, practices of site selection, protection, and exhibition has resulted in processes of cultural production and construction (Lowenthal 1998; Graham et al 2000), transforming a way of life and cultural practices into heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), and creating valued cultural symbols and commodities that function in mapping out both cultural difference and social space (see Bennett 2005). Furthermore, in the ecomuseum context, culture becomes a resource that extends beyond mere notions of capital to be linked to political agendas (Yudice 2003), in which “[culture’s] *content* [in many ways] is less important than its *utility* in achieving certain political (or economic or social) objectives” (Oakes 2008: 422). The ecomuseum thus can be understood also as a mechanism of cultural governance. As articulations of cultural heritage, cultural difference, community consolidation, and ethnic subject positionality are structured through the institutionalization process, local populations are forced to orient themselves within the field of museological process in which they are now entangled. As we seen across the cases discussed above - Suoga, Tang'an and Longli - including other sites in Guizhou as well as in Guangxi, like Huaili, the establishment of the ecomuseum has produced new opportunities for rural locales and local communities as they are co-opted under larger

rural development schemes.

For the rest of this study, I turn back to the case of Huaili village and the development of the Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum. Chapters 5 and 6 continue to provide a detailed ethnographic account of the political and economic intricacies of the manifestation of the ecomuseum in this small Yao village. These following chapters contribute to critical heritage and museum studies in interrogating the ecomuseum as a site of knowledge production and cultural contestation, where social relations of identity and difference, representation, and forms of power play out (Gable and Handler 1996; Karp et al. 2006), and are seen as “highly productive machineries in their capacity to transform modes of thought, perception, and behavior – in short, ways of life” (Bennett 2006: 57) as they remain situated within the political framework of China. In highlighting these issues through an exploration of themes of the trajectory of local heritage through the ecomuseum context and community engagements in project development, I expose how the ecomuseum generates and regulates peoples' relationship with their cultural heritage, community, and self as well as with larger political narratives of rural development and cultural difference. It becomes clear that through the creation of the social space of the ecomuseum, local populations have become situated within a complex and dynamic politics of the ethnic authentication, commercialization, and community participation.

CHAPTER 5

ENTANGLED DRUMS AND EMERGENT HERITAGE

Objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become
(Thomas 1991: 4).

“We play bronze drums for deceased elders!”, exclaimed Huaili villager Li Haifang as smoke from the wood fire in his home enveloped his outstretched face. He stopped, leaned back out of the smoke and took a few puff off his cigarette. His pause after this exclamation was intentional, to let me internalize the drum's connection with the funeral ritual and to also recognize his authority as a one of the most knowledgeable drummers of the Baiku Yao.¹³⁷ It was also a silence to connote a sense of certainty on the link between the drum and ritual. For the Baiku Yao, death was the primary reason to evoke the sacred power of the drum.

For generations the bronze drum has played an intricate role in the social and religious life of the Baiku Yao. It embodies the sacred and possesses agency in its ritual power and ability to move people. It holds distinct proscribed anthropomorphic attributes as a member of the community and its use and presence reflects the social organization of kin relations. In Baiku Yao society the drum takes on a particular personality, and reveals local social values by evoking expressions of memory, history, and Baiku Yao identity.

With the establishment of ecomuseums in China, local cultural objects, practices, and spaces undergo a processes of selection and recontextualization, as outlined in the

¹³⁷ After the drum “dance” of *QinZeGeLa*, or “monkey stick dance” (*hougunwu* in ch.) was designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage item of the provincial region of Guangxi, Li Haifang was bestowed the honorary title of “cultural inheritor” by the Guangxi Culture Bureau. This title is adopted from the UNESCO practice of designating “cultural inheritors” of intangible heritage practices.

previous two chapters. With a recent spotlight put on the Baiku Yao since the establishment of the ecomuseum project in 2004, the bronze drum, in particular, has been recognized as a key cultural symbol of the Baiku Yao. Situated in a new regime of value and heritage discourse through the ecomuseum context, the life and trajectory of the bronze drum in Baiku Yao society and its interaction with various actors has been altered. And, local villagers' relationship with the bronze drum and other cultural forms and practices have become significantly complicated. New relations have been formed between the sacred and the self and larger questions have been raised on the meaning, function, and value of this cultural assets and how they impact local cultural knowledge and certain social actions.

This chapter points to the implications of ecomuseum development on “heritage”. Through the intervention of a new heritage discourse for the protection and conservation of local “heritages”, the commercialization of heritage and ethnicity, and intensified extra-local state and community relations, ecomuseum development has altered the social life of objects and their relationship with local populations. This chapter pays particular attention to the bronze drum in Baiku Yao society and explores the cultural and political-economic implications for its (re)constituted meaning, value and function across different social contexts. By following the trajectory of the bronze drum as it moves through spatial and temporal “regimes of value” (Appaduari 1986), I uncover the social relations that shape and are shaped by their movement (MacKenzie 1991; Hoskins 1998).

While Chinese texts are written on the aesthetics, material dimensions, and function of the cultural form of the bronze drum, namely using an archeological perspective, there has been made little attempt to understand how bronze drums are perceived by persons

that they are linked to over time and space and how individuals' perceptions regarding the drum have changed (Hoskins 2006: 78). This chapter attempts to address this gap in the literature and provide an exploration of the social life of the bronze drum¹³⁸. Drawing on the work of Hoskins (1993, 1998), MacKenzie (1991), Gell (1998), Appadurai (1986), Kopytoff (1986), and Thomas (1991, 1994), this chapter builds an analytical framework to examine the interplay between people and cultural objects and practices through the ecomuseum space. I follow a recent line of material culture and heritage studies scholarship that directs attention to the movement of things as spatial and cultural domains entangled in global forces and frictions (Appadurai 1986; Tsing 2005). According to Appadurai (1986: 5) by engaging with objects' dynamic movement through broader social, cultural, economic, political contexts and exploring their connection to the human experience, "we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" and grasp the meanings that are "inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories". In this chapter, I apply the approach of "cultural biographies" presented by Kopytoff (1986) to uncover the social life of things. Object biographies allow us to not just understand an object synchronically, but through its life history, i.e. the movement of objects and the shifting meanings and values that are invested in them through the social interactions they are embedded in over time (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170).¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Throughout this chapter I employ a methodology to explore the social life of the bronze drum which entails examining what values drums are given across different actors, how drums come to hold these values, and the ways these values affect interactions between people and drums and between people. This methodology is commonly seen across material culture studies (<http://www.seiselt.com/smutheory/Diana%20Fridberg/SocialThings.html>).

¹³⁹ Seminal cases of the traded objects of the Kula in the Trobriands (Malinowski 1922; Weiner 1992) and the sperm whale tooth (*tabua*) in Fiji (Arno 2005; Sahlins 1983); string bags in New Guinea (MacKenzie 1991), and barkcloth ponchos (*tiputa*) in Polynesia (Thomas 1999) illustrate the shifting meanings and values of objects and how they are deeply invested in conditioning social relations. Many have examined such relations through realms of object exchange and value (Mauss 1924/1954;

Studying the biographies of things, objects are shown to change through their existence and have the capability of accumulating multiple histories (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170). This analytical biographical approach is employed to understand the local knowledge that surrounds and frames the bronze drum in Baiku Yao society and how its significance has changed through the intervention of the ecomuseum project. This approach also aids in addressing how the bronze drum mediates social agency, offering an explanation of objects' role in the shaping of human identities and different social lives (see Telle 2007; Gell 1998; Gosden and Marhsall 1999: 169).



Figure 17. Bronze Drum, Huaili village, Lihu township, Nandan county.

The Baiku Yao, the Bronze Drum, and the Supernatural

The earliest bronze drums in southern China and Southeast Asia date back over 2,000 years to the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE)¹⁴⁰. According to research by Han

Malinowski 1922; Miller 1987; Hoskins 1998; Appadurai 1986) or reconfiguration through different social contexts (Thomas 1991, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ There continues to be a heated debate between the Chinese and Vietnamese on the location of the earliest bronze drum. Franz Heger declared in his 1902 classification that his Type I Dong Son bronze drum found in northern Vietnam was the earliest. Yet, Chinese scholars have declared the Wanjiaba

Xiaorong (1998), the earliest mention of bronze drums in China appears in the book *Shi Ben* dating from the 3rd century BCE. Similar to other bronze objects during the dynastic period in China, rulers and elites' possession of bronze drums in southern China was a declaration of wealth and power.¹⁴¹ Use of bronze drums also extended to warfare, and acted as instruments to summon people, to convey orders to soldiers, and to synchronize movements for military battles (Han 2004). Bronze drums, were also seen to possess great spiritual power as protectors against disaster and evil and for bringing fortune and wealth (Wu 2009: 445).¹⁴² As such they have performed multiple ritual functions for different groups throughout southern China, Vietnam, and Myanmar. For example, “among the Yueh chieftains of Yunnan drums were a symbol of authority and were used to summon the gods, obtain blessings, and to heal the sick” (Cooler 1992: 9). In addition to their different function, bronze drum have evolved over time possessing a range of shapes, decorations, and chemical compositions. While they have retained a basic geometry of spherical in shape and hollow with a large bell, their are a variety of defined types throughout southern China and Southeast Asia.¹⁴³

bronze drum discovered in Yunnan province (unearthed in 1919) as the earliest (see Han 1998). Claims by the Chinese make the earliest bronze drum date back to between the 7th and 5th century BCE, approximately 690 BCE according to C14 date (Han 1998).

¹⁴¹ Ma Yuan's seizure of bronze drums from this southern region to later melt them down and recast them as bronze horses is said have also been done to take away power from ruling elites (Cooler 1995: 8; Han 1998)

¹⁴² Geometric motifs, patterns, and images of peacocks, parallelograms, triangles, feathered dancers, flying birds, circles, stars, clouds, and thunder etched onto the side and face of drums, with the sun image located at its center and some possessing ornamentation of three dimensional “frogs-like” creatures adorning the top are said to reflect customs across multiple ethnic groups in China as well as in Vietnam for worshiping celestial bodies and nature (Imamura 2010; Han 1998; Han 2004; Wang 1994).

¹⁴³ Bronze drums stand anywhere from a third of a meter to a half meter tall, with a face approximately half a meter in diameter. These measurements are an average of the three types of bronze drums – LengShuiChong, Zunyi, MaJiang - found in HeChi, which has the highest number of bronze drums in the world. Vietnamese and Burmese bronze drums are found to be similar in shape and height, yet some do reach almost a meter tall.

Of the 2400 bronze drums found world-wide, the majority are in China. Of these, most are collected in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and more specifically in northwest Guangxi's HeChi Red River Basin (*Hechi Hongshui Heliu*). Composed of seven counties - Donglan, Nandan, Tian'e, Fengshan, Bama, Dahui, and Du'an - and a total of 109 townships, over 1400 bronze drums have been unearthed and collected in HeChi (Wu 2009).¹⁴⁴ Today, bronze drums found in HeChi continue to be used by the Zhuang, Miao, and Yao ethnic groups for rituals and performances. Lihu, home to the Baiku Yao, has the largest collection of bronze drums for any township in the region, with 215,¹⁴⁵ and Nandan county is second to Donglan for the largest collection of bronze drums of any county, with 405 (Wu 2009)¹⁴⁶.

Living with the Baiku Yao in Huaili, Lihu township, where I conducted over fifteen months of fieldwork, I attended many Baiku Yao religious rituals, from healing practices and household protection to godfather namings and funeral ceremonies. These experiences along with many discussions with villagers lasting until the wee hours of the morning, allowed me to gradually understand the ordered arrangements and symbolism of Baiku Yao religious life (see Turner 1967: 2), the tacit knowledge of this complicated ritual system, and the significance of the bronze drum (*nuo* in Baiku Yao native language). Although the Baiku Yao are steeped in a ritual tradition of animism, they do not engage in

¹⁴⁴ These bronze drums date from three periods: the end of the Song dynasty and beginning of the Yuan dynasty, the Yuan and Ming dynasty, and Qing dynasty with the majority of the Majiang style (Wu 2009).

¹⁴⁵ I have explored texts on the bronze drum in China yet have been unable to find any written historic records that provide information on how long bronze drums were historically used by the Baiku Yao. Information from interviews with Chinese experts and Baiku Yao elders only point to funeral ritual practice, with some claiming usage in acts of warfare. Wu (2009) states that in HeChi, where Nandan county is located, the earliest bronze drums date back to 990 A.D.

¹⁴⁶ According to Nandan Culture Bureau (*Wentiju*) the county has 405 bronze drums distributed across Lihu (215), Baxu (91), etc. (see Wu 2009: 27).

discussing the sacred and its embodiments, even among members of the same clan and community, let alone with a visiting anthropologist. Such discussions are not considered taboo. Rather, the fact that they remain a “hidden transcript” is an illustration of the Baiku Yao's unquestability and natural acceptance of ritual belief and practiced ritual postulates (see Rappaport 1999). The unyielding certainty expressed among the Baiku Yao of the drum's sacred power strengthen the dimensions of the bronze drum's symbolic attachments. For the Baiku Yao, reflection on its significance and practice, like most religious ritual and cultural customs, yields a common response of simply “following the way of our ancestors”.¹⁴⁷

In Baiku Yao society, all bronze drums have a spirit and a name. They also have a specific gender determined by their appearance - the molded sun image on the face of the drum - and by virtue of their sound.¹⁴⁸ For the Nandan Baiku Yao, female drums are prized over male drums, reflected in the high number of “female” drums found throughout the Baiku Yao inhabited townships of Lihu and Baxu.¹⁴⁹ Female drums are referred to as “*mei*” in Baiku Yao language, translated as “mother”. Male drum are

¹⁴⁷ This reflects Clifford Geertz's (1973: 90) definition of religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” .

¹⁴⁸ “Female” drums (*geme nou*) are said to possess a deeper and more resonating sound, than “male” drums' (*gebeng nou*) higher, sharper sound. A male drum is recognized by having a long flat sun image with its rays protruding from the center of the drum. Female drums have a short, curved relief sun rays. The shape of the sun rays and added metal used to form the curved relief of the “female” drum is understood by some local experts as a factor in altering the sound of the drum. Because the sun rarely comes out in the afternoon in Libo county, and the weather is so cool, most bronze drums are female”. See Lohmann (2007) for a similar analysis of gendered feminine drums of the Asaburo.

¹⁴⁹ According to Baiku Yao elders (Wu 2009: 15), the bronze drum came to Nandan from Libo county, Guizhou province, claiming that “in the morning the weather is cool, so the bronze drums that came out (smelted or cast) were female; in the afternoon, with the sun high, the weather is hot, and what comes out are male bronze drums.

referred to as “*bo*”, or father. Given names for drums include an auspicious name followed by the “*mei*” or “*bo*” term, such as “gold mother”, and “jade mother”.

The naming of a bronze drum involves a complex religious ritual involving communication with the supernatural. For the Baiku Yao, all things of nature have a spirit, including the earth, the mountains and rivers, the sun and moon, wind and rain, animals, and also the bronze drum (see Yu 1987). It is believed that spirits and ghosts exist all around them and can cause unpredictable harmonious, enlightening, and treacherous occurrences, such as sickness, death, and village drought and flooding. This often leaves the Baiku Yao with an unceasingly sense of powerlessness and such supernatural-related anxieties play a significant role in the social life and religious behavior of the Baiku Yao.¹⁵⁰ With a belief in supernatural agency, the Baiku Yao, like other cultures found throughout the world,¹⁵¹ often engage in countless rituals to appease and give blessings to spirits. Ritual practitioners are called upon in an attempt to assuage the imminence of calamity and resolve pain and misfortune enhanced by villagers’ “eruptive anxieties” (Norenzayan and Hansen 2006: 174; see also Durkheim 1912).

In Baiku Yao society, only a small group of ritual practitioners, or “spirit men and women”,¹⁵² referred to as *weiyua* and *nomhao* in Baiku Yao language (*mogong* or *guishi*

¹⁵⁰ Research and ethnographies on the Baiku Yao acknowledge this fact but often do not delve into analysis of this topic. This is partly due to the fact that research on ethnic minority “superstitions” (*mixin*) has only recently become more accepted in Chinese academia. Although research on Baiku Yao culture and religious activities does exist in the early 1980s (see Yu), it has been for the most part preliminary. Since the establishment of the ecomuseum in 2004, Baiku Yao culture has received much more academic and government attention, seen through a significant rise in academic publications (in Chinese). Even with this rise in academic interest, rich ethnographies are still lacking, especially on the Baiku Yao's ritual system.

¹⁵¹ See for example the Native American Cheyenne and the Iahita Arapesh of Papua New Guinea (Lowie 1924; Tuzin 1982)

¹⁵² I choose not to use the term “shaman” as a shaman is commonly referred to as someone who “uses soul journeys in dreams and trance to counteract supernatural causes of illness” (Lohmann). In Baiku Yao

in Chinese) are understood to possess the ability to conduct sacred rituals and aid in bringing people in balance with the natural and supernatural world.¹⁵³ Ritual practices conducted by *weiyua* and *nomhao* range from hearing and summoning spirits and reciting incantations to conducting divination, journeying into the otherworld, and bestowing a name to a bronze drum and sanctifying it as a sacred object. Both ritual practitioners are understood to communicate with the supernatural and hold power in “curing”. But distinction does exist in that *nomhao* are seen as possessing the capacity to summon and listen to spirits in the supernatural world through incantations and ritual offerings, while *weiyua* are understood to possess similar powers as well as be able to foresee the future and conduct more “dangerous” tasks of venturing into the otherworld, and identifying and retrieving a threatened soul of the living.¹⁵⁴

Both types of ritual practitioners acquire the ability to conduct such rituals through a period of being summoned by a spirit god. Of the six male *nomhao* in Lihu township I spoke with, all received their ability to practice rituals and communicate with the supernatural at middle age, with some starting as late as the age of 65. *Weiyua*, on the

society, *weiyua* and *nomhao* work to counteract supernatural causes but they do not “leave” the human body or call on other spirits to embody them, as a form of spirit possession. Rather they use incantations to “communicate” with spirits in the supernatural world for multiple reasons. Although it may seem through observations that they do slip sometimes in a “trance”, *weiyua* and *nomhao* are in fact always mentally “present” and are seen constantly aware of events taking place in the human world during their rituals. *Weiyua* and *nomhao*, however, do obtain their ability from a dream-like experience with the supernatural and *weiyua* in particular can engage in a “journey” to find and bring back a threatened or missing soul. I use the term spirit men and women as a term to connote a “conjurer and seer of spirits”.

¹⁵³ Typically, *weiyua* are women and *nomhao* are men, although the occasional exception does apply, such as in the case of the male sorcerer *GuZongZou* who is identified by local Baiku Yao as *weiyua*. In Baiku Yao society there are often more *nomhao* than *weiyua*.

¹⁵⁴ Rituals of this type involve a two step process: 1) the *weiyua* locates and calls back/retrieves the soul of the living and; 2) a spirit man or woman (either *weiyua* or *nomhao*) gives ritual offerings to thank the associated spirit god that had “endangered” or “taken” the human soul. This second ritual is often conducted days or weeks later and only held if the soul of the living returns to their respective body, e.g. the person for which the ritual is performed gets better. For both *nomhao* and *weiyua*, they often call upon their respective household protective spirit (*gong gu xi* in Baiku Yao language, *jiashen* ch.) to assist in ritual practices.

other hand, were summoned much earlier, around the age of 26.¹⁵⁵ This “summoning” period takes place through a series of dreams in which the individual encounter the supernatural depicted as a group of young child-like spirits, called *jidou*. *Nomhao* Li Xiaoming explains his own experience as follows:

For years I heard voices after I went to bed in the evening. I tried not to listen but they continued and get louder. [*Jidou*] were badgering me as they spoke of the work I had to do. I could not sleep for days. They would come to call on me every month. Finally after years, with my hearing getting worse, I accepted and gave in. Now I have trouble hearing out of this [left] ear. Afterward, the *jidou* voices still come, and they have told me me who to make my table for offerings and where to retrieve my bamboo for divination. Throughout each year I must try to appease the *jidou* and listen to what they tell me.

This summoning and transition period also often involves an escalation of personal sickness, resulting in bouts of extreme rashes, bleeding, ear ache, and even malabsorption and malnourishment. A *weiyua* named *GuZongZou* explained to me that, “suddenly, at the moment of total incapacitation, when I was only in and bones, my body began to change and my health improved. It was when I had accepted the *jidou* and way of a *weiyua*”.

Sitting on low stools around a wood fire in his family’s adobe home in Manjiang village, Lu Chaojin, then vice director of the Huaili ecomuseum, explained to me the complex ritual process conducted by such practitioners for naming the bronze drum. The ritual he spoke of to me took place only a few days prior when his family was presented with a bronze drum from the nearby Huangjiang county mayor¹⁵⁶ named “queen mother” through the sanctification ritual.

¹⁵⁵ *GuZongZou*, a male *weiyua*, was the youngest to begin practicing in Lihu, receiving his ability at the age of 16.

¹⁵⁶ Huangjiang county in HeChi is home to the largest manufacturers of bronze drums in Guangxi. It was explained to me that the mayor offered this drum as a way to honor Lu Chaojin in his efforts to promote the documentation and local heritage conservation and education of Baiku Yao culture.



Figure 18. Ritual conducted by a *nomhao* of Huaili (Photograph by Zhang Haizi, 2012)

Prior to acquiring a name, when the bronze drum is bought, or in this case acquired, by the household, it is hung outside the home of the owner and clan members are allowed to play it freely. This act allows villagers to listen to the drum and discuss its distinct sound. It also helps the household make a formal decision to keep the drum and contemplate its future name¹⁵⁷ (see Liang 2005; Wu 2009). Many clans member attend the naming ceremony, for they are welcoming a new drum and member into their clan.

Lu Chaojin's father, a well known *nomhao* in the community, conducted the naming ritual service. The naming ritual¹⁵⁸ is held on a selected auspicious day, often determined by the *nomhao*. The ritual begins with a ritual for the ancestor and village/household protective spirit “*Gong Gu Xi*” spirits, with the *nomhao* placing cups of wine in a large round flat basket. Then he takes a short stack of white tissue paper and cuts them into a square arch shape. The *nomhao* also takes a piece of charcoal and draws images of a horse and a person, the horse rider, on the sheets of tissue paper to symbolize the

¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that the while the name of the drum can be proposed by the household, the final decision is made during the naming ritual, determined by supernatural spirits.

¹⁵⁸ Description of the naming ritual is draw from my research in Huaili and supplemented with data gathered by ecomuseum staff at Huaili ecomuseum, along with some information from Liang (2005: 114-115) and Wu (2009: 217).

household protective spirit, who the offerings are presented to. The pieces of paper are placed on the flat basket next to a live caged rooster. Then the *nomhao* begins to burn sticks of incense and chant in monotone tossing uncooked rice frequently over the incense. After the *nomhao* finishes chanting, the rooster is sacrificed by slitting its throat and draining the blood into a bowl, which is also placed on the flat basket. The *nomhao* then drinks the cups of wine with the family members.

The ritual continues outside with an offering to the dragon spirit. With an assistant the *nomhao* exits the home with a live duck, a few cups of wine and bowls, and incense. Because the dragon spirit is associated with water, the ritual is performed at to the edge of a small pool found in the village. The ritual practice is almost the same as for the “*Gong Gu Xi*” spirit. However, after the duck is sacrificed and blood is drained into a bowl with some put into two cups of wine, the blood wine is lightly poured onto the ground as an offering, with the remaining drunk by the *nomhao* and assistant. After these two ritual practices, the chicken and duck are feathered and boiled by other members of the household. After they are cooked, the whole birds are placed in bowls on the flat basket, and the *nomhao* conducts another offering to the two spirits and ancestors. Then with a small amount of cooked glutinous rice he takes the tissue paper with images and sticks it on the central wood pillar of the home.

After offerings have been made, the ritual for deciding the name to the bronze drum begins. Lu Chaojin and an assistant place the new bronze drum on the ground in the center of the home and the *nomhao* places eight wine cups, a bowl of pork, a bowl of chicken and duck meat, and two bowls of water on the face of the sitting drum. The *nomhao* sits in front of the bronze drum and begins to chant as he holds a two pieces of

split bamboo sticks, which act as his divination device. After several minutes, the *nomhao* “presents” the name of the drum to the spirit god through his chanting. Moments later the *nomhao* drops the divination bamboo sticks into the bowl of water on the drum, and examines them for positive or negative signs. With the bamboo sticks crossed¹⁵⁹, the *nomhao* declares the spirits' consent on the drum's name and the name is officially announced to the household. All members of the household and invited guests then sit to enjoy a large feast in celebration of the new “sacred” drum, called “queen mother”.

Once specific spiritual and human attributes are given to the drum, the bronze drum becomes a highly revered sacred object. This form of “imaginatively attributing and thence perceiving humanlike characteristics in nonhuman things”, according to Lohmann (2007: 5), is called “anthropomorphism” (see also Guthrie 1993). For the Baiku Yao sanctification not only bequeaths the bronze drum a name and gender, but proclaims it as a member of the community. Similar to what Durkheim (1912/1954) states, there is nothing intrinsic about the bronze drum that makes it sacred; it becomes sacred only when the community invests it with that meaning. Lohmann (2007: 5) explain this as the projection of the internal culture on the external world. The material object of the bronze drum becomes a sacred object through the collective meaning and ritual logic bestowed on it by the Baiku Yao community. By rendering specific imagined characteristics for things in nature, the belief and social system constructed by this group of people is further legitimized and relates to the achievement of certain goals (see Hoskins 1993: 119).

¹⁵⁹ Cross sticks forming an X is auspicious, parallel sticks are not. For other rituals, the ritual practitioner may use a split piece of jointed segment of a bamboo stem (or culm), with both halves of the bamboo dropped on the ground as for divination. An auspicious sign is when one half is faced up and the other faced down. Both pieces facing down or up is not auspicious.

The Baiku Yao understand the supernatural as not ethereal, but a realm possessing volition as an active force in the universe. Lohmann (2003) claims that the supernatural is a “universal human experience that is elaborated differently in different traditions”, and is often defined in academic circles through the “unique spiritual reality of a given culture”. Many etic assumptions exist for the “supernatural”, such as Bosco's (2003) claim as a “realm of spirits beyond the observable world that seems to transcend natural law”.¹⁶⁰ Etic definitions create a dichotomy and separation between the supernatural and the “natural” worlds. Yet, as argued by both Bosco (2003) and Lohmann (2003), they do not so much “demonstrate a problem with the category of ‘supernatural’”, as they point to “the dangers of conflating various etic and emic *definitions* of the supernatural”. According to Lohmann (2003: 176), beyond distinct definitions, what is most important is to understand how different people model this phenomenon of the supernatural, in both etic and emic perspectives. Distinctions between the natural and supernatural are salient in Baiku Yao society, yet their lines are also blurred (see Guthrie 1993). The Baiku Yao interpret the “law” of the universe as deeply implicated in the relationships between humans and spirits (or ghosts). One can easily influence the other and harmony of the natural world can be suddenly put in jeopardy for an individual, family, village or the environment itself. Living and nonliving things are also claimed to inhabit both the human and supernatural worlds. The bronze drum, in particular, exists as a material object in the human world and also possesses symbolic objectification of the sacred, for

¹⁶⁰ There has been a long continuous debate in anthropological circles on the emic and etic sides of the term of the “supernatural”, such that many find problematic the utility of etic distinction of “natural” and “supernatural” (see Lohmann 2003). Michael Jindra (2003), for example, emphasizes this problematic dichotomy, yet still offers to define “natural” as referring to “absolute, rational and universal facts”, and “supernatural” as referring to “relative values and beliefs”.

its use in the supernatural world. Thus, it represents a means to mediate the connection between both worlds. With an ascribed a sacred power, the drum turns into an important tool in Baiku Yao society used in “opening the path” (*bojie*) to the supernatural for the human soul to reach the ancestral land after death through the use its sound.

Death and the Power of Sound

Baiku Yao believe that after death the deceased spirit is not extinguished. The spirit exists in the universe and the relationship with the living can persist even after death. For the deceased to have a peaceful existence in the afterlife, the soul of the departed must be guided to the ancestral land to remain for eternity. The bronze drum plays an important role as a channel in this important ritual process.

When I inquired about the perceived sacred embodiments of the bronze drum and its association with death, I was met with answers by Baiku Yao villagers that focused more of the oral legends surrounding the symbolism of the drum than explicit details on ritual meanings. Like most Baiku Yao I spoke with on the bronze drum, Li Haifang, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, turned my attention to the tale of *Lasai Decha*:

A long time ago... One day a young man named named *Lasai Decha* was taking out his cow to the fields, when he saw a mother cow undergoing significant pain as she gave birth to a calf. He returned to inform his mother of what he witnessed and she explained to him that not only cows suffer during birth, stating that, “I, too, underwent significant pain and suffering for several days to give birth to you”. Later, upon his mother's death, *Lasai Decha*, being a filial son and aware of his mother's unending care for him, decided not to permit his mother's body to be eaten by his fellow villagers, as they customarily engaged in cannibalism after death. Instead, he secretly hid his mother's body in a coffin underground in his home to prevent her body from being seen and eaten. When villagers came to ask of his mother's whereabouts and the boy lied, saying she was off in the fields. He then went to consult his maternal uncle (*jiujiu*), who explained that he must offer meat to his fellow villagers even if it was not his mother. *Lasai Decha* collected a large water buffalo of his own and invited his uncle to slaughter the animal in

public. Then he divided the meat to present to each household. Although the villagers were initially angry that *Lasai Decha* had violated the social laws of society, they welcomed the sacrifice of the buffalo as an alternative.

The collective knowledge of this narrative across Baiku Yao society constitutes a fundamental part of the discourse on ritual practice legitimizing both the logic of the sacred and the ordering of funerals.¹⁶¹ For the Baiku Yao, it defines the ritual postulates of the funeral that have been practiced over countless generations.¹⁶² It is part of a much larger and complicated system of folklore of the Baiku Yao which outlines the social values and relations between humans and nature and the natural and supernatural worlds. Although the story does not mention explicitly the practice of the bronze drum, the story's close association with other folklore reveals the drum's function in ritual practices and the sacred realm of death. One such legend that compliments the tale *LaSai DeCha* that was told to me time and again by elders was that of the Monkey Drummer:

A long time ago, a *dounou* [Baiku Yao] male elder went into the forest to harvest some soy beans (*huangdou*). While in the forest, he got tired from working and decided to take a nap lying in a pile of soy bean husks. After a while, a group of monkeys coming down the mountain to eat soy beans saw the man and discovered that he was not moving. Thinking he was dead, the monkey and accompanying fox (*zhuliu*) decided to play the bronze drum for the man to commemorate his death. The elder awoke to the sound of the drums and laying still he opened one eye to see the animals playing. He witnessed the monkey beating the drum jumping around it and making strange movements. He became so surprised that he arose and startled the animals and they ran off into the hills. The man took the two drums - wood cow-skin drum and bronze drum - back to his village. Later, back in

¹⁶¹ From playing the bronze drums and “opening the path” (*bojie* in Baiku Yao native language, *kailu* in Chinese) for the departed to travel to the ancestral land, to crying over the buffalo and methods of sacrifice, to the complex role of kin, to burial and the village-wide “long table” feast, today's funeral practices in Huaili, and across Baiku Yao villages in Lihu and Baxu townships, are said to mimic that of the oral legend.

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the village, during the funeral of another village elder, the man decided to play the wood cow-skin drum with the accompanying bronze drums. While playing, the man began to mimic the movements he saw from the monkey. Other villagers immediately saw the man was playing differently and inquired on where he learned such movements. The man told his story and thus began the legend of *QinZeGeLa*, monkey stick jump.

The ritual postulates from these two folktales define for the Baiku Yao how important the bronze drum is, not simply as a tangible object but as a practice that can drive the soul of the deceased.

The Baiku Yao understand “sound” as an expression of the spirit that has an organic and spiritual functionality. Although unable to be seen or sometimes understood, sound exists around us and is deeply connected to emotive spirits¹⁶³. Sound is believed to be a manifestation from anything with a spirit (Xu 2010: 53) and can cause spiritual movement and fulfillment for both the living and the dead. In the Baiku Yao oral legend of *GuVon VeGlei* and the Nine Suns, for example, after the eight suns had been slain by the arrows shot by the strong and heroic *GuVon VeGlei*, it was only from the deep and resolute sound of the bear that the last celestial sun could be summoned to grace the world with its light.¹⁶⁴ Similar to what “sociologists Durkheim, Mauss, G. H. Mead, and Schutz stress [as] the primacy of symbolic action in an ongoing intersubjective lifeworld, and the ways engagement in symbolic action continually builds and shapes actors' perceptions and meanings”, we begin to see how the association with “sound” is inseparable from Baiku Yao social life and worldview (see Feld 1984). In my

¹⁶³ Expressions and significance of sound are also observed in the yelling of men during funeral rituals at the end of each cadence of playing the drum. Joyful yelling by male drummers is a signal for the spirit world to welcome the deceased. Also the sound of intense crying, or wailing, even if sometimes exaggerated, is important to accentuate the expressions of sorrow and loss in respect to both the living and dead.

¹⁶⁴ Today, it is said that that upon hearing the sound of the rooster the sun awakes and rises in the morning.

conversations with Baiku Yao villagers, it became increasingly clear that the power of the bronze drum within the ritual context lies in its ability to drive spiritual movement through its production of sound.

Following death, a local religious practitioner is called on by the deceased's family, and an auspicious day is decided for the beginning of the funeral ceremony.¹⁶⁵ Quickly, before for the first day of the funeral ceremony, preparations are made. Relatives of the deceased work to find and purchase one or more water buffalo for sacrifice¹⁶⁶. The brother-in-law of the deceased is notified, as he plays an important role in the buffalo sacrifice. A funeral coordinator is selected. And, preparations for the deceased body and coffin are made and clan members begin arranging clothing, rice, wine, and money offerings to the departed and family of the departed.¹⁶⁷

On the first day of the ritual ceremony, commonly called *bojie* or “opening the path”, bronze drums from across the region, from within and outside the clan of the deceased, are brought to the funeral site in the village. Anywhere from a handful to over twenty

¹⁶⁵ From May until October funerals are not held in Baiku Yao society. From early summer to mid fall, villagers are busy with the yearly harvest and time is limited for planning and preparing large events like funerals. In addition, because water buffaloes are an indispensable part of the cultivation process, sacrifice of buffaloes for the funeral ceremony during this important time would be disruptive to modes of production and to the constructed socio-cultural system. Thus, applying this functionalist and cultural materialism approach, only after the harvest and before the start of working on the next years crop, are funerals held. In cases when a member of the community dies from May to October, their funerals are put on hold. The body of the deceased is placed in a prearranged black wood coffin and buried in a dug hole in the ground of the departed's family home. They remain in the home of the family until the allocated time for funerals or when the family is prepared to host a suitable formal funeral service.

¹⁶⁶ To hold a formal funeral, a buffalo must be sacrificed. If the family is financially incapable, such as in times prior to the 1980s reform period, the deceased's body will be buried in a tomb on the mountainside and later, even after several years, a formal funeral with sacrificial buffalo will be hosted for the previously deceased relative. Water buffaloes can be family owned, purchased from relatives or other clansmen or, as commonly done today, acquired from a breeding farm on the Guangxi-Guizhou border. On average, water buffaloes can be very costly for a Baiku Yao household, costing between 5,000- 10,000 RMB (approximately \$800-1600 dollars (2013)).

¹⁶⁷ Clan men arrange gifted wine and money and women begin preparing pre-made ceremonial dress to be placed inside the coffin of the deceased.

drums are brought by family and friends and are tied up in a straight line to large wooden arch frames constructed on the day of the ceremony. Drumming can only begin after a ritual practitioner welcomes each bronze drum to participate in the funeral. In this ritual practice, called *ji gu*, the ritual practitioner takes a pair of chopsticks and a bowl of water and lightly dips the sticks into the water and taps them onto the center of each drum as he begins to chant:

Divine (name of the drum)
Auspicious (name of the drum).
Today, the elder (name) has passed away, We ask of you to come and join us in
grievance.
We use fresh water and good wine to wash your face.
Everyone can see our sorrowful heart.
For the elder that has passed away we together come to to hold this memorial
service.
Using your formidable power to drive away demons and ghosts, To escort the elder
to go to the otherworld.
Today many bronze drums have come, Maternal grand-uncle (*jiuye*), paternal
grand-uncle (*guye*), and elders (*laotong*) [are here].
(If is it not the deceased household's bronze drum, these two sentence change into
"You are representing (relative's name)".
Numerous ancient treasures are requested amiability, Simultaneously giving off your
(plural) formidable power.
Open your (plural) throat, Give off your (plural) sound.
Let your (plural) sound reach the temple of heaven, Let your (plural) sound reach
the otherworld.
Now you (plural) will open the path (*bojie*) for the elder, Now you (plural) will
protect the spirit of the elder.
Here, a support/frame is for you (plural), Please with me together we will pass.¹⁶⁸

After each drum is welcomed into the funeral ritual, young and old Baiku Yao men approach the drums, and separate into pairs for each drum to be played. One man, called *psin-u*, stands beside the face of the drum with a short bamboo stick in his left hand and a wood mallet made of a bamboo stick and saturated tree root in the right. With the drum

¹⁶⁸ Ritual chant was transcribed for the author by Lu Chaojin in 2012. The author checked the transcribed text with research conducted by Liang (2005: 115, also cited in Wu 2009). Translation is conducted by the author.

hanging only ten centimeters off the ground, he leans over the drum with his body turned to the left, right leg situated slightly in front of the drum and pressed lightly against the drum's bell. The other man, called *ling-u*, takes position behind the bell of the drum with a large bucket, called *doulou* in Baiku Yao language or *fengtong* in Chinese, made of China fir wood. He holds the *doulou* in both his hands, left hand gripping the top of the bucket and the right hand holding its base. The front player lightly pounds the mallet into the center of the drum while striking the top of the drum with the bamboo stick creating a distinct rhythm. As soon as the mallet sounds the drum by hitting its center, the other man drives the *doulou* into the bell from behind and then pulls it out rapidly in a swinging motion. The use of the *doulou* creates a prolonged resonating “wah” sound effect that allows the sound of the drum to carry. While playing, all bronze drummers follow the beat of the large wood cow-skinned drum, or *zou*, situated in front of them. Each bronze drum player does not make eye contact with the *zou* drummer as they play¹⁶⁹, focusing rather on the sound they produce from the bronze drum.

After the start of the drumming on the first day, the first part of the funeral ceremony of “opening the path”, or *bojie* begins. This “formal” (*zhengshi*) drumming period has a determined set of bars with repeating measures of rhythmic melody (see Fig. 19). The number of measures in each phrase is determined by the lead *zou* drummer and is typically ten measures long. Once each cadence is reached in unison, all drummers lift their arms and *doulou* into the air and yell loudly “woo”, with long wooden rifles sometimes blasted. Also after each cadence, all drummers stop to take a drink of wine.

¹⁶⁹ Baiku Yao bronze drums are played using three rhythms. Rhythms are played according to where the funeral is held or where the deceased is from. Rhythms include Huaili, Yaoli, and Jihou. In Baxu county and Yaoshan they play Huaili rhythm.

This is extremely important, for the wine symbolizes that the spirit of the drummer stays grounded and does not pass into the otherworld where the deceased is led. The rhythmic drum continues until the determined number of bars are completed and the *zou* drummer stops.

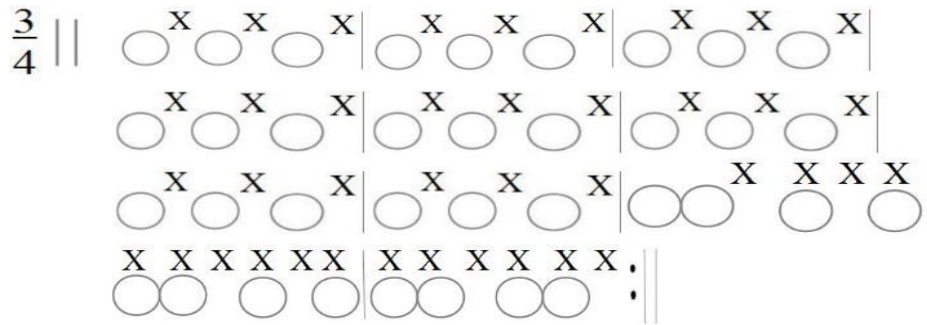


Figure. 19: Huaili Bronze Drum Style. “O” represents hitting the center of the drum with a mallet, “X” represents hitting the side of the drum with a bamboo stick. The rhythmic melody can be lengthened or shorted between the first and eighth bar according to the *zou* player. (Diagram created by the author)

Funerals in Baiku Yao society are considered a time of great loss and a period to lament the death of a loved one. Clansmen, relatives, and friends gather to grieve and cry for the loss of the deceased. This emotional period takes place at different places and times, such as when villagers sit next to the coffin, for the sacrificial buffalo ceremony, and for leading the deceased's body up the mountain for burial. However, funerals are also regarded as a time of joy. As one villager exclaimed to me as drums echoed behind him, “When elders die, it is a time of happiness ... when they reach the ancestral land, which is a land of paradise. Death is a relief from the hardship of real life”. Thus, death symbolizes a moment of rejoice whereby the deceased can come in union with his/her ancestors as he/she reaches the ancestral land. This is observed clearly through the act of drumming. Drummer's faces have a serious and devout look of concentration during the

drumming process, when each cadence is reached, yet their mood suddenly shifts to drunken merriment and joyous outbursts, and behaviors of yelling, laughing, and joking to celebrate the deceased soul on the path to the ancestral land.¹⁷⁰

Funeral ritual in Baiku Yao society, are held over three days. The first day is for “opening the path”, the second day for the the sacrifice of the water buffalo, called *kan niu* in Chinese, and at night to guide the deceased's spirit to the ancestral land, and the third day for the burial and the closing ceremony¹⁷¹. These three days are often not consecutive¹⁷² and at night family members, clansmen, and friends gather to visit the deceased's home in the form of a wake. The coffin and body of the deceased lay in the center of the house with long bamboo poles lined above it strung with bags full of paper “money”, incense, and offered clothing. Visitors sit around the coffin to grieve and chat. Some bronze drums used for the funeral ritual are only moved from their place of storage in a relative's home to the home of the deceased to be played during this night wake period. The large cow skin-cover wooden drum is, too, placed in corner of the home with one or two bronze drums hung nearby. The sounding of the drums is said to be a continuation of the day time drumming and throughout the evening drummers take turns playing.

¹⁷⁰ The sense of joy is also seen from a small group of three or four male villagers standing behind the *zou* drummer. As the drumming takes place, these men hold a set number of sticks - even number (8, 10, or 12) if the deceased is female and odd number (7, 9, or 11) if male - and they joyously wave the sticks in the air said to be aiding in guiding the deceased into the otherworld with the sticks used as forms of defense against any treacherous encounters along the way.

¹⁷¹ I have recorded on several occasions the entire funeral ceremony of the Baiku Yao, from start to finish. Yet, a complete description of the many acts and rituals of this events falls outside the scope of this chapter. See scholars Yu (1987), Liang (2005), Liu (2006), Xu (2010), and Mo (2011) who have written a description of many parts of the funeral ceremony in Chinese.

¹⁷² The duration between the *bojie* ritual and sacrifice of the water buffalo can be a few days. However, the second day for sacrifice and third day for burial are always consecutive.

This evening period during the funeral event is regarded as the one of the most important times for cultural inheritance, when youth to learn to drum. Only during this time, between *bojie* and the burial, can bronze drums be “played freely”. Youth, typically over the age of twelve, interested in learning the bronze drum, can enter the home and request to play. Youth are typically first handed the mallet and bamboo sticks of the drum before they are big enough to handle the heavier and more laborious *doulou*. Interviewed male villager drummers claimed that they actually do not “teach” youth how to play. Rather, they engage in a process of welcoming youth and offering assistance. It is up to the youth himself to want to play. As youth begin to learn to drum, an elder will often stand near to watch as a form of guidance. Only after a youth finishes will an elder offer advice on improving his playing technique. All of my interviewees, surveyed from ages 18 to 75, learned to play the bronze drum in this way.¹⁷³ After a youth is familiar with the form and technique of drumming, they are welcomed by elders to play during the daytime funeral ceremony. But again, it purely up to the individual youth himself if he chooses to participate. Thus, the transmittance of drum playing is not a forced practice or understood as a formal means of inheritance between teacher and student. Rather, it is a cultural practice transmitted through personal interest and communal obligation; men recognizing the importance of playing the drum for their clan and their elders.

On the second day, after the ceremony to sacrifice the water buffalo, bronze drums reenter the ritual-scape and resume their booming, resonant rhythmic beat for the final time. Informal playing begins at dusk attended only by male villagers. As night falls, the

¹⁷³ Some male villagers also received practice earlier the beat and rhythm of bronze drum playing by learning the bamboo drum (*zhu tonggu*), a short bamboo tube with carved holes made to mimic the sound of the bronze drum.

funeral coordinator motions of the commencement of “formal” playing, or *zetic* in Baiku Yao language, just like the first day’s *bojie*. As each bar of playing ends, the rowdiness and yelling from the male drummers increases. Wine bowls are passed around and by the day’s end every drummer is in a drunken state. Just after the last bar is played, out of the darkness a man with two other villagers rushes into the drumming arena waving a long 2-3 meter bamboo stick with white cut paper attached to the top, signaling the end of the drumming ceremony.¹⁷⁴

Night brings a new ritual for the funeral ceremony. The highest level spirit man is received at the home of the deceased late in the evening to conduct the most important part of the funeral ritual, to guide the deceased to the ancestral land, called *hijie nuodu*. In Huaili only two sorcerers have the ability to perform such a ritual, *GuZongZou* (40 years old), and Lu Jinhong (81 years old). The spirit man sits in the home of the deceased next to the coffin surrounded by the family and kin of the deceased. For the next 5-8 hours, until sunrise, the spirit man guides the spirit of the deceased to the ancestral world. The chanting of the spirit man, made in classic Baiku Yao language only discernible by other elder spirit man and elders knowledgeable in song and legend, is composed of a collection of distinct stories that when put together illustrate a route or map for the deceased spirit to traverse. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to spend several days with *GuZongZou* who explained that the night ritual “shows us where we came from and how we got here. It includes the origins of rice and clothing, the drum, and the land we once lived on. It is also the most dangerous for me and the soul of the deceased, as we are confronted with many obstacles and demons... reaching the ancestral land is indeed an

¹⁷⁴ Large balls of glutinous rice each with two kebab sticks of meat from the sacrificed buffalo made during the night performance are distributed to each drummer as a form of thanks for their participation.

arduous act”.¹⁷⁵ During the ritual, *GuZongZou* has two elders seated next to him holding sticks. The souls of these elders travel with him into the supernatural world helping to defend against any challenges along the way. As they travel in the supernatural world, they are accompanied by the souls of the family of the deceased. According to conversations with *GuZongZou*, over the course of their travels, he guides them from Huaili to the village of Badi through the land of monkeys, over the volcano, and mountain so high one can touch the stars, and across the seven pools to a large river, to name just a few sites¹⁷⁶. (See Fig. 19) Upon reaching the river, only he and his two accomplices, and the soul of the deceased may cross. *GuZongZou* calls the ancestors of the land of the departed from across the river to welcome them. Then they cross the river, leaving the deceased in the ancestral land. All souls of the living rush along the same route back to Huaili and return to the natural world.

The next morning, after the conclusion of the burial ceremony, funeral attendees sit together in two long rows to eat the meat of the water buffalo sacrificed the day before. In the center of rows is a “table” of large green plant leafs placed on the ground.¹⁷⁷ Women eat first, and then men come down from the grave site after finishing the burial to switch places with the women to eat. After the meal is finished, bronze drums owners go to the

¹⁷⁵ By conducting a two-part study of the multiple steps and places that compose the route to the ancestral land in relation with the history and geography of the land assumed to be crossed by the Baiku Yao on their way to Huaili, such as Guangxi, Guizhou, and other regions, such as Hunan, Jiangsu, and Shanxi, one may begin to create a theory on the migratory route taken by the Baiku Yao. Along these lines of investigation, I assisted former ecomuseum vice-director Lu Chaojin, the Huaili ecomuseum, and the recently established Baiku Yao Culture and Development Association in recording ritual sorcerer *GuZongZou* chanting and describing each section of this night ritual. It is the aim of these local agents to transcribe this “spiritual route” into Chinese for scholarly and heritage protection purposes as well as attempt to comprehend the relation between it and the history of the Baiku Yao.

¹⁷⁶ Here I only present some highlights on the route to the ancestral land. According to *GuZongZou* and Lu Chaojin there are over 200 sites traveled along this route.

¹⁷⁷ Meat is placed on the large plant leafs in front of each villager. Each attendee who has gifted wine, rice, corn, or money to the family of the deceased is also giving about 1/2 kg of wrapped cooked glutinous rice, the prized staple of the Baiku Yao.

home where the drums are kept to retrieve their drums and head home. Similar to the welcoming of the drums prior to the funeral ceremony, a ritual practitioner conducts another ritual to thank the drums and send them back to a peaceful existence to their respective household.¹⁷⁸

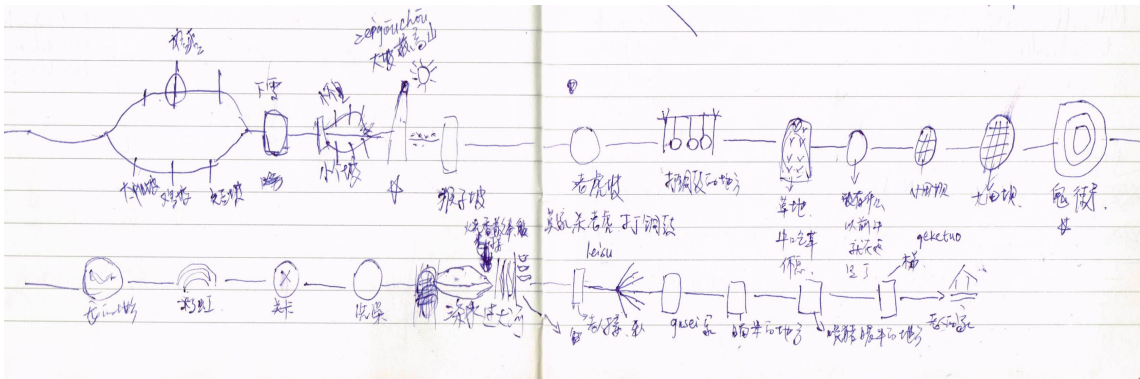


Figure 20. Diagram on the path to Baiku Yao ancestral land. This is a partial depiction of the route taken by the soul of the deceased and the spirit man, starting from the top left leading to the right and continuing to the bottom left moving right, passing sites such as the volcano mountain, land of monkeys, and the treacherous fork of six roads. Diagram was drawn by Huaili spirit man, *Gu Zong Zou*, of Huaili village.

Gendered Relationships with the Drum

The objectification of the sacred on the bronze drum not only legitimates the power and volition of the supernatural in the material, natural world. It, too, affects the thinking and feeling of those who look upon the drum and the relationships people form with it (Hoskins 2006). The positions bronze drums occupy as social agents in Baiku Yao culture (Gell 1998: 7) is clearly demonstrated through the gendered relationships the surround

¹⁷⁸ Three bowls of rice, glutinous rice, and wine are placed on each bronze drum and the ritual practitioner chants: Divine (bronze drum's name), Auspicious (bronze drum's name), Today the elder has already been sent up the mountain, He/His is already settled at the Nine Springs (*jiuquan*), or Ancestral Land. "The far clear black moon" (bronze drum spiritual name) is a supernatural entity. He gave you a thick and broad handle, He gave you a red red face. Now, we have not eaten meat, Now we give you meat. We have not drank, Now we give you drink. Together we use fresh water and wine, to wash the sorrow of the face. You came with (relative's name), you came on the back of (relative's name). This bowl of wine, is to let him face your face. This bowl of meat, is set aside for him to have energy to return home. Thunder has hit you motionless, Wind has blown you to not shake. Protect your master's richness, Protect your master's fortune.

them. In Baiku Yao society, men are the only ones allowed to play the bronze drum and wooden skin-covered drum.¹⁷⁹ During all funerals, drum playing is strictly conducted by men. Women are excluded from this performative act and are also not involved in handling or protecting the drum.¹⁸⁰ In her discussion of gender and musical instruments, Doubleday (2008) describes that, “when any class of people wishes to maintain control over a particular musical instrument, an exclusive instrument-human relationship is developed, forbidding outsiders access”. Baiku Yao male exclusivity to the drum depends upon a woman’s distant and forbidden relationship with it. Women are thus placed in a “negative instrument-human relationship”, where gender taboos aim to insulate them from the power of drum and vice versa (Doubleday 2008: 5; see also Thomas 1995: 54; Herdt 1982).

Several studies have explored both the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of gender relations with objects, namely instruments (Lohmann 2003). Yet, what is commonly not discussed in this literature is the fact that communities which have such profound relationship with their material culture do not always know why such relationships exist or how they have been formed. In my exploration of gendered experiences with Baiku Yao bronze drums, a cultural consensus is revealed among the Baiku Yao who state that “this is the way our ancestors have done it”.¹⁸¹ Questions I posed that seemingly requested them to reflect on the power of the drum and the ritual act,

¹⁷⁹ This has changed since the inroads of tourism, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Women can be present for naming rituals and drumming during funerals, but are not invited or choose not to attend such gendered experiences. Specifically, on the final day of drumming for funeral ceremonies and the covering with skin of the *zou*, women are not present.

¹⁸¹ The villagers' relationship with the bronze drum is not the only cultural practice that is understood through a connection with “tradition” and “ancestors”. In my inquiries on other ritual practices, dress-making, and home construction for example, villagers commonly explained that these unquestioned practices were following what was done by previous generations.

were met with an inability to go beyond the acceptance of the sacredness of the drum as anything but natural. Rappaport (1999), defines this as the constitution of a discourse that is unverifiable and unfalsifiable. It is through this discourse that both the ritual act, the sacredness of the drum, and the gendered relationships that surround the object are conferred. According to Rappaport (1999), the structure that is formed through ritual and notions of sacredness, and the logical properties found within is embodied in the “stream of acts and utterances” associated with the drum. In Baiku Yao society, relationships with the sacred are expressed through practice more than informed speech acts. With ritual producing a kind of performative truth and certainty, encoded in postulates of the sacred (Lambek 2013: 5; Rappaport 1999), many villagers continue to adhere “to the canonical order that is being performed by the group” (Innis 2004), and find especially strange that an outside researcher would have so many questions concerning such an obvious truth.

The Bronze Drum Beyond the Ritual

Bronze drums are believed to possess an inherent power that lies beyond the ritual acts. Collective memory expose such attributes of the drum and the intimate relations they form with Baiku Yao lives. Some of these stories were revealed to me in discussions with village elders such as 75 year old Lu Jimin, of Manjiang village. Beyond his recently acquired ability two years ago to practice small village rituals as a recognized *nomhao*, Lu Jimin is known as a maven in understanding the aesthetics of sound of bronze drums. In almost ever acquisition of a bronze drum in the area, Lu Jimin has been called upon to discuss its sound quality. After conversing on the different roles of bronze drums and distinctions of sound, Lu Jimin turned to my attention to bronze drum named

“*mei thon*”. He stated emphatically, “*mei thon* is the best drum I have ever heard. Its unique rich and bright sound was like no other”. He spoke of the Manjiang village drum with an air of respect, yet also with a sense of great loss as he indulged in its tangibility:

One day we were preparing for a funeral. Bronze drums from across the region were brought to Manjiang for the ceremony, including *mei thon*. Setting up over ten bronze drums, a villager who had treated a hand ailment with natural medicine was also handling *mei thon*. He had rubbed his treated hand on the drum without thinking anything of it. We departed for lunch and no one had really paid attention to the condition of the drums. After lunch we took the drum on our back to transport it and on our way *mei thon* decided to purposely fall to the ground. The drum knew something was wrong. We discovered a huge crack that went straight through its center. Realizing that the great drum was broken, we began to weep.

The story reveals the drum's susceptibility to human interaction, its transformative power, and the emotional attachment to the community. It illustrates the collective knowledge on the bronze drum's imagined social agency. For Lu Jimin and the surrounding Baiku Yao elders in the room listening to the story, such action by a bronze drum was not considered uncommon or improbable. For example, when discussing the “life” of the drum with another villager, he explained to me that after he returned from work in the fields one day, and his own drum had moved on its own from the corner where it was placed to center of the house. For the Huaili Baiku Yao community, *mei thon's* damaged existence represented the loss of a supreme sacred object and sound and an active member of the community.¹⁸²

Throughout my field research on bronze drums of the Baiku Yao, stories continued to follow a line of collective knowledge on the power of the drum and its devoted respect.

For example, a Huaili elder told me:

¹⁸² *Mei thon* still exists in the home of the Manjiang village communal drum guardian. Although the drum remains broke and the sound will never be the same, the spirit of the drum is not considered dead. Thus, it sits broken and unused, not to be discarded.

A boy from nearby Baiku Yao village was on his way to attend a funeral service in Huaili and heard the sound of playing bronze drums. Upon approaching the funeral grounds, he exclaimed to his fellow travelers how great the drums' sounded, but also cast doubt that the drum of HuaQiao/Huatu village called *mei da* used at the funeral could not be so good - loud and clear. Even while retrieving his *doulou* to play, he continued to proclaim doubt on this particular drum's ability. After returning home the boy's stomach started to ache. He turned to his father and told him he was not feeling well and requested to see a *nomhao*. His father said, "I have just prepared a delicious meal, let me finish and I will take you". Just as his father finished the meal, the boy fell to the ground and died.

The story turned into a fable with the story-teller's concluding statement, "We don't know if the boy's flippant words or if the interaction with possible herbal medicine caused the bronze drum to break after playing it. Yet, disrespect towards the drum, even in the form of verbal communication, will result in an individual's ill-will". Other elders listening in the room nodded reassuringly at the prominence of the drum's spiritual power and required respect.

Discussing the work of Gell and the social agency of objects, Hoskins (2006) points to the notion that "objects that challenge our senses or our comprehension have their most powerful effects on our imaginations". Like Ferme (2001: 21) claims, "the life that objects and substances take on, from circumstances not of their own making but of their made-ness", produces ... unpredictable events". For the Baiku Yao, these events surrounding the bronze drum may seem unforeseeable, but they are nonetheless accepted as "logically" undeniable, collectively understood and based on the interconnected relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds. This collective knowledge reveals how the drum stimulates an emotional response in their ability to animate discussions and memory and the appropriation of their imagined power and sacredness.

Drum Possession and Conceptions of Value

Attachment to the sacred establishes a “fetishistic” characteristic for the bronze drum. The special meaning attributed to the drum, as a powerfully charged object and practice (Doubleday 2008; see also Mack 1995), is a fetishism associated through sacred experiences. Marx calls this “fetish-worship” a persuasion of “sensuous appetites” whereby the a “sensuous-consciousness” is established through the belief that the drum possesses some form of magical power. It is a consciousness and fetishism that includes and extends beyond its ritual practice.

When I conducted a total of 70 household interviews across the three ecomuseum villages of ManJiang, HuaQiao and HuaTu in 2012, interviewees confirmed a strong desire to possess a bronze drum, even if they already had one. Their desire for the drum rests in the identification of its value as a prized ritual object and its association with social status and prestige. Similar to Durkheim's notion of prestige goods and sacred objects, for the Baiku Yao the possession of a bronze drum compels public attention. In interviews with villagers across six villages in Huaili and in other Baiku Yao villages in Lihu township, the bronze drum was revealed to hold multiple values - spiritual and emotional value, knowledge value, and an aesthetic value related to sound. As a purchased object on the open market in Lihu township and greater Nandan county, the bronze drum also holds a temporal market value as a commodity. The notion of the “commodity”, at the level of the economic relations of production, however, does not last long among the Baiku Yao. Although the bronze drum enters Baiku Yao society originally as a commodity through exchange¹⁸³, it quickly moves beyond this “commodity phase”

¹⁸³ In discussions with bronze drum experts in Guangxi and Nandan county, bronze drums are believed to

of consumption and such value is regarded as relatively insignificant. Although the reality of commodity, according to Marx, exists in Baiku Yao society, in its fettered form the commodity appears to have intrinsic value derived from its aesthetic of sound and attributed sacred nature. As it enters the realm of the sacred, through the naming ritual, it “becomes treated as a significant part of the ontological order of the world” (Dant 1996). The need for such objects, as Marx explains, is in part culturally determined (Dant 1996).

After a drum is purchased and brought to the village a customary social event ensues in which male clansmen and villagers come to the owners household to view, hear, and play the drum for the first time. This event, discussed above, is extremely important in determining the value of the drum. Local drum experts, such as Lu Jimin, explained to me that while all drums are important for their ritual purpose, certain drums are regarded more highly than others. This is attributed to sound quality which depends on both material composition and craftsmanship. A well-made drum is regarded as having a good shape, symmetry in form, and compatible thickness for its size as well as the possession of certain amounts of elements, such as silver and gold.¹⁸⁴ However, a drum's sound, and consequently its value, can be altered. The owner can enhance the aesthetic value of sound for the drum by placing the drum through a process of “rubbing”, whereby a professional uses an electric sanding device to “rub” inside the bell, directly under the

have been historically introduced to the Baiku Yao through trade with Zhuang groups inhabiting the region.

¹⁸⁴ The direct correlation between a drum's sound and the raw material composition is illustrated in the fact that for Baiku Yao villagers, older drums that possess these qualities are ascribed higher value than newer drums, which are claimed to be much thicker and have much lower amounts of gold and silver (*jinyin*) and less bronze.

face of the drum, to thin out the drum¹⁸⁵. Only after a drum's sound is approved, can it be consecrated by naming ritual.

From both the possession and noted sound quality of the bronze drum can social prestige and social status be bestowed on its owner and the drum itself. This should not be assumed, however, to demonstrate the existence of an economy of prestige for the Baiku Yao. Villagers may gain respect for possessing a drum, but they do not gain hierarchical relations within the community or with surrounding villages¹⁸⁶. The purchase of a drum by an individual household or extended family demonstrates their wealth (bronze drum typically cost between 3,000 and 6,000 RMB, \$500-\$1000 dollars, half a year income for the village agriculturalist). At the same time, drum possession reflects the owner's affirmed social virtue in being able to offer the drum for the most important of Baiku Yao ritual ceremonies. The more drums played at a family member or clansmen's funeral demonstrates the esteem and status for that individual and his/her family. In addition, because bronze drums are passed down from generation to generation, a family clan's possession of one or multiple bronze drums also symbolizes the power of the clan.

In Huaili, every family kin organization, or *youguo*, possesses a bronze drum.¹⁸⁷ At

¹⁸⁵ According to bronze drum sound connoisseur Lu Jimin, such practices were not required before, because bronze drums were previously made of better materials. Lu Jimin explained to me that within the past 5-10 years, the sound quality of drums has diminished, possibility attributed to its rise in “mass production”. Interestingly, this is around the same time the bronze drum became publicly recognized as an important “cultural heritage” in Guangxi.

¹⁸⁶ Because the bronze drum are not exchanged, the Baiku Yao, unlike cultures such as in the Trobriand Islands, do not receive prestige from the *acquisition* of an exchanged object, which is often seen to accumulate greater value (and the histories and identities of past owners) through such an act (see Malinowski 1922; Weiner 1988).

¹⁸⁷ Chinese have used the term *youguo*, literally meaning “oil pot”, to explain and identify different kin organizations among the Baiku Yao. The creation of the Chinese term draws on the fact that relatives of the deceased, from nuclear family members to distant cousins and even spouses of relatives, share in an eating custom during funerals of not consuming “fat oil”, or *you*, which includes all forms of meat. Huaili main village has four, Manjiang has six, HuaQiao has four, and HuaTu has five *wei yao* (in Baiku Yao language). Association to different *youguo* is also seen through specific social activities, such as

the time of my fieldwork in Huaili, HuaQiao had a total of four bronze drums, HuaTu had seven, and Manjiang had ten. Bronze drums are typically owned by an extended family, or sometimes by an individual household. Its usage is shared among those of the same kin and its use reflects the cohesion of a clan family.¹⁸⁸ The bronze drum can also bind an entire village. For example, in Manjiang, five drums - *meimu*, *meilo*, *meispei*, *meitho*, *meizei* - are communal “village drums”, passed down from a common ancestor of the whole Lu clan of Manjiang.¹⁸⁹ For the “village drums” of Manjiang¹⁹⁰, communal borrowing within the village often takes place for funeral ceremonies.

marriage and sacred rituals. In marriage members of the same *youguo* are forbidden to marry. When a member of a *youguo* has become threatened by supernatural powers and a “day of rest” is proscribed. All members of the *youguo* are required not to take part in any activities on that day or allow outsiders to enter the home. A household that is part of that *youguo* will place two or three types of different tree branches found in the area on their door to symbolize participation in this event and display to non-kin that their home is not open. If the entire village is proscribed to participate in the “day of rest”, a woven long grass string with thin pieces of knife-shaped white bark is hung across the entrance(s) of the village to block ghosts from entering the village. At this time, outsiders may not enter the village.

¹⁸⁸ If a drum is purchased by multiple households, such as when several brothers pool money to acquire a drum, then the drum is considered part of that particular family. While members of the family owning the drum can use the drum, it must not be borrowed outside of the kin family organization. Some village elders did, however, tell me that while bronze drums are not customarily borrowed outside of that family, on rare occasion only with mutual consent given by family elders borrowing can take place.

¹⁸⁹ Like all household bronze drums and the *zou* (wood cow-skin), communal drums have a designated guardian. The guardian of the drum is a selected responsible male, typically the eldest in the household. The drum is stored in the home of the guardian indefinitely unless, in the event of the death of the guardian, the drum will be transferred to the household of another family member. Storage of the bronze drum, must be conducted with the highest degree of care and drums can only be moved when needed. To secure its safety, the whereabouts of the stored bronze drum in the guardian's home is a private household matter and secrecy often persists. Commonly, bronze drums are stored in the “safest place” in the home, explained to me as under the bed of the head of the household covered by a blanket. Although villagers today know which household holds a drum, prior to the 1980s reform era, the secrecy of drum location was strictly enforced across the village. During the Mao era, bronze drums were kept in far off mountain caves with their location known by only a few men because of their seizure under the ill-fated movement to increase steel production for the nation during the Great Leap Forward (see Lynch 2008). Huaili villagers also stated that during the Cultural Revolution, “The use of bronze drums was strongly prohibited, and was also deemed “superstitious” (*mixin*)”, we couldn't play the drum or sacrifice buffaloes, so we did not have funerals at that time”. During this time the number of bronze drums significantly declined in HeChi region, such as in HeChi's Donglan county alone, the number fell from 500 in 1961 to 40 in 2009 (Wu 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Manjiang village drums are all stored in the home of the village unit leader, *duizhang*, and respected elder of the Lu clan.

Drums Recontextualized: the Ecomuseum and the Political-Economy of Display

While bronze drums remain deeply embedded in an ordered ritual and social system of the Baiku Yao, it has recently experienced recontextualization with the establishment of the ecomuseum. At the same time the ecomuseum initiative aims to document, promote, celebrate, and conserve ritual practices of the bronze drum and its associated funeral services, it has also provoked the reconfiguration of its meaning, function, and ownership as valuable tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In the second half of this chapter, I examine the process of re-valuation of the drum in this local context. In particular, I address the cultural processes of “heritageization” and exhibition through which the bronze drum has become identified, exhibited, and consequently revalued as “cultural heritage” in the present and used as a resource to achieve certain economic goals (Walsh 1992; DiGiovano 2009; Waterton and Watson 2010; Smith 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Here, I show that even as the bronze drum continues to exist as an important sacred ritual object in Baiku Yao society, new values, interpretations, and significance have been added specifically through its integration into the heritage tourism industry. Examining the paths and diversions of “heritages” over time and space reveals how identities and narratives are formed around these “heritages” and how they are impressed by the context within which they are produced, imagined, exhibited, and received. The development process of the ecomuseum in rural China introduces a political process of mediating Baiku Yao identity and the value and significance of tangible and intangible culture as it undergoes the push and pull of commoditization and singularity.

Converting the Baiku Yao way of life into heritage through the instrument of the ecomuseum has helped to secure Huaili's status as a place of "authentic cultural tradition".¹⁹¹ This has come with the added value of pastness, difference, indigeneity, and exhibition to Baiku Yao culture and Huaili. However, in terms of today's tourism economy, the aspect of the "exhibition of the real world" and spectacle of the quotidian found through the ecomuseum village, described in Chapter 3, is often not enough. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 144), "[t]he industry prefers the world as a picture of itself - the picture window, cultural precinct, and formal performance". Observed tourist behavior during my fieldwork across ecomuseum sites in Guangxi and Guizhou revealed that the "world as exhibition of itself" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 144) is a much more valuable tourism asset. Although the notion of a "living museum" and "authentic", "primitive" ethnic minority culture draws tourists to Huaili, the village-scape and everyday village life of the Baiku Yao has not undergone enough of a process of exhibition, or established enough of a relationship between "actualities" and "virtualities", to be deemed attract and to fuel the growth of a local tourism industry. Indeed, for their visit to Huaili, most tourists explore only the ecomuseum center, often bypassing the ecomuseum village with many claiming that "the village has nothing" and "has no appeal" (*cunzhai meiyou shenme, meiyou shenme haokan*). Therefore, while the creation of a Huaili as a new cultural destination does possess economic viability, it does not guarantee profitability, at least not for village residents.¹⁹² For tourists venturing into

¹⁹¹ See Oakes (1997) on a similar evaluation on the theme park industry's affect on Zhaoxing and Dong culture in Guizhou province.

¹⁹² Tourism management companies outside of Nandan county drive the tourism business. Tourists sign onto packaged tours that take them through the mountainous landscape of northwest Guangxi. Thus, money flows into the hands of tourism companies, guides, and referred hotels and restaurants. The lack of an

the far reaches of Guangxi and the rural ethnic China, “the sign of itself” (Culler 1981) and the “theater of objects” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 192) receives greater appeal than experiences of everyday rural ethnic life.

To take advantage of the economic viability brought by the establishment by the ecomuseum and respond to the lack of tourism development in the village at the onset of ecomuseum project construction, Lihu and Huaili local leaders engaged in devising a new instrument for developing a local cultural economy. The establishment of the ecomuseum in Huaili was a declaration of Baiku Yao cultural value. And, the influx of government investment for the ecomuseum project signaled for local leaders the construction of a tourist destination in Huaili. Interaction with government leaders and extra-local experts on the construction of the ecomuseum introduced local leaders and villagers to notions of Huaili possessing a “distinct and comprehensive ethnic culture” (*teshi wanzheng minzu wenhua*), “primitive cultural traditions” (*yuanshi wenhua chuantong*), and a rich cultural landscape (*fengfu wenhua jingguan*). Moreover, such social interactions strengthened local understandings of how Baiku Yao culture was imagined and was being planned for export through exhibition. Local leaders began to explore how local cultural symbols and “heritage” defined through ecomuseum development could become economically productive cultural assets. In doing so, they formed a tourism development team, including the Lihu party secretary, township governor, vice-township leader Lu Chaojin (later vice-director of the ecomuseum), and Li Zhengjun from the Lihu Culture Office, along with Huaili village party secretary Li Fucui, then village committee representative

instated entrance fee, charged guided tours, guesthouses and restaurants (*nongjiale*), and an established handicraft market, which is commonly found in other economically lucrative ethnic minority destinations in China, yields little flow of tourist dollars into the village.

Lu Jingao, and other village committee members, such as Li Haifang and Li Zilin. Soon after the launch of the ecomuseum project, the team decided to travel to the nearby provinces of Guizhou and Hunan to conduct a formal investigation of tourism development strategies. According to interviewed team members, visited sites were selected because they represented “well-established *minzu* cultural tourism destinations” and offered “an opportunity to learn tourism models”.

Investigations of ethnic village destinations in Guizhou and Hunan led to greater understanding on the set of expectations attached to the Han Chinese tourist gaze. The tourists' quest to experience consumed images of “unpolluted” frontier landscapes and “authentic” cultures of ethnic minorities (Notar 2006; Oakes 1997) is identified by many scholars as linked to the tourist’s “fascination in the 'real lives' of others that somehow possess a reality hard to discover in their own experiences”¹⁹³. The “the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional” that is imagined to exist in other people, places, and times are induced by images that order the tourist gaze (Handler 1986: 2, cited in McIntosh and Prentice 1999; MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990). The quest of seeking authenticity¹⁹⁴ and a “calming certainty” in a growing domestic tourism market in China (Anagnost 1997; Van den Berghe 1995; Connell 2007) is those caught up in the production of imaginaries that works to satisfy tourist desires. MacCannell (1973, 1976) explains that with the recognized economic benefits of meeting tourist demand, host populations often resort to repackaging local culture and landscape. In Huaili, this

¹⁹³ According to Urry (2002: 12), “tourism results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary”. Thus objects of the tourist gaze must be different and distinctive and “must be out of the ordinary” (Urry 2002: 12).

¹⁹⁴ Much scholarship surrounds the notion of authenticity and the ramifications of tourists “quest” for the authentic (MacCannell 1976; Greenwood 1977; Wang 2008; Picard 1990; Cohen 1988; Bruner 1994).

resulted in a contrived authentic experience, of “staged authenticity”, aiming to create an impression of authenticity for a tourist audience (MacCannell 1973, 1976; Greenwood 1982) whereby the constructed, performed “front stage” is seemingly separated from the “everyday life” of the “back stage”.¹⁹⁵ Within the unending quest for authenticity exists a preeminent irony of tourism in that the tourists' search for authenticity often yields commoditized inauthentic experience created specifically for tourist consumption.¹⁹⁶ In Huaili, the creation of the ecomuseum and local cultural economy through the tourist performance has crafted a Baiku Yao object of the tourist gaze and has led to the creation of new clear boundaries between the front stage (the ecomuseum center) and back stage (the village).

Lihu and Huaili local leader awareness of the tourist gaze through their investigative tour led to greater comprehension of a shared repertoire of ethnic tourism representations and performance in China. They discovered the prominence of seemingly home-grown cultural performances in offering elaborate and embellished displays of ethnic distinctiveness, exoticism, beauty, spectacle, and entertainment that attracted large crowds. When I later spoke to local leaders about their plans for tourism development they expressed the importance of making the new tourist destination of the ecomuseum

¹⁹⁵ See Walsh (2005) who demonstrates how such back and front stage divisions are more blurred than distinct.

¹⁹⁶ The search for more perceived “authenticity” often leads to tourist attempts to go behind the “front stage” of re-presented culture to reach the “reality” that presumably lies in the “back stage”, which can often transform the back stage in a staged arena (MacCannell 1973; Goffman 1959; see Walsh 2005). Or, as Oakes (1997) explains, the touristic culture and staged authenticity presented in one site created from hosts' response to the tourist gaze may become perceived by tourists as so “too commercial”, and result in tourists traveling to more remote destinations where cultural customs are perceived as “still authentic”.

meet tourist desires¹⁹⁷ and to emulate “successful” tourism development in visited ethnic villages. As a result, they decided to establish the Baiku Yao tourist cultural performance.

The cultural performance, seen as a main facet of ethnic cultural tourism in China, was recognized as a prime method to add the “virtual” to the “actual” ecomuseum experience. Demonstrating their understanding of the shared repertoire of staged *minzu* performance in China (Turner 2008: 146-7), local cultural producers of the Baiku Yao cultural performance in Huaili asserted to me that music and dance was a “necessary” component of ethnic minority tourist cultural performances. They represented forms of “attraction”, commonly referred to in Chinese as *hao kan* (to look good or appealing), and seen to help further “romanticize” ethnic minority culture and feed the voyeuristic gaze of tourists of the ethnic experience and “native” body, in particular through the expressive display of the dancing female body¹⁹⁸. Lihu and Huaili leaders quickly engaged in producing visual signs of ethnicity and authenticity for tourism development by incorporating music and dance with local cultural assets. By accommodating music and dance into displays of Baiku Yao culture, they were re-representing and re-producing stereotypical ethnic minority representations, such as the long held literary epithet in China that minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu*) “can sing and are good at dancing” (*nengge shanwu*) (Ma Yin et al. 1981: 6 cited in Mackerras 1984: 202).

The constructed, displayed representations seen in ethnic theme village destinations and cultural performances, shaped by the tourism industry and social and political

¹⁹⁷ Tourist desires and efforts to create a place that inspires tourist fantasies is explored by Notar (2006), and is also found in the southwest China’s famed tourism sites of Yunnan's Lijiang, Guizhou's XiJiang, and Hunan's Fenghuang.

¹⁹⁸ See work by Gladney (1994) and Schien (2000) on conceptions of the female ethnic minority. See also Davis (2006) on the Tai of Yunnan.

institutions and individuals, are defined by Briassoulis (2002) and Healy (1994) as a “tourism commons”, a pool of common resources employed in tourism processes. While this tourism commons has clear regional characteristics, in China it is seen to exist more broadly throughout the country as a variety of discursive practices and semiotic constructions. Turner (2010: 48-9), in her exploration of ethnic minority performances in Guangxi, critically explores the “tourism commons” to illustrate how cultural representations shape notions of place and ethnicity. Turner demonstrates that the tourism commons is constituted in “common rhetorical structures, imagery of ethnic minorities and scenic landscapes, and common repertoire of tourism performances built from political ideologies, scholarly research, national models for cultural tourism and hybridized local forms” (2010: 145). One of the most visible manifestations of official and popular ethnic representation in the tourism context, that also signifies a discursive practice of the state cultural policy, is the ethnic theme park established throughout China¹⁹⁹. In his investigation of ethnic theme parks and ethnic village destinations, Oakes (1997) states, “Tourism has been a major factor in directing China's gaze toward minority culture and in standardizing that culture into a set of “authentic” markers which are readily recognizable for public consumption”. Seen through exotic and primitive representations of ethnic minority culture found in featured “authentic replicas” of minority architecture and performing, colorfully dressed minority villagers brought from

¹⁹⁹ The ethnic theme park that received increasing popularity through the 1980s and 1990s in China has been explored by Oakes (1997, 1998), Gladney (2004), and Hai (2007). The author has also conducted research on ethnic theme parks as a comparative study across Beijing, Shenzhen, and Kunming urban centers. The application of the ethnic theme park seen outside China, such as the Taman Mini in Indonesia, that involves similar aspects related to politics of representation, ethnicity, and nationalism is examined by Pemberton (1994) and Hitchcock (1998).

the countryside, the ethnic theme park “domesticates and displays ethnic culture to be gazed upon by modern Chinese” (Oakes 1997).

Beyond the physical sites of representation, social media - print to websites, television and movies - also plays an important role in the (re)production and dissemination of images and representation of specific ethnic peoples and places.²⁰⁰ Popular representations of *minzu* culture are seen through Zhang Yimou's *Impressions Third Sister Liu* in Yangshuo, CD covers with Mongolian men on horseback riding through green pastures, public mosaics of alluring Dai women wearing tight-fitted dresses and sarongs walking through lush green rain forests or bathing in rivers, and Dong girls in ornamental dress singing *Dongzu Dage* and Tibetans dancing with colorful long flowing sleeves with backdrops of picturesque snow-capped mountains on televised folk competitions and galas. Such images accentuate different representations of exoticism, eroticism, spectacle, and primitivity of the “ethnic other” (Gladney 1994; Schein 2000; Turner 2008; Chio 2009; Nyíri 2011; Doorne, Ateljevic, and Bai 2003).²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ See Turner (2010) for a comprehensive exploration of imagery through social media. See also Baranovitch (2003).

²⁰¹ These representations are not merely a product of the contemporary tourism industry and attempts to satisfy tourist expectations and desires. They are implicated in historical and social constructions of ethnic and cultural difference in China. In the ongoing process of nation building and strengthening the notion of a national identity, projects of ethnic identification have worked to establish cultural representations of China's diverse peoples according to the state's dominant narrative (Khan 1996; Diamond 1995; McKhann 1995; Chao 1996; Gladney 1991). According to Fiskesjö (1999, 2006), ethnic distinctions have existed in China since the dynastic period in which non-Han were seen as “uncooked”, “barbarians” situated on the “edge of the empire”. Harrell (1995, 2001) has also pointed to the historical sequence during which ethnic peoples have been included under rule in China, and their identification and incorporation under various “civilizing projects”. Since the liberation of the People's Republic of China, as explained by Chen (2008: ii), the seemingly fixed representations have been even more pronounced: “the image of ethnic minorities functioned as a sign of alterity and adopted different meanings and connotations – ranging from national unity, exotic romanticism, traditional harmony, tenacity, and strength to eco-wisdom – in response to the changing content of the national identity anxiety”. Historic processes of identity formation and ethnic interpellation underline contemporary strategies for ethnic tourism in China. Sofield and Li (1998) and Yang, Wall and Smith (2008) have examined how ethnic minorities fit within Chinese state policies of tourism. Gladney (1994, 2004), Harrell (1995), Schein (2000), Oakes (1997, 1998), and Bulag (2002), to name a few, offer studies on

“Filtered by representations in tourist theme parks, and by images in television, film, and other media of public culture, ethnic minorities in China have come to be associated with very specific and delimited cultural markers which get standardized and circulated in China's burgeoning industry of cultural commodity production” (Oakes 1997)²⁰². These images create icons of an idealized people and place and frame the imaginations of travelers and productions of experiences they desire to consume.

In addition to recognizing the tourism industry's requirement for “a reliable product that meets universal standards” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 152) and engaging in practices of cultural borrowing²⁰³ to position Huaili as part of a larger regional cultural package and ethnic tourism network, Lihu and Huaili performance producers aimed to highlight local distinctiveness in the face of a competitive tourism market.²⁰⁴ They explored and reinterpreted the pool of resources in Huaili to construct a cultural

the construction of alterity in ethnic China, exploring how imaginings of cultural and ethnic distinction have influenced the positionality of a “peripheral”, internal ethnic other as well as the creation of their modern subjectivities. These scholars, including Swain (1989), Litzinger (2000), Walsh (2005), Wall and Xie (2005), Notar (2006), and Chio (2011, 2013) have examined the complexities of articulated ethnicity and its related assemblages in local contexts as they become negotiated and re-defined in dialogical interactions and power relations to satisfy tourist desires and state agendas involving local peoples, elites, minority communities, and the Chinese government, and market-oriented developers that influence “ways of being ethnic” in China. What has come out of this breadth of literature and growing scholarship on the new politics of heritage in China (Su and Teo 2009; Sigley 2010; McLaren 2010; du Clos 2007; Shepherd 2006, 2012; Blumenfield and Silverman 2013) is an exposure of the changing discourses and representations that articulate ethnic culture in China and how they have been understood, imagined, appropriated, and contested by multiple actors.

²⁰² Oakes (1997) also contends that at the same time a touristic vision of ethnic minorities is established, so, too, is a vision of the nation and a modern, “harmonious” China, with essentialized non-Han cultural markers as the central feature of state-sanctioned ethnic identity.

²⁰³ The accommodation of conventional images and ethnic tourism approaches for purposes of marketability and tourist consumption is similar to the process of what Graburn (1976: 27) calls “cultural borrowing”. Although Graburn uses this concept for art, performance also represents a field of tourism and consumption, in which “symbols of identity” are often taken on from other groups to enhance one group's attractiveness and “prestige in their own or other's eyes” (Graburn 1976: 27). Such has been the case in Huaili through the articulation of music and dance.

²⁰⁴ The tourism field in China, like many countries, is replete with competition for receiving destination status, tourist expenditure, economic investment, and government support and cultural producers must create clear distinctions of ethnic culture and place (Turner 2010: 7).

performance that would be distinguishable and culturally unique. The bronze drum became an integral tool in creating cultural distinctiveness as a the fetishistic sign of the Baiku Yao. It signified pastness, tradition, and cultural continuity as a well-known southern Chinese ancient cultural relic and recently proclaimed intangible cultural heritage. As a result of its inclusion in the cultural performance and as a cultural symbol of the Baiku Yao, the status, value, meaning, and practice of bronze drum, in addition to with other local resources, has been altered, intentionally modified and manipulated, in the mode of performativity to provide new tourism products (see Briassoulis 2002: 1069; Healy 1994).²⁰⁵

Staging the Baiku Yao Tourist Cultural Performance

Sitting on the grass in front of the ecomuseum center located across from the three ecomuseum villages of HuaQiao, HuaTu and Manjiang in the summer of 2008, I watched for the first time Baiku Yao villagers dressed in their formal handmade batik and embroidered clothing file into the center and prepare for the day's tourist cultural performance. The outspoken and friendly village leader Li Fucai walked up the driveway leading to the center carrying a bronze drum on his back and hung it inside the center next to other drums on the wood arch structure. Then he came out to sit next to me and relax before the performance. I asked him if the drum he was carrying was his own. Li Fucai replied, “its my family's drum...and I keep it.... I brought it here to be played for the performance because we don't have enough here”. What Li Fucai was referring to was the

205 It is important to note, since the tourism industry had only recently begun to open in Nandan county in the late 1990s, these leaders were actively involved in developing a caricature of the Baiku Yao and identifying cultural symbols.

fact that the ecomuseum center possessed only two bronze drums along with one *zou* (wood cow-skin drum). The drums at the ecomuseum center held a dual role as a part of the permanent collection of the ecomuseum center exhibition and as an instrument for the cultural performance.²⁰⁶ Li Fucui went on to state that, “Today we only need four bronze drums because that is what the tourists have reserved”²⁰⁷. As he finished his statement, another male villager carrying a bronze drum passed us heading into the ecomuseum center. Mr. Li continued, “I called that man today to come and bring his drum. It is part of my duty, like other village representatives, to gather performers and drums in Hua Qiao”.

Our conversation was cut short by Li Xia, one of the ecomuseum staff, announcing that she had just received a phone call from the travel company tour guide that visitors were already in Lihu township center and were preparing to head up to the ecomuseum. Young men and women villagers in Baiku Yao dress walked down to the driveway leading up to the ecomuseum center and waited. The eldest woman performer, Li Ziyi, Huaili village committee female representative and regionally recognized “cultural inheritor” of Baiku Yao ethnic dress, ran to grab a large bamboo basket tray and filled a bunch of small bamboo cups with rice wine. Men placed gun powder into their long wooden rifles and stood at attention at the front of the group as women performers formed a line across the driveway each holding a cup of wine.

²⁰⁶ According to local villagers, because these drums do not possess a name, they not identified as sacred, and they can be played freely for such things as the tourist performance.

²⁰⁷ The cost of tourist cultural performances in Huaili are determined on the number of acts in the performance, number of performers, and number of drums used. Prices range from 600 RMB, 900 RMB, 1200 RMB, and 1800 RMB. With each level of performance cost the number of bronze drums increases, with 4 bronze drum being the lowest. Also, for higher cost performances, performers wear ceremonial dress (worn for funerals, weddings, and the Spring Festival) rather than daily attire. (Both types of clothing are handmade.)

Visitors pulled up and parked on the roadside across from the ecomuseum center. Making their way up the driveway on foot, visitors were met with welcoming gun blasts. Then Baiku Yao women walked toward the tour group and hand-fed wine to each visitor before allowing them pass into the grounds of the ecomuseum center. As visitors took pictures of themselves in front of the entrance of the center and the stone sign inscribed with the museum's name, performers hurriedly returned to the performance area in the main square of the ecomuseum center to make final preparations. With visitors taking their seats in the main square, one of the ecomuseum staff with microphone in hand offered a warm and smiling welcome to the visitors to Huaili and to the “Baiku Yao Ecomuseum”.

Wide-eyed and camera totting Han visitors sat leisurely as they were introduced to the first performance, “Bronze Drum Dance” (*Tonggu Wu*). The large and plump village party secretary, Lu Jingao, clad in Baiku Yao ceremonial dress with an indigo turban wrapped around his head, customarily worn by married Baiku Yao men, stood in front of the wood drum. With a dramatic stretch of his arms into the air, he came down with a forceful blast onto the center of the drum to begin the rhythmic playing of the bronze drum chorus. As the drum beats resonated throughout the square, smiling female performers danced into the performance space, circling Lu Jingao and the wood drum in synchronized choreographed movements. For the first dance, “Bronze Drum Dance” (*Tonggu Wu*), female dancers held the *doulou* wood buckets used for playing the bronze drum, and made dramatic gestures to mimic bronze drum playing. Mixed in between the following dance routines - “Dress-making Dance” (*fushiwu*), “Flat Basket Dance” (*bojiwu*), “Bamboo Drum Dance” (*zhuguwu*) - were other acts that drew on various

aspects of cultural significance for the Baiku Yao. For example, male villagers were called into the performance space to play the high pitched squeaking bamboo flute (*vewu; lali*) and a deep and droning sound of the buffalo horn (*nio jiao* or *niu jiao* in Chinese). Female Baiku Yao also demonstrated the act of playing - spinning and throwing - handmade wooden tops (*nuojie* or *tuolou* in Chinese)²⁰⁸. Finally, for the last act, the “Monkey Stick Dance” (*Hou Gun Wu*), female performers danced around the wooden drum holding wooden sticks striking them between their raised legs and in front and behind their bodies. With the drum beat continuing, female performers then went into the audience and took the hands of male and female visitors leading them into the performance space to dance together, creating an immersive tourist “ethnic” experience in Huaili. Visitors continuously snapped photographs throughout the cultural performance focusing on female movements and males elders playing the bronze drum. Images were also captured of visitors' participatory dance acts and later trying on ethnic dress and banging on bronze and wooden drums after the performance.



Figure 21. Baiku Yao cultural performance, Huaili ecomuseum (2011).

²⁰⁸ Wooden top throwing, which was originally a game played by men, is now performed by women for cultural performances. Also, end of the year events held in Lihu township now offer female and male competitions for top throwing.

The performance narrator directed visitors attention to the ecomuseum center exhibition located next to the performance space to understand more of Baiku Yao culture and life. The inside exhibition worked to frame the display of the Baiku Yao as a fading remnant of ancient tradition (Schein 1992: 72), while the outside performance offered viewing tourists proclamations of the vibrancy of the local culture. In such contexts, the Baiku Yao have become “marked bodies” on exhibit, under different objective knowledges of a rhetorical practice (Haraway 1991). After viewing the exhibition, tourists headed back to their vehicles or escorted by tour guides to their buses and continued on to their next destination. Meanwhile, performers collected their wages (20-35RMB, approximately \$3-6 dollars). Village drums, too, were paid for their participation (10 yuan, approximately \$1.50), before they returned to their respective villages.

The Second Life of the Bronze Drum

The Baiku Yao tourist cultural performance aims to create an entertaining “authentic” experience by adding value of pastness, tradition, and difference to the performativity of Baiku Yao culture. A dominant marker of authenticity that is used to represent these attributes is the bronze drum. In the domain of tourist consumption, it plays to object-oriented notions of authenticity. Measured against absolute and objective criteria (Zhu 2012: 1496), the toured object is seen to possess an origin of authenticity that resembles the museum-oriented materialist perspective of objects (Trilling 1972 cited in Wang 1999).²⁰⁹ This is based on the assumption that there is something inherently

²⁰⁹ “Authenticity is seen as an objective and measurable attribute inherent in the material fabric, form and

“authentic” about the bronze drum (Wang 1999).²¹⁰ For the Chinese, this comes with the bronze drum being recognized as a form of cultural antiquity, a “known” historic cultural relic of southern China, discussed below. It also come through in its close association with ethnicity. It is publicly understood as a regionally shared cultural form in Guangxi, as well as Yunnan and Guizhou, specifically among ethnic minority groups, such as the Zhuang, Miao, and Yao. Its presence in the tourist performance thus creates for tourists an encounter with the “native” and the “past”.

The use of the bronze drum also signifies a timeless cultural tradition. The bronze drum does not simply sit in the exhibition space as a docile object, but as played instrument. It is a sign of tradition’s vitality. The tourist cultural performance in Huaili draws on the native body of the Baiku Yao to add to induce the sense of a living of tradition and authenticity. Adding to this is that male elders are engaged in the performative act of drumming at the ecomuseum center. This adds a sense of “age” to the visual spectacle of the drum just as the wrinkled musician strumming his guitar as he meanders through a blues standard on the stage of New Orleans' many clubs invokes feelings of nostalgia for a viewing public. While this is not necessarily nostalgia of the Han Chinese tourist's own past experiences, watching elders engage in different aspects of cultural tradition certainly incites visitor appeal. For example, drawing from my research in Huaili and popular tourist destinations throughout southwest China like Xijiang in Guizhou, and Lijiang and XinRenDong in Yunnan, performing ethnic minority

function of artefacts and monuments, and a positivist set of research methods and criteria have evolved to test their genuineness” (Jones 2010: 182).

²¹⁰ Both MacCannell (1976) and Boorstin (1964) are explained by Wang (1999) to be part of this camp on objective authenticity seen through their critical exploration of notions of “staged authenticity” and “pseudo-events”, respectively.

elders is claimed by many Han tourists as one of the most enjoyable tourist experiences for cultural destinations. Baiku Yao elders, such as Lu Chaojin's 70 year old grey-haired father, *GuPiaThon*, playing the bronze drum alongside Baiku Yao younger men in the tourist performance serves to highlight the continuity of the cultural tradition as well as the practice of cultural inheritance. Camera totting tourists make it a point in every performance in Huaili to take pictures of *GuPiathon* playing the bronze drum, aiming to capture “heritage” - the drum and the native body - in a single frame. This “object” of the tourist gaze represents for tourists the cultural continuity of the Baiku Yao.

In addition to the bronze drum, the selection of other “cultural characteristics”, or “heritages”, deemed distinctive of Baiku Yao for the tourist performance provide visual tools that lend to a perceived persistence of the past and tradition in the present (see Kishenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 150).²¹¹ The combined display of villagers performing in brightly colored handmade clothing, handmade instruments of the bamboo flute, buffalo horns, and wooden tops also create a representation of a “living past” (Lowenthal 1985; Walsh 1992). Exhibitions of handmade objects, such as clothing and instruments like the bamboo flute and buffalo horns also create a sense of “genuineness”, or *yuanishi*, for the tourist experience. One instance during the performed act of playing the bamboo flute illustrates this point. In the front of a large group of Han tourists, the front section of the flute became loose and slipped off, falling to the ground while a Baiku Yao elder

²¹¹ In China, wearing ethnic minority dress is seen as an inherent attribute of the “authentic” ethnic minority. Ethnic minority dress distinguishes the “unspoiled” ethnic culture of a people and place from those that have experienced “Hanization” (*hanhua* ch.) as the country rushes to modernize and more cultures are brought into the fold of mainstream modern society. Baiku Yao dress is another prominent visual feature that adds value to and is added value through the tourist performance. Dress is understood as a clear visual sign of identity (Pohl 1998; Hendrickson 1995) is a culturally transparent means of communicating cultural difference and sameness and a marker of cultural boundaries (Barth 1969). In tourist destinations, dress plays a defining role in producing the “authentic” experience (see Schein 2000:116-117).

performed. The narrator of the performance quickly responded that this “truly is a *yuanshengtai* performance”. Tourists laughed at the unintended mishap and later explained to me that while neither of the handmade instruments played were aesthetically pleasing to the ear, what they don't provide in musical pleasure, they do create in representations of an “authentic”, “traditional culture”.

For many visiting Chinese, the ecomuseum exemplifies the recent trend in the search for the “*yuanshengtai*” experience. The search and designation of *yuanshengtai* is a recent phenomenon in China as the country attempts to define cultural distinction and protect its cultural roots. As discussed by Jie Chen (2008), the concept is borrowed from biological nomenclature, and is literally translated as “original” or “primordial (*yuan*) and “ecology” (*shengtai*)²¹². According to Chen (2008: 159), it “began to appear in public discourse as a description of folk art or cultural heritage... and become much more popular after CCTV (China's Central Television) biannual National Youth Singing Competition set up a “*yuanshengtai*” competition category in 2006”.²¹³ The competition, classified *yuanshengtai* singers as those without any professional training and those who “try to reproduce the “living form” of folk songs as part of everyday life” (Chen 2008: 159). With the popular competition dominated by ethnic minority singers (Chen 2008: 159), the term became more associated with ethnicity. It has become a contemporary

²¹² Other terms, such as *yuanshixing* and *zhenshixing* also express connotations of an “original state” of things. Zhu (2013) explores these as concepts of “authenticity” that existed prior to, as well as in tandem with, the recent notion of *yuanshengtai*. Zhu looks at these two concepts as two understandings of Chinese efforts for heritage conservation.

²¹³ The term *yuanshengtai* was an outcrop from the “eco-craze” that hit China at the turn of the 21st century as more people, experts, and government programs began to focus on issues of environmental degradation and sustainable development. The attachment of the prefix “eco” and use of the term *shengtai*, connoted a sentiment of “environmentalism”, “a balanced relationship between man and nature”, and became a catch phrase for former president Hu Jintao for his effort to build a “harmonious society”. The adoption of the “eco-museum” concept, coincidentally came at this time in China and is seemingly attached to this “eco-craze” (Su personal conversation 2008).

representation of an official narrative of social and cultural difference in highlighting structural binaries of modern-primitive and altered-original. In a time when the rush to develop and modernize has overtaken the nation, *yuanshengtai* has placed a new value on the “originality” and “purity” of things and places. Today, “the term “*yuanshengtai*” is now widely used in China's popular discourses in areas such as music, dance, cuisine, fashion, architecture, tourism, etc.” (Chen 2008: 159). Used in these cultural expressions as well as associated with place, *yuanshengtai* extends beyond its literal definition to connote a sense of perceived authenticity as “unspoiled” and “unaffected” in today's modernizing China. Within the malaise of a transforming China and solace found the quest for authenticity, *yuanshengtai* fever has led to the shaping of the imagination of the toured object and other. Chen (2008: 163) claims that “whereas on the surface the “*yuanshengtai*” fever privileges the particular over the universal, the local over the global [often making comparisons], the empowerment is nevertheless done through old discourses of universalism, such as aesthetic quality or power of civilization”. While *yuanshengtai* is presented as a new catch phrase and recent trend to imagine authenticity, it is conditioned by historical and social roots.

At the same time Chinese tourists now claim a desire for experiences of *yuanshengtai*, the reality of such a quest is much different. In fact, through this search things and places should not be too *yuanshengtai* for the paying tourist. Indeed, it still needs to fit into the mold of the tourist experience as an toured object of the tourist gaze. For example, we see the irony of the tourist experience of *yuanshengtai* in the case of Huaili ecomuseum where Chinese tourists claim the ecomuseum visit as a *yuanshengtai* experience. Visitors are received at the ecomuseum center by Baiku Yao villages clothed

in their “ethnic dress” handing out wine, and performed to by local villagers as they sit comfortably in chairs surrounded by a mountainous countryside landscape, only to later meander through the ecomuseum center exhibition. A trip into the “ecomuseum villages” of Manjiang, HuaQiao, and HuaTu, however, is seen by most tourists I spoke with as an a *yuanshengtai* experience. However, “inconveniences” of dirt and uneven rock walkways, and the sights and smells of dung about from cows and pigs strolling freely through the village, leave tourists uninterested in entering the village. This is complemented by the understanding that there exist no in-village “sites” to “discover”.

Creativity and Authenticity

Many local experts, government officials, and village performers in Nandan, Lihu, and Huaili found it strange of my inquiries on why the bronze drum was such a prominent part of the tourist cultural performance. To them, it was all too obvious that the drum's inclusion reflected “its paramount importance in Baiku Yao society”. Throughout all the Baiku Yao cultural destinations I have visited in Nandan, Libo, and the cultural theme park outside Guilin where Baiku Yao culture is featured, the bronze drum forms an integral part of the staged Baiku Yao performance. Even though the drum's significance for the Baiku Yao was explained to me time and time again by performance coordinators and performers themselves, such explanations did not make it into the tourist cultural performance. The sound produced by the drum was not presented as a medium for communication between the natural and supernatural worlds or a liberating force for the deceased to reach the ancestral world. It's sacred function along with its anthropomorphic attributes and social status in Baiku Yao society was excluded from the performance

space, leaving little room for the tourist interpretation of the drum as anything but a secular musical instrument associated with the dance.²¹⁴ Lack of presented information on the drum demonstrates that the bronze drum and the tourist performance itself is created specifically as an object of the tourist gaze playing to tourist desires of visual spectacle and entertainment.

Many of my visits to ethnic minority cultural destinations and emerging local cultural markets in southwest China included some display of a tourist cultural performance. Many performances for tourism actually revolved around music and dance and drew on elements that were based on an existing or pre-existing local music and dance forms of the host population. While performative dances for tourists vary, they are, according to Daniel (1996: 782), “often an exact simulation; a re-creation of a historic past; a contemporary manifestation of inventiveness within traditions and among styles; a holistic and multisensory phenomenon that often communicates to tourists and performers at a fundamental level”.²¹⁵ Observing the Baiku Yao cultural performance in Huaili and the prominence of music and dance acts, many visitors openly embrace the relationship between music and dance as a fundamental facet of Baiku Yao culture. This is reaffirmed during the tourist performance, when narrators assure visitors that this *is* “Baiku Yao dance” (*zhege shi baiku yao wudao*).

²¹⁴ Failure to divulge information on the function and significance of the Baiku Yao ritual drum during the performance, can be understood as a means to not undermine the tourist experience and the presentation of imagined ethnic identity and authenticity. While identifications of the “sacred” and engagements with the “supernatural” are becoming more accepted in Chinese society, a pejorative tone still exists for “superstitious” activities. Announcement of its ritual use for funerals could also provoke myriad emotions associated with grief, sorrow, and death for an otherwise joyous event of performativity. Furthermore, introducing the drum as a sacred ritual object of the Baiku Yao calls into question its contrived use in cultural performances and staged association with dance, consequently impacting tourist perceptions of authenticity.

²¹⁵ Daniel (1998: 791) claims that many staged traditional dance performances of the 1980s and 1990s were filled with “ingenuity and inventiveness”, and developed choreography based on traditional elements. See also Handler and Saxton (1988).

One day, sitting together with Manjiang resident and ecomuseum vice-director, Lu Chaojin, a well-regarded expert on local Baiku Yao culture, at the ecomuseum center I inquired if the Baiku Yao had local events or ceremonies that included dance or where music and dance were associated. Lu Chaojin shook his head. He then stated frankly, “we do not have a tradition of dancing” (*women meiyou wudao de chuantong*). He went on to state, “there is no word for “dance” (“*wu*” in Chinese) in Baiku Yao language, we only have the word “*dou*” meaning “jump” (*tiao* in Chinese). The lack of the word “dance” as part of the Baiku Yao lexicon seemingly confirmed why in the months of my fieldwork in Huaili and in all of the Baiku Yao local events, ceremonies, and rituals I attended I never encountered Baiku Yao residents engaging in acts of dance outside of the staged cultural performance.. Outside of the tourist performance dance does not exist in Baiku Yao society.²¹⁶ Moreover, not only was the notion and practice of “dance” invented, but so was its association with the sound of the drum.

Although Lu Chaojin and other Baiku Yao I spoke with claim that a tradition of dancing does not exist for the Baiku Yao, further exploration into the practices of music and dance for the Baiku Yao has revealed the existence of an expression of dance movement. Local Baiku Yao introduce *QinZeGeLa* in the folktale on a man’s encounter with the monkey drummer, explained above. The Baiku Yao term *QinZeGeLa* literally means “jump drum monkey”.²¹⁷ The non-Baiku Yao Chinese have translated *QinZeGeLa* into Chinese as *HouGunWu* or literally “monkey stick dance”. Baiku Yao and non-Baiku

²¹⁶ Studies do illustrate that in some cultures dance is so embedded, that the languages of these cultures contain no word for dance (Gard 2006: 203; see also Grau 1993; Oyortey 1993). However, in Huaili this was the complete opposite.

²¹⁷ *Qin* (*dou* in Huaili) means “jump” (*tiao* in Chinese), *Ze* (*zou* in Huaili) means “drum” (*gu* in Chinese), and *geluo* means “monkey” (*houzi* in Chinese).

Yao engaged in the tourism network and heritage domain, including producers of the performance troupe, village performers, ecomuseum staff, village and township leaders, and Culture Bureau officials as well as Chinese scholars have proclaimed that *QinZeGeLa* is an “ancient” (*gudai*) traditional dance of the Baiku Yao. Literature on the *QinZeGeLa* written by non-Baiku Yao authors explain it as a Baiku Yao dance tradition of some 2000 years.

QinZeGeLa is performed so seldom in Baiku Yao society²¹⁸, that only a few Baiku Yao elders could recall for me the last time they had encountered it. (Villagers under the age of thirty I spoke with had never seen it conducted.) Elders explained to me that for generations *QinZeGeLa*, or *DouZouGeLa* as pronounced in Huaili, has been performed during funerals by the most experienced of *zou* (wood cow-skin drum) drummers. Today, only a handful of Baiku Yao *zou* drummers are familiar with how to perform it. In the midst of playing the *zou* at a funeral of a deceased elder, the *zou* drummer engages in movements that resemble, according to many elders, the perceived evolutionary ancestor of the Baiku Yao the monkey. The *zou* drummer, experiencing a feeling of elation, or “*miao*” in Baiku Yao native language, will start to roll his shoulders inward and hunch over and will then begin to circle the *zou* striking the pair of held wood drum sticks together between each raised leg and then behind the back and in front of the chest in tempo of the accompanying bronze drum beat.

The declaration of *QinZeGeLa* as a “traditional dance” of the Baiku Yao by local and non-local tourism developers has formed the basis from which to develop “dance” as a

²¹⁸ Over the fifteen months I conducted research in Huaili, and attending five funerals, I never saw the *QinZeGeLa* performed in the village. The one I did encounter it was at a performance held by the Huaili performance troupe organized for a CCTV special, when Li Haifang conducted it.

main component of the tourist cultural performance in Huaili. In 2004, Huaili villager Li Haifang worked with Lihu township Culture Office director Li Zhengjun and other local leaders and female village representatives to transform *QinZeGeLa*, now referred to publicly by its Chinese name *HouGunWu*, into a choreographed dance for the development of the tourist cultural performance²¹⁹ (Fig. 28). As a result, *QinZeGeLa*, like the sounding of the bronze drum, was remade as something new and displaced from its ritual connotation.

After working on the design of *QinZeGeLa* for the tourist performance, however, performance producers were met with a challenge as they did not have other dance forms or “movement material” of the Baiku Yao to draw from to create a complete multi-dance performance. What followed was a process of cultural production that was in line with the tourism principle to invent new products devised to accommodate the shared performance repertoire and interest the tourist. Performance coordinators engaged in practices of cultural creativity. First involved the appropriation of the foreign concept of “dance”. Second, was the mixture of rearticulated daily local cultural activities and foreign dance movements to establish performative cultural re-enactments of Baiku Yao. For example, for the “Dress-making Dance” (*Fushi Wu*), dance movements were used to exemplify a visual spectacle of the reenactment of cultural practice of dress making. Making dance gestures in rhythm to the beaten drum, female dancers walk around the performance space picking imaginary “cotton” and placing it in their back baskets, and

²¹⁹ After Li Haifang and village representatives initially developed several dance routines, dance instructors from the Nandan county Culture Performance Troupe (*wengongtuan*) were brought to Huaili to offer feedback and collaborated with performance producers to redesign several choreographed dances. According to local producers, outside experts helped “to make dances more professional and attractive for viewing tourists”.

“sewing” and “embroidering” invisible thread. This signified the business of reconstructing representations of cultural tradition through the medium of virtual entertainment. It represents what Daniel (1996) and Bruner (1994) call a process of combining “authenticity” and “creativity”.

Although dance and its association to the sound of the drum for the Baiku Yao cultural performance is a cultural invention, its exhibition and declaration as a cultural attribute of the Baiku Yao creates a perceived “authentic” experience for the viewing tourist. Several scholars have explored the notion of authenticity as a cultural construction (Linnekin 1991; Bruner 1994; Culler 1981; Leite and Graburn 2009). According to Wang (1999: 351), “[t]hings appear to be authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers” (see also Bruner 1994: 401). Unlike cases that are said to undermine existing cultural practices through the construction of authenticity and commoditization of culture (Jones 2010; Cohen 1998; Dicks 2003: 30-2; MacCannell 1973), Baiku Yao “dance” exemplifies a constructed commodity from its inception. Thus, it is not a found conflict for local cultural producers and village performers that the consumption of the symbols provided through the tourist cultural performance are not necessarily directly related to the specific reality of Huaili and Baiku Yao culture and history. In fact, at the same time Baiku Yao dance and music is produced to provide spectacle and entertainment, it also understood among villager performers as constituting cultural integrity as it is a cultural form that is quintessentially “Baiku Yao” (see Bruner 2005: 3), created and performed by the Baiku Yao themselves, even if it is purely for purposes of tourism. The creativeness of the dance and its contrived relationship with the

drum, unbeknownst to tourists, also does not create a challenge to the tourist “authentic experience”. The sound produced by the bronze drum and *zou*, played by its owners, to establish a tempo for dancing Baiku Yao female in the primary context of the rural locale presents a privileged form of authenticity for the tourist. As Bruner (2005: 5) poignantly states, the question in Huaili is not about the “limiting binaries as authentic-inauthentic, true-false, real-show, back-front” that many scholars examine, but rather that the tourist performance, and in particular the elements of Baiku Yao dance and music, is an “authentic tourist production”. Baiku Yao dance and music is “constitutive”, and is a new culture practice constructed for a tourist audience (Bruner 2005: 5). The point here is not that a real Baiku Yao exists behind the tourist performance, such as argued by MacCannell (1976) in his structuralist look at the regions of the front and back stage. But, rather, that tourist productions of the Baiku Yao have been created and displayed in specific local settings as the Baiku Yao have become engaged in larger economic and political contexts.



Figure 22. *QinZeGeLa* dance performance, Baiku Yao cultural performance troupe, Huaili (2012).

For most Baiku Yao residents of Huaili, the production of dance through the cultural performance is perceived as an awkward, foreign activity. Especially for the creation of the Baiku Yao cultural performance troupe, composed today of 36 members,²²⁰ performance training posed a significant challenge. According to performance choreographers Li Haifang and Li Zhengjun, “the training of villagers in dance has been particularly difficult”. Ecomuseum Baiku Yao staff, Li Xia and He Chun, who have worked at the ecomuseum since 2006, have assisted in the coordination of the Huaili performance troupe and the choreography of several dance routine. They explained to me how a lack of experience and understanding of dancing among the Baiku Yao has inhibited the overall participation of female villagers and professionalism of the performance:

Baiku Yao females general don't really dance so asking them to move this way and raise hands or feet that way in dancing gestures is uncustomary for them and they feel uncomfortable and embarrassed...when [female villagers] come for training for the dance, after the first or second day many don't want to participate anymore ... they don't want fellow villagers to see them dance, because they know villagers will think what they are doing as weird (personal conversation October 2012).

Those Baiku Yao villagers I spoke with who do not participate in the tourist performance argue that while cultural elements of Baiku Yao have been used for the tourist performance, they did not fully represent Baiku Yao culture. Recontextualization is seen to have altered Baiku Yao cultural forms, creating new meanings, practices, and values that do not hold many Baiku Yao villagers. For example, when I first applied the

²²⁰ Members are composed of dancers, drummers, bamboo flute and ox horn players, and coordinators. The majority of female dancers initially came from the main village of Huaili. Only later, in 2007-2008, with the recognized decrease of female performers due to the pull of internal migrant labor and birth of children, were women recruited from other surrounding villages of Manjiang, HuaQiao, HuaTu, HuiLe, and LiBai. Male performers are drawn from all of these villages.

term “dance”²²¹ to inquire on the movements and gestures of the *QinZeGeLa*, one villager stopped me mid-sentence and pointed in the direction of the ecomuseum center, exclaiming “that is where “dance” is held”. Even as *QinZeGeLa* has become part of the Baiku Yao tourist cultural performance and has recently been designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage Item on the provincial list of Guangxi in 2011, local villagers disregard or are unaware of such new status and continue to hold *QinZeGeLa* as a traditional informal expression of the funeral ritual ceremony. Whereas the production of the Baiku Yao tourist cultural performance in Huaili has led to the construction of “Baiku Yao dance” and its associated drum beat to drive the tempo, “dance” for local villagers remains a foreign practices, just as the term itself.

On the other hand, as ecomuseum staff Li Xia explained to me, villager performers are very aware of the modes of modernity created through the instrument of the tourist cultural performance and what the performance represents: “Because they see other ethnic minority dances at various competitions or festivals, they distinguish that the dance movements they perform are different and our own”, and at the same time performers think this is a Baiku Yao dance, they also know it is not traditional”. Thus, while the bronze drum, along with other cultural elements of the Baiku Yao, have been refashioned and dance even invented, for Baiku Yao performers the tourist performance does not equate to falsification (Linnekin 1991) or a clear loss of integrity (Salazar and Porter 2004). Their dialogue with the heritage tourism industry and engagement in processes of tourism production and consumption has rather accentuated distinction

²²¹ Because no Baiku Yao word for dance exists, my translator and I in these interviews used the Chinese word “*wudao*” or “*tiaowu*” in local Gui-Liu dialect, which is understood by almost all Baiku Yao of Huaili, especially men.

between tradition and present-centered cultural representation along with what is ours and theirs within the tourism network, focusing on the cultural assets that can perform as resources for capital gain.

The new value placed on the Baiku Yao bronze drum, through the development of the ecomuseum and introduction of the heritage tourism industry in Huaili, has opened a realm of contestation in Baiku Yao society that formerly did not exist. Placement in the tourist performance space has created a second life for the Baiku Yao drum. It embodies a dual role as a sacred and a secular object. The latter is seen in its use as a “musical instrument” in the tourist performance, in which the significance of its produced sound shifts from application in religious ritual to the ritual of tourism (see Graburn 2001). The recontextualization of the bronze drum is certainly a process that villagers have engaged in, negotiating local knowledge and the heritage tourism industry to define boundaries between the sacred and the profane, driven by a hunger for economic profit in a poverty-stricken peripheral village. Today, for the Baiku Yao, the beat of the drum is seen to drive not only the soul of the deceased but also that of the living.

Although many households have participating the commercialization of the drum, several village elders see the ecomuseum and tourism as the culprit in bringing pressure and harm to Baiku Yao social order and detrimental to Baiku Yao “tradition”. Because the bronze drum has a perceived inalienable quality in Baiku Yao society, contests have arisen as cultural commercialism is seen to threaten the “tradition” and local signification of the drum (see Potter and Salazar 2005: 363). The issue of value - when things are promoted as valuable in a political-economic context - has led to issues over the subversion of traditional claims, especially as new acts of signification and methods of

practice become subject to greater local reappropriation (Clifford 1988: 11-12). Village elders adamantly expressed to me disagreement with how drums are being used outside of their ritual role, claiming that “the very sacred essence of the drum is being misunderstood and can be lost”. Many stated to me that they had previously offered forbidding words to village performers that the sound of the drum must be made only for the deceased, not female dancers or viewing tourists. However, they expressed that their words have been in vain with the increase in attention given by villagers to the tourist cultural performance held for paying tourists.

Although several Baiku Yao elders claim that the inclusion of the bronze drum in the tourist performance is problematic for the cultural tradition, some villagers see it differently. They claim that with the development of heritage tourism in Huaili, issues of use value and cosmological notions of the sacred are in not necessarily in competition. Villagers such as the village leader Li Fucai feel that even though their bronze drums are identified as “sacred”, the drum's participation in the tourist performance does not infringe on the ritual system that orders the bronze drum as a ritual object. Li Fucai and his brother, Li Guangde, stated clearly to me that, “the bronze drum can earn the family money rather than sitting idle in the home, but of course, if our bronze drum is needed for a funeral ceremony, it cannot be used for the performance. It’s primary use is for the deceased”. Those that engage in the tourism network, like the Li brothers, have created a clear conceptual and practical divide between the multiple functions of the drum.

Li Zhengjun, director of the Lihu Culture Office and spokesman for Baiku Yao culture, who is a strong supporter and promoter of the performed Baiku Yao culture recognizes the bronze drum as a cultural heritage worth protecting, and an attribute of

local distinctiveness worth celebrating. He claims that the performance of the bronze drum is a means to stimulate the continuity of cultural tradition, rather than its disappearance. Although Li Zhengjun has faced criticism by elders, he continues to promote the performance of the drum, stating:

As I see it, we must be keen to current conditions. More and more youth are leaving the village for urban work and life and many do not learn how to play the drum. By playing the drum for performance, it creates new opportunities for more people to learn and to understand the importance of the drum for the Baiku Yao. Performance is a way the tradition of the bronze drum can live on (personal conversation 2012).

The words of Li Zhengjun illustrate how the dominant discourse of the tourism commons shapes the production of performance, place, and ethnicity in cultural displays and how local actors have used the commons and modes of cultural production and creativity to create identities and experiences that are their own and that satisfy a burgeoning tourism economy (see Notar 2006; Turner 2010). Li Zhengjun's statement also aligns with Cohen's (1998) argument that “the emergence of a tourist market [can] facilitat[e] the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish” (1988: 382). Commoditization is thus cast in a positive light that is opposite to village elders and some scholars who suggest the negative “exploitative” affect of tourism (Greenwood 1989).

New government edicts to protect the bronze drum have further complicated local perceptions of the drum. With attention turned to the protection of the bronze drum through the launch of the “Guangxi Red River Basin Bronze Drum Arts Project” (*Guangxi Hongshui Heliu Tonggu Jishu Xiangmu*) in 2003²²² and the “Guangxi

²²² Following the call of the 16th National People's Congress “work supporting the protection of important cultural heritage and outstanding folk arts”, the HeChi government proposed the “Guangxi Hongshui Heliu Bronze Drum Arts Project” for the the National Ministry of Culture’s “Chinese ethnic folk culture

Traditional Folk Culture Protection Regulation” under the Guangxi regional government, and subsequent attention on the retention of “intangible cultural heritage”²²³, the bronze drum has become a hotbed for local and regional engagements with the national and international heritage discourse. For Huaili, this has led to the creation a local ecological protective zone [see Fig. 23]. Huaili is part of a larger Guangxi regional Culture Bureau campaign issued in 2010 for HeChi Red River Basin as a “bronze drum culture ecological zone”. Most recently, in 2012, the National Ministry of Culture has declare this area a “national conservation zone” (State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People’s Republic of China 2013) and the national government has proposed the bronze drum customs from HeChi for the international UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list.²²⁴



Figure 23. *Bronze Drum Art Ecological Protected Village*, Huaili village, established 2006 under the Guangxi “Red River Basin Bronze Drum Arts Project”. Photograph by author.

protection project”. It became one of the first ten pilot projects under this national program (Ma 2008). At its core was the protection of bronze drums across the region of HeChi, northwest Guangxi, as well as the transmission of “bronze drum arts”, the protection of “bronze drum cultural spaces”, and the protection of “bronze drum intangible cultural heritage aspects of song and dance”. The project was one of the largest government-led heritage protection projects in southern China.

²²³ Annual ICH protection meetings began to be held by the Guangxi Culture Bureau and a “Guangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Center” was launched. Counties through Guangxi were called upon, including Nandan, to establish their own subsequent ICH centers (Intangible Cultural Heritage of China n.d.).

²²⁴ Zhuang bronze drum customs of HeChi have been listed as a national intangible cultural heritage item in 2006, and in 2008 the National Ministry of Culture declared Donglan “The Hometown of China Folk Bronze Drums”.

Greater attention on the bronze drum, has made local governments to come under increasing pressure to take protective measures and allocate resources for the protection. In Lihu township, for example, a government memorandum has been established to prohibit the sale of bronze drums outside of the township. Drums may be brought to Lihu and sold, but drums may not leave the township as commodities. To manage this, the free trade of drums has been limited to the designated space of the Lihu Culture Office, located in the heart of Lihu township. Culture Office vice-director Li Zhengjun oversees both drums' protection and commodity exchange. However, according to Mr. Qin Qiusheng, director of the Nandan Management Office for Cultural Relics (*nandan wenwu guanli suo*), implementing such protective measures has not been easy: “We are having such a problem here [in Nandan] working with the Baiku Yao in protecting the bronze drum. Even after going door to door talking to bronze drum owners about the importance of the bronze drum, many don't care about any of our requests”. Even with greater government-led support in the protection of local cultural heritage and efforts to promote public awareness of heritage conservation, the government sees a disinterest among the Baiku Yao to adhere to government edicts for heritage protection. In conversations with Baiku Yao villagers, many expressed a strong sentiment of dissatisfaction with such government intervention. One villager claimed, “The government should not tell me if I can or cannot sell *my* bronze drum. It is my decision, not anyone else's. I am the owner of my drum.” Mr. Qin said to me frankly, “while we try to promote awareness and understanding on the value of the bronze drum, in the end it is up to the drum owner. This is because it really comes down to what they want to do. All we can do is try to plant a

seed for villagers engagement in conservation efforts”. According to Li Zhengjun, this effort has made a difference, for example, in that the rate of the sale of bronze drums from Lihu has decreased, mainly as a result of defining the space for drum trade.

Controlling the market space to the Lihu Culture Office and how commodities flow within the township is the first step for the government to regulate decisions to protect bronze drums for the Baiku Yao.

The Bronze Drum: A Symbol of Southern Chinese Identity

The bronze drum has long been associated with a southern Chinese identity. While previously “scorned by earlier Chinese scholars because of its “barbarian” origins”, the bronze drum was regarded in post-1949 China as evidence of minority people's ingenuity and “one of the most magnificent material relics of the southern minority peoples” (Han 2004: 24). Under under Mao Zedong, bronze drums were brought under a state patriotic discourse and defined as “cultural relics” and a “cultural achievement of the southern Chinese as well as a symbol of southern identity”, seen as an important contribution to the progress of a unified and multi-ethnic Chinese civilization (Han 2004: 24).²²⁵ In 1957, Chinese archaeologist Wen You even wrote that, “If somebody asks, what is the most important ancient cultural relic of our minority siblings in southern China, we can answer

²²⁵ After 1949, and especially after the mid-1970s, bronze drums in China came under significant scrutiny as Chinese archeologists began to explore its geographic and ethnic origins with a focus on classification, dating, function, and molding techniques (Han 2004: 10). This led to intense debates over the typological models of bronze drums between the Chinese and Vietnamese, such as that by Franz Heger (1853-1931), which placed Dongson Vietnamese drums, i.e Type I, as the earliest in the world. Placed. The Chinese strongly refuted this and Vietnamese typologies and developed their own classification schemes which declared China possessed the earliest drums (see Han 2004). Ultimately, this gave rise to greater political attention of the bronze drum to strengthen nationalist sentiment public attention (Han 2004).

him unhesitatingly that it is the bronze drum” (Wen 1957 cited in Han 2004: 24).

Over the past two decades, with emergence of a nation-wide “heritage fever” and rise in attention on the protection of China’s “traditions”, “customs”, and “folklore, the bronze drum has become an iconic symbol of antiquity, spirituality, and the continuity of cultural tradition and diversity. The bronze drum's placement in the domain of heritage has consequently signaled a process of re-valuation (see Porter and Salazar 2005) and the restructuring of attitudes and engagements in its significance and use. Within the past fifteen years, the bronze drum has reached regional and national cultural heritage status and many local authorities and populations across the southern provinces of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou have utilized the cultural asset of the bronze drum to add value of ethnic distinctiveness. The county of Nandan and township of Lihu is indeed not alone in this endeavor. For example, Donglan county, in HeChi city (where Nandan county is also located), is home to over 600 bronze drums. Through government investment and scholarly assistance Donglan bronze drum dance tradition was listed as a first category national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, followed by the county declared by regional and national authorities in 2008 as “The Hometown of China Folk Bronze Drums”. The Ma Guai Festival, performed by the Zhuang of Donglan, Fengshan, Bama, and Nandan counties, has also received increasing public attention and large tourist crowds as a large ethnic minority ritual ceremony in which bronze drums are played to worship the frog as a symbol of rain and the fate of year's harvest.

For Guangxi, the bronze drum is understood as a prominent cultural symbol of the region. Throughout Guangxi, it is clear to *see* the bronze drum as part of the imagination of a Guangxi and southern Chinese identity. Bronze drum visual culture has played an

important role in the process of constructing and articulating a regional identity. Massive signs found throughout the region depict Guangxi's picturesque landscape and ethnic diversity, complete with images of bronze drums. Huge model bronze drums line both sides of the highway leading from the capital city airport of Nanning to the city center, giving both domestic and foreign visitors a sense that they are in Guangxi and southern China. Bronze drum motifs are found on city and county squares, building facades, halls, and also Chinese regional rice wine advertisements. Souvenir miniature bronze drums are on sale in shops, and websites tailored for Han urbanites and foreigners market high priced full-size bronze drums as aesthetic ornaments and unique coffee tables. In the design of two of the largest museums in Guangxi, the bronze drum is an unmistakable image. At the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, a five meter tall model of a bronze drum welcomes the visitor at its entrance, and the recently erected Guangxi Museum for Nationalities represents a monument of the bronze drum as the entire building depicts the spherical decorative drum design [Fig. 24]. Theatrical performances ranging from elaborate International Bronze Drum Festivals and national and regional folk art shows to local village touristic cultural performances in Guangxi also inject imagery of the bronze drum. These examples illustrate the importance of the bronze drum in producing a new visual culture of modern southern China.

In the push to modernize China's countryside and promote the conservation of ethnic cultural traditions, the bronze drum has become subsumed within a national and global heritage discourse and expanding tourism industry. Engagements with the processes of modernity have led to a complication of local traditional knowledge and practices of the bronze drum. In Huaili, whereas the bronze drum is imagined as "sacred things ...

protected and isolated by prohibitions” (Durkheim 1912: 38) and understood as a vehicle of social and spiritual fulfillment, inseparable from Baiku Yao social life and worldview, their engagement in the domain of heritage and tourism has reconfigured such claims. Indeed, the development of the ecomuseum in Huaili has been the impetus for this change. The movement of the bronze drum into a new social context has introduced new claims to meaning, function, and value and has reshaped the social relations and narratives they are embedded in.



Figure 24. Guangxi Museum for Nationalities (left)
(<http://www.gxmb.com/eng/news-detail.php?ID=2998>)

Figure 25. Bronze Drum Sculpture, located in Baise county, Guangxi (right). It is recognized by the Guinness World Record as the world’s largest bronze drum (15.6 meters high and 13.6 meters surface diameter).
(<http://www.yoyobl.com/news.aspx?id=759>)

Placement in the tourism performance space, has led to a break of singularization of the drum and the adding of new layers of meaning and function. In this context of performative presentation, the fact of the estrangement of the bronze drum tradition is what produces meanings other than the “heritage” message (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:

157).²²⁶ To call the bronze drum along with other cultural attributes of the Baiku Yao “heritage” signifies a reinterpretation of the drum's ritual significance as new tourist product. Once only used for funeral ceremonies, today the drum assumes attributes as a cultural commodity and musical instrument associated with “Baiku Yao dance”. This process of shifting contexts demonstrates also that the drum is “bounded to some degree by barriers to perception” within each context (Goffman 1959: 106) that are clear to Baiku Yao villagers. In each context the bronze drum exists in material form and has a distinct method of practice,²²⁷ but how it is articulated and undergoes acts of signification differ considerably. Because local leaders and performance producers found it advantageous to establish a site of tourist desire by providing ethnic music and dance spectacles, the bronze drum figured prominently in the cultural performance equation as a Baiku Yao “musical instrument”. Through its positioning in the performance context, the drum has become linked to the movement of dance and gained signification for producing “musical sound” that creates a secular beat.

The added value attributed to this identified and conceived “heritage” signifies for different stakeholders a new economic opportunity, a declaration of its worth for

²²⁶ Since the term “cultural heritage” was introduced in Huaili with the establishment of the ecomuseum, villagers have viewed this, like the ecomuseum itself, as an expression of foreign intervention, imposed as a rhetoric of a political language by Chinese government institutions and intellectual elites (see Liu 2013). There are no native words for “culture heritage” (*wenhua yichan*), or “culture” (*wenhua*) and “customs” (*xisu xiguan*) in Baiku Yao language. Villagers refer to cultural forms and practices by name only and use terms, such as “things from the past” or “like/following our ancestors” to express conceptions of “tradition” and “inheritance”. (To understand notions of inheritance, protection, and management of cultural heritage in Baiku Yao society for my fieldwork, I had to refer to each cultural form or practice individually drawing on local terminology.)

²²⁷ The drum rhythm used for the tourist cultural performance is the same used in funeral ceremonies in Huaili. When I asked about how the rhythm of the bronze drum was decided for the tourist cultural performance, the current performance coordinator and ecomuseum staff, Li Xia, stated, “we are following the traditional Huaili style of bronze drum playing. Over the years of the performance, coordinators have not changed it. Why would we change it?” With the already established drum beat, the practice of the bronze drum in the performance space has not undergone a similar fate to the cultural creativity of the “Baiku Yao dance”.

protection, and the displacement of a cultural tradition. Each signifies a different vision of the recontextualization of the bronze drum through the ecomuseum space. However, are community members willing to incorporate a revaluation of this sacred object into their local cosmology as a source of income? What we have seen already are efforts to create an avenue to promote the economic viability of this cultural resource through its use in the creation of community-driven tourist cultural performance. Of course, this, too, presents a challenge in continuing its traditional cultural practice and retention of its customary significance as the inroads of tourism and processes of cultural revaluation become more prominent (see Potter and Salazar 2005: 366). The concern in Huaili, like many locales consumed by tourism development, is that as more villagers come to realize the profits induced by tourism, local “heritage” among local populations may become more associated as an object of tourist performance than a religious ritual activity.

For now, the new signification of the bronze drum within the tourist performance context does not suggest that its function and meaning in the everyday life of the Baiku Yao community has been extinguished or even diminished. Even as the bronze drum has entered new controlled spaces through the heritage and tourism domain, the drum still figures prominently in the ritual system of the Baiku Yao. In spite of breaking the singularization of the bronze drum, and alteration of the religious ideology²²⁸, in the village space and the Baiku Yao community the bronze drum has retained its strength through its special significance as a sacred ritual object for the funeral.²²⁹ Although it is

²²⁸ Baiku Yao women have also begun to engage in playing the bronze drum within the tourist performance space. Female performers and troupe coordinators explained to me that it is necessarily female performer to both understand the beat of the drum they are dancing to as well as know how to play in the drum in case male performers are unavailable.

²²⁹ See Lohmann for a similar occurrence to the Papua New Guinea drum and related gender roles.

premature to conclude that the religious ritual system in Huaili will become displaced with the intensification of tourism, the transformation into a “touristic culture” as seen in Bali (Picard 1996), is a looming reality. With the number of Baiku Yao tourist cultural performances held every year in Huaili, now at over 100, and throughout Guangxi and other parts of China, local Baiku Yao have already come to see the bronze drum used and applied more for tourist performance than for village funerals. This impact on the practice of local heritage and on the ways of seeing the Baiku Yao is certain to make a strong impression for present and future generations, who are said to carry on these traditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an investigation of how local heritage transforms in the context of the ecomuseum in China. It not only explores the movement of heritage, in particular the bronze drum, into the domain of heritage tourism, but also how this begins to complicate traditional knowledge and the ritual structure in Baiku Yao society. In doing so I have illustrated the multiple meanings and significations attributed to the bronze drum, how it has been entangled in multiple webs of cultural significance (Hoskins 2006: 81).

At the same time the ecomuseum works to recreate the cultural landscape through the museumification process, it has brought forth commercialization of cultural forms and practices (see Edensor 2002). In Huaili, under the ecomuseum project, local culture has been “reproduced according to the demands of rationalized commodity production... invented and manufactured in order to facilitate the local specializations necessary for economic integration and tourism development” (Oakes 1998: 140). As we see through

the creation of the tourist cultural performance in Huaili, cultural forms and practices, like the bronze drum, are implicated in a shared performance repertoire and tourism commons which define how ethnic cultures should be represented. The instrument of tourist performance accommodates and also creates these power-laden representations of symbolic culture (Edensor 2002: 8). As a result, new acts of signification are created that reframe local heritages as tourism products. By looking at the power of display in the local context of Huaili, this chapter has shown its relation to the agency of individuals to act in processes of cultural production and creativity.²³⁰ Local attempts to engage in the expanding heritage tourism market has created “vitalities” through the processes of exhibition and performance and has consequently change forms of local cultural heritage and ethnic and cultural identity for the Baiku Yao. Indeed, the formation of local cultural practices and identity is conditioned by the relations between peoples, tradition and modernity, and multiple and competing discourses that come in contact through the ecomuseum space. The following chapter looks more closely at the complicated politics of Baiku Yao villagers multifaceted responses to ecomuseum development and interrogates the ecomuseum as a purported participatory “community museum”.

²³⁰ Graham et al. (2000:2) states that “people in the present are the creators of heritage, and not merely passive receivers or transmitters of it [as] the present creates the heritage it requires and manages it for a range of contemporary purposes”.

CHAPTER 6

THE ECOMUSEUM EFFECT: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AT THE PERIPHERY?

An ecomuseum is never finishes, it evolves and grows.
Hugues de Varine (2011)

In August 2012, I was sitting in an adobe home in HuaTu located at the base of the mountain in Huaili village. The young HuaTu woman in her 30s who invited me in to her home was a bit hesitant to participate in my household interviews. Her hesitation was driven in large part from her past contact with outsiders, in particular government authorities who came to HuaTu every year to obtain information on rural livelihoods, poverty levels, and most importantly, the number of births in a household, of which they could be fined if over the allocated number. Several people in HuaTu I spoke with actually retracted from answering questions that related directly to their families. Their awkwardness was also a result of skepticism in local government work, which they felt disregarded HuaTu in the quest to develop Huaili as cultural destination. Thus, when my questions turned to the ecomuseum, the woman, like many others in HuaTu began to express a sense of uneasiness.

This HuaTu resident in many ways exemplified why the ecomuseum in Huaili was seen to be increasingly disconnected from the local Baiku Yao community. She was neither enthusiastic about the idea of having an ecomuseum project in her hometown nor particularly interested in participating in the developments that came with it. In fact, sentiments of disengagement and exclusion were most pronounced. She was like many young married women in Huaili, working to raise a family and tending to household duties as husband was in Guangdong for most of the year, participating in migrant labor. I

shifted away from my questions on the ecomuseum to focus on her intricate embroidery that she was working on. When I ask how she prepared her cotton for the cloth she used, she replied that she walked over the hill behind HuaTu to a flat and wide area to “run the thread” (*paosa*) to prepare for the loom. Because I had seen many Baiku Yao women using the closer plot of land at the ecomuseum center complex to conduct such work, I asked her why she did not use it. To this she replied, in a soft tone, “I am shy. I don't go there. Its not my space, its someone else's”. To her the ecomuseum center was a private, government space, and not *for* the community. It was also seen as a space for tourism, where doing any form of everyday practice there would come under the watchful eye of visiting tourists and would ultimately change into a form of voyeurism with tourists’ photographs capturing their every move in the cloth making procedure. She later stated to me that “some tourist come into HuaTu, and have taken our photographs, but we have seen nothing come from this... the museum has not brought us benefits, we have no income (*shouru*) from the museum, it all goes to the museum”.

In her comments is the core of what this chapter interrogates - the relationship between the ecomuseum and village residents of Huaili and how one woman of many sees herself as dissociated from a project that purports service to the community. At stake here are issues of what role the ecomuseum plays in Huaili and its significance for Huaili residents. This interviewee and many others in HuaTu and the other villages of ManJiang and HuaQiao see the ecomuseum as providing no significant benefit to their rural livelihoods and distant to their social lives. Yet, other villagers have expressed that the situation in Huaili is changing and, in fact, their actions account for it. The introduction of new initiatives of community engagement by ecomuseum staff, has resulted in the

change in positionality of many villagers and the alteration of the course of ecomuseum development in Huaili. This has introduced forms of “community heritage” at the same time disconnection between ecomuseum and community persists.

In this chapter, I focus on interactions enacted by the cultural process of ecomuseum development. Interactions between involved actors - village residents, ecomuseum, and government agencies - are seen as a creative force in the manifestation of the ecomuseum and the transformation of the project with serious implications for shaping the intimate lives of the ecomuseum local population. I have already detailed one form of interaction in the previous chapter in discussing how Huaili residents have engaged in the tourism industry and the recontextualization of their local heritage, the bronze drum, enacted by ecomuseum development. In this chapter, I want to move to a more critical analysis of the political nature of such interactions and point to certain gaps, distances, and contestations through shifts in power and positionality. Here I focus on the theme of “community participation”. Looking at how the ecomuseum manifests in China as a government-led and directed initiative in rural locales that is seen to position ethnic minority local populations in a marginal political space in relation to extra-local dominant powers, I call into question the idea of the “ecomuseum” in China and its association with Western principles of community participation, community development, and the democratization of heritage practices. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Stone (1989), I raise the question of the widespread adoption of these Western cultural values that underpin the ecomuseum concept, specifically the cross-cultural applicability and viability of community participation and ecomuseology in this non-Western context. I explore how Chinese project developers and ecomuseum local hosts populations hold different ideas

on “development” and “participation” that are, too, different from international notions of ecomuseology.

Community Participation in China

The notion of “community participation” (*shequ canyu*) came to China in the post-Mao reform era. The “opening up reforms” under Deng Xiaoping, market liberalization, and a gradual change in local governance brought on by the decollectivization campaign, household responsibility system, village-elections, and growth in social organizations in the 1980s led to a shift in the role of people making decisions about matters that affected their livelihood (Plummer 2004: 2).²³¹ This created “an opportunity for new social groups to emerge and for existing groups to expand their influence” (Taylor 2004: 23). In one of the first book length projects on the subject of community participation in China, Plummer and Taylor (2004: 36) explain combined with post-Mao reforms and policy changes, opening up to the international community enabled participatory projects to emerge:

In the early 1990s the central government gave permission to the international donor community to work in agreed provinces and allowed the concept of ‘community participation’ to be tested in isolated rural development, agriculture/irrigation management, natural resource management, forestry, watershed management, rural water and sanitation, and rural health and education sector projects, as well as multisectoral poverty alleviation initiatives. By doing so they allowed the concept of ‘participation’ to enter development rhetoric – within the centralized regime governing China.²³²

²³¹ I do not mean here to disregard the long history of “public” (*gongzhong/minzhong*) and “political” (*zhengzhi*) participation seen in China, especially during the Mao regime, which is often linked to mass mobilization of political campaigns (Saich 2001). In fact, this historical reference and the legacy of mass mobilization continues to exert powerful influence on the actions and attitudes of Chinese authorities and local populations (Perry 2002), in particular for the development of new participatory project interventions.

²³² A detailed explanation of the context for the development of community participation in China since the 1980s is seen in Plummer and Taylor (2004).

Although at first “generic” and lacking localization, small-scale participatory projects introduced in the early 1990s in China were the foundation for future participatory models and practices. These early participatory initiatives were informed by the participatory development discourse that had grown in the West in the 1960s and 1970s.²³³

Midgley (1986: 4) states that “the notion of community participation is deeply ideological in that it reflects beliefs derived from social and political theories about how societies should be organised”. In terms of community participation, the social and political theories Midgley speaks of are Western-oriented. They created a participatory paradigm that is tied to Western notions of democracy, individualism, empowerment, and social justice, specifically in areas of decision-making power and the fostering of the capacity of self-help and self-determinism (Mayo 2000). A growing literature exploring participatory development shows how descriptions and definition of participation align with these Western cultural values. Community participation is explained as “an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish” (Paul 1987); “includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their

²³³ Mayo (2000) and Midgley (1986) explain that the focus on the engagement and involvement of the community in the areas of development became increasingly present in the beginning of the 20th century with growing state concerns of education, social welfare, and economic disparities, particularly in the UK, and for its colonies, and in the USA. Later after the 1950s and much more since the 1970s, the notion of “participation” has become part of the development mainstream (Cornwall 2008: 269) and an umbrella term for a new genre of development intervention (Tosun 2000: 615). Community participation in development was seen to not only release some of the economic burden of the state but also potentially improve the chances of success for development projects (Cornwall 2006). What began as an alternative approach to development became a catchphrase and buzzword for most forms of development intervention (Tosun 2000; Cornwall and Brock 2005).

sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes” (Cohen and Uphoff 1980); and is “the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control” (Pearse and Stiefel 1979). These definitions emphasize the collaborative and empowering process of participation in peoples' management and control of resources and decisions considered important to them and the project at hand (see Cornwall 2006; Mohan 2001). Ultimately, community participation is implied as a method of shifting the balance of power so that local needs, interests, and view can come through (Tosun 2000).

This follows with Robert Chamber's (1983, 1997) popular people-centered approach to development research as a means to not only stimulate active participation and social empowerment by informed participants, but a way for placing “local realities at the heart of development interventions, and of the need to transform agents of development from being directive ‘experts’ to ‘facilitators’ of local knowledge and capabilities” (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 8) by “putting the last first”. This was an approach to foster communities' capability of managing “what they understand as development” through a collaborative framework (Botchway 2001: 2). For Robert Chambers and others, community participation is to design “development in such a way that intended beneficiaries are encouraged to take matters into their own hands, to participate in their own development through mobilising their own resources, defining their own needs, and making their own decisions about how to meet them” (Stone 1989 cited in Tosun 2000: 615). For many like Chambers, this involves a “process of helping community members develop skills and confidence so that they can have more influence on the issues that affect their lives”

(International Association for Community Development (IACD), n.d.). It is about capacity building and education and implies the creation of a certain kind of active citizen, one who learns and understands the intricacies of democracy and justice as they participate in development project interventions. It is through the role of education and the building of a “knowledge base” that participation of local population is assumed to be most effective.²³⁴

China became an uncharted territory in the 1980s for international donor agencies to introduce the approach of “community participation” and to promote western values. Initially, according to Plummer (2004: 3), the participatory approach in China “developed on a project-by-project, sector-by-sector basis, ... at the micro level”. Projects were introduced across China that focused on local and regional challenges of development, such as regional economic disparities, poverty, environmental concerns, and the control of human and economic resources.²³⁵ Poverty, in particular, has been one area where the

²³⁴ Interestingly, this rhetorical prose on ensuring people are educated in the idea and act of participation seems to purport a movement of following the leader, which is seen in many participatory development projects, more in fact than making steps recognizing local community needs and interests and opening a path for grassroots efforts through practices such as greater decentralization.

²³⁵ Participatory projects were introduced in the early 1990s in Beijing under the Germany Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) which supported the Centre for Integrated Agricultural Development (CIAD) and in Kunming, Yunnan province under the Ford Foundation (Plummer 2004). Yunnan was the first region in southwest China to see the rise in participatory projects through The Yunnan Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Network established in 1994 (see Wilkes 2011), and has received a growth in support by international agencies and NGOs for participatory projects, especially since the early 2000s. Other projects employing a participatory approach to development in China include the Participatory Approach for Rapid Assessment in the tropical rainforest of Xishuangbana to devise an indigenous classification system and to apply indigenous knowledge for the research and conservation of biodiversity (Wang et al 2004); the inclusion of farmers as research partners in the conservation planning process to define alternatives for sustainable land use and water rehabilitation methods on the Loess Plateau (<http://eempc.org/loess-plateau-watershed-rehabilitation-project>); the establishment of community work planning and collaboration with pastoralists using participatory action research for grassland management on the Tibetan Plateau and Xinjiang (Banks et al 2003); and developing village committees for forest management planning in the Xiaolongshan Forest Region of Gansu Province under a the Natural Forest Protection Program (NFPP) (Liu 2010). Other projects that attempt to address issues on gender equality, and social and economic development include the Yunnan Women's Health and Development Program using the methodology of creating “photo novellas”, or women

implementation of participatory development approaches has seen an increasing amount of attention in China.²³⁶ Recent literature shows that international agencies and national and local governments have employed strategies for community participation worldwide as a means to enhance development among poverty-stricken populations (Craig and Mayo 1995; Narayan 2002). In the case of China, participatory development approaches reached a national stage through its integration in state national policies on poverty reduction (Li and Liu 2010).²³⁷ Since the early 1980s, the eradication of poverty has received significant government support through national poverty reduction campaigns and regional and local development projects.

photographers (Wang et al 1996), the Congjiang cultural mapping project for heritage management, the community-based ecotourism projects in Hainan (Stone and Wall 2004; Li 2010), and the Jiuzhaigou Biosphere Reserve (Li 2006). The World Bank and other transnational organizations and NGOs lead most of these and others projects in China.

²³⁶ Poverty alleviation programs began under Mao in the 1950s. Under Mao's strategies of land reform and industrialization, however, the "Five Guarantees for Households in Extreme Poverty" failed to reach their expected goals (Li and Remenyi 2004). From 1978 to 2010, four poverty reduction programs have been implemented in China. The National Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program marked the most ambitious program to date "designed to lift 80 million people out of absolute poverty in the period of seven years from 1994 to 2000". (http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/27/content_17712.htm)

²³⁷ With the establishment of the State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOP) in 1986, the National Poverty Alleviation Program was officially launched in China (The State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOP) is composed of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Civil Affairs, and Ministry of Health, and other 27 government ministries.) In the 1990s, the LGOP focused on promoting the development of local infrastructure and small and medium enterprises to utilize local resources, known as township and village enterprises (TVEs) (Li and Remenyi 2004). LGOP's *National 8-7 Priority Poverty Alleviation Program* marked China's most ambitious program for poverty reduction "designed to lift 80 million people out of absolute poverty in the period of seven years from 1994 to 2000" (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China 2001). Although China saw a dramatic decline in poverty rates, decreasing from 250 million people in 1978 to 32 million in 2000, from 31% of the rural population to 3%, poverty reduction planning remained a top-down process. According to Li and Remenyi (2004), "progress in reducing the incidence of poverty in rural China was stalling, possibly even in reverse". Since 2001, the LGOP developed a new poverty reduction strategy that refocused national efforts on endemic village poverty. In a shift of approach to implement a village-based poverty reduction program (Plummer 2004: 5), the county level was given authority over poverty alleviation planning (previously at the provincial level) and new methods were introduced for local participation, gender awareness, and NGO involvement. Employing participatory development and planning approaches was an effort aimed to improve program efficiency and "shift poverty reduction planning from 'traditional top-down to participatory bottom-up'" (Li 2006). Although it improved fund targeting accuracy, it did not live up to inciting forms of empowerment of villagers in the control over decision-making practices (Li 2006 cited in Li and Liu 2010: 313).

Cultural Heritage and Community Participation in China

While the participatory approach in China has been applied in specific areas for purposes of development, it has only recently begun to see application in the domain of heritage. In China, the concept of community participation is not intrinsic to the protection of cultural heritage. Heritage conservation work has primarily been an initiative led by and regulated by the Chinese government. Even under government directives local populations and development agencies across China have engaged the national and global heritage discourse to safeguard local culture and also exploit this important cultural assets for public and international recognition and the development of new local cultural economies (Oakes 1998, 2006; Walsh 2005; see also MacCannell 1973, 1992; Greenwood 1989). As a result, the deeply rooted approach to “destroy the old to make way for the new” (*pojiu lixin*) introduced during the Mao era, and the notion of community involvement in the heritage industry has taken on new meaning in the post-Mao reform era. At the same time the linkage between tourism and cultural heritage has been strengthened (Sofield and Li 1998; Zeng et al. 2007), “stakeholder” and community involvement and the integration of new community heritage participatory approaches has become a growing topic of interest in China (Li 2004; Xu 2007; Su and Wall 2012; Nitzky 2013; see also Sigley 2010). With China's continued participation in and adoption of the global heritage discourse since 1985 there has been a growing focus on inclusive heritage protection work, especially for regional and local “intangible cultural heritage”. This has taken place in three major forms - the transformation of the

national heritage discourse, community-based heritage tourism industry, and emergence of international agencies and NGOs sponsoring heritage protection work.

The Chinese government's enactment of new heritage protection laws and conservation principles that come in line with international standards of heritage conservation has been one step in this direction (Qian 2007).²³⁸ The Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (*Zhongguo Wenwu Guji Baohu Zhunze*, commonly called the China Principles), which has attracted international attention as China's first guidelines for nation-wide heritage conservation work, represents such an initiative that heeds the call of the global community to promote community inclusion in heritage work.²³⁹ The use of the “participation” (*canyu*) concept is seen in several articles of the China Principles, including 1.3.4, 2.4.4, 10.1.1, and 14.3.2, emphasizing the “mobilization of social participation” (*dongyuan quan shehuicanyu*) and “publicly administered, and the establishment of collaborative links” (*gongguan, jianli xiezuo lianxi*). In addition, China's embrace of the recent 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICHC) and establishment of its own Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection law in 2011, along with the establishment of the list of ICH “cultural inheritors” has led to increase in recognition of intangible cultural heritage items

²³⁸ Of course the tremendous and costly process of establishing 45 items on UNESCO's World Heritage List and the hosting of an assortment of international forums and symposiums, such the The third International Conference on Natural World Heritage in 2007 and 25th ICOM General Conference in 2011, have considerably added to building up China's presence in the international community and to make its mark in upholding universal values of humanity.

²³⁹ The China Principles was created as a collaborative effort between the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Australian Heritage Commission (see du Cros 2007).

and participants and has made community involvement a more important topic for heritage work.²⁴⁰

In addition to the enactment of new heritage protection laws and conservation principles, China has seen the implementation of numerous local cultural heritage protection projects and heritage tourism endeavors across the country that embrace a community-based participatory approach. In their study of the ancient village heritage sites of Hangcun and Xidi in Anhui, for example, Ying and Zhou (2007) emphasize the emergence of a new “communal approach” to heritage management that has begun to take hold in this and several other cultural heritage destinations in China. This communal approach is discussed as villagers working together to commercialize their village through ticket sales and local business ventures and using accumulated revenue from tourism to establish a community welfare system (Ying and Zhou 2007)²⁴¹. Different forms of heritage tourism development involving communities in heritage management practices and involvement in the planning and development process are also explored by Chio (2009) in Guangxi and Guizhou, Walsh (2005) in Yunnan, and Li (2004) in Hainan, as well as Liu (2000), Liu (1999), Tang (1998), and Song and Ban (2007). Oakes (2006), for example, documents villagers' mobilization of a community-owned association to

²⁴⁰ The national ICH protection project now covers 1,028 state-level ICH items are now listed and 1,488 representative inheritors have been recognized. “China's National People's Congress Standing Committee adopted a law on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) designed to preserve traditions considered to have historic, literary, artistic, or scientific value, including those traditions of the various minority ethnic groups in the country. It also extends protection to material objects and physical locations that are connected with ICH”. (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/culture/2011-02/25/c_13750084.htm).

²⁴¹ Interestingly, Ying and Zhou (2007) also state that through their research that while revenues have increased, villagers often do not work in cooperation in business ventures. The same is seen in the Buyi ancient village of Zhenshan, designated an ecomuseum under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Program in Guizhou, where villagers have worked together to establish a community managed tourist destination, but business ventures are seen to be on a household-to-household basis.

manage tourism and improve public welfare using accumulated tourism capital from exploiting heritage assets.²⁴² Although these and other cases in China present cultural heritage and tourism as an important means for rural development and local communities engagement in these endeavors, community participation is often only witnessed at the economic level and village residents' involved in the planning and decision-making process is minimal at best (Bao and Sun 2006; Wen 2006; Gu and Ryan 2008; Ying and Zhou 2007)²⁴³.

In the last two decades, transnational organizations and NGOs have collaborated with Chinese government agencies and local social groups to apply participatory development approaches to tourism and heritage management. The World Bank, UNESCO, the Millennium Development Goal-Fund, and the Ford Foundation, including foreign government agencies from Germany and Norway, have extended their work with China into areas of culture and heritage. These transnational organizations and foreign governments have instigated development initiatives that integrate cultural heritage in local economic development, while calling for the empowerment of local, often poor, marginalized community groups in the protection of cultural heritage resources and

²⁴² Creating a tourism corporation approach in China has also introduced challenges for local populations and the notion of equitable community participation. Corporations are seen to exist through village committees, run by the village, and through extra-local companies (Gao et al 2009). Tourism development run by extra-local tourism companies often result in disenfranchisement of the local population. In my field investigation of Zhaoxing and Tang'an ecomuseum, discussed in Chapter 4, at the same time as helping to promote the area as a tourist destination, the outside tourism company administering the township has reaped a majority of tourism revenues. In their findings from research on two ethnic tourist villages in Yunnan, Yang and Wall (2009: 92) found that "villagers are usually marginalized or disadvantaged economically because they have limited business experience and lack access to capital and other resources".

²⁴³ Tosun (2000) presents a summary of limitations to community participation in developing countries that can be applied to understanding conditions of community participation in China (Li 2008). In particular, Ryan and Gu (2010) emphasize the challenge of the top-down management approach and the dominant role of government and underlying bureaucratic system in China that direct the course of tourism development.

sustainable tourism through community-based approaches. For example, the “China Culture and Development Partnership Framework” (CDPF), launched in 2008, brings together the work of eight UN agencies, Chinese government organs, and local populations in the regions of Guizhou, Yunnan, Qinghai, and Tibet “to improve the inclusion of ethnic minorities in cultural, socio-economic and political life through improved public policies and services” and to “empower ethnic minority groups to better manage their cultural resources and to benefit from culture-based economic development” (United Nations in China 2010a). Also, under the World Bank, the “Guizhou Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection and Development Project”, established in 2009 with a loan of \$60 million, selected 22 sites throughout Guizhou, including Tang’an and Longli ecomuseums, to “[increase] economic benefits to local communities through increased tourism and better protection of cultural and natural heritages” (World Bank n.d.).²⁴⁴ Claiming to employ a community-based development (CBD) approach, the Guizhou program calls for improving local infrastructure and tourism facilities, the restoration of historic towns and structures, conservation of tangible, intangible, and natural heritage and cultural landscapes, and strengthening institutional capacity and framework for project implementation, involving local communities in the planning, management and implementation of the project (World Bank n.d.). Other projects such as the “Ethnic Cultural and Ecological Village” program sponsored by the

²⁴⁴ Under a request by the Chinese government, World Bank began assistance in cultural heritage conservation in development projects in the 1990s. The China-World Bank partnership for cultural and natural heritage conservation has resulted in 12 projects over the past 18 years. (Ebbe et al 2011). From 1980 to 2000, the World Bank has invested in cultural heritage to develop tourism and since 2000 it shifted its approach to the integration of cultural heritage in local economic development and the promotion of sustainable tourism (Licciardi 2010).

Ford Foundation led by Yin Shaoting and a team of scholars from Yunnan University²⁴⁵ and the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Program and Guangxi 1+10 Ecomuseum Program have also received increasing attention as a new “model” for community participation in heritage work.²⁴⁶ While results of all of these projects for participatory cultural heritage management and tourism development are seen to be mixed, they have helped to introduce to government agencies and local populations alternative development and heritage management practices, and have incited local cultural awareness on the application of heritage resources and strengthened their capacity to protect and reinterpret cultural heritage resources.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ This program followed a common ecomuseology philosophy for community participation and community development. In total six villages in Yunnan were selected for the program through which a team of university scholars and students collaborated with village residents to development. One village, XinRenDong in PuZhiHei county, Yunnan province, under this program, where I conducted fieldwork in 2011, represents such a collaborative project to manage ethnic cultural resources for tourism. Through a participatory approach to development, villagers revitalizing forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, such as ancient stone god (*shen*) statues, and recreating traditional ethnic dance performances, involving many villagers from different age groups in the project. Xu (2007), who also conducted an investigation in XinRenDong, states that these efforts are as much for purposes of tourism as they are for building a sense of community and a local Sani identity. Of the six ethnic villages selected for the program, only three remain as “successful” examples of the program, with the other three being “taken over by government” for purposes solely of tourism revenue generation (Yin Shaoting personal conversation 2011).

²⁴⁶ Conferences and workshops have been held throughout China by county and provincial governments, sponsored also by the national State Administration for Cultural Heritage, to discuss the potential benefits of implementing the ecomuseum and community museum concept. Examples include the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou (2005), National Eco- (Community) Museum Forum (2011), Anji County Ecomuseum Forum (2011), Guangxi Museum for Nationalities Ecomuseum Construction Workshop (2011).

²⁴⁷ For the Guizhou Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection and Development Project, the World Bank has issued a five-part environmental impact assessment report (World Bank n.d.). The report mainly focuses on a description of the project and provides an assessment of potential impacts and benefits, both positive and negative, along with certain recommendations for mitigation of concerns. It is so far unclear if these mitigation practices have been put in place and how the World Bank and related government partners have measured or monitored project efficacy as the project is still ongoing and remains in its infancy. The author's exploration of the World Bank project in several localities in Guizhou has revealed the World Bank mainly playing a role as initiator and not facilitator, as foreign-inspired project (see Tosun and Jenkins 1998). After projects were launched, local Chinese government agencies received advice from the World Bank but have mainly took it upon themselves to administer each locale-specific project. From the authors' fieldwork, similar to conclusions drawn from the work of Tosun and Jenkins (1998), so far these foreign-inspired projects have yielded little in the

Community Participation and the Ecomuseum in China

In introducing the ecomuseum philosophy to the world, Hugues de Varine has emphasized that at the center of the idea of this “community museum” lies not things, but people; it is focused on activities of public participation and it is anchored in its community for the objective of the development of that community. As a community-based endeavor integrating the local community and place in the museum space, the establishment of the ecomuseum assumes a clear mission in not only serving the local populations but “arises in response to the needs and wishes of people living and working in the area”; it is a project based on the local population’s inclusion, participation, and conscious responsibility in the process of cultural preservation, management and development “at every stage while it is planned and created afterwards when it is open and functioning” (Varine 2006: 60). Rather than defining the ecomuseum as a grassroots endeavor, Peter Davis (1999 (2008)) and Gerard Corsane (2005), declare community participation as a key principle of the ecomuseum. They have evaluated ecomuseums throughout the world, especially in Italy, using “participation” as an indicator of implementing the ecomuseum approach. For advocates like Peter Davis, the ecomuseum principle of community involvement presents a role for the community as “curator” of the project and the management of their heritage (Davis 1999: 75). The ecomuseum is understood not as a product but as a cultural process, through which a

way of local participation, seen through the lack of village resident engagement at the planning stage. A Beijing-based NGO involved in one project in the “China Culture and Development Partnership Framework” (CDPF) has provided an assessment report on their work (http://en.bjchp.org/?page_id=307) and Nitzky (2013) also examines the nature of community participation through the collaborative cultural mapping project.

sense of community, belonging, and place is cultivated, negotiated, and constituted.

Ecomuseum programs in Guizhou and Guangxi represent one of the first attempts to implement forms of “community heritage”, specifically “community museums”, in the non-Western context of China. In addition to proclaiming their goal to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of China’s diverse cultures and address concerns of poverty alleviation and development in ethnic minority regions, they purport adherence to Western ideals of community involvement and social development. Su Donghai (2006: 10), a key proponent of ecomuseum development in China, has stated that, “[h]eritage is kept alive in ways that involve local communities and encourage their democratic participation in the building and management of ecomuseums”. In his inaugural speech to the 2005 International Ecomuseum Forum held in Guizhou²⁴⁸, Su (2006) presented two essential conditions to a successful and sustainable ecomuseum project in China: strong support by political and administrative powers, and a real participation of the communities and their members. For the latter, he claims that “the government and scholars can be major forces in establishing an ecomuseum, but the community residents are the only ones who can solidify the ecomuseum (Su 2006: 6). Su asserts that participation involves both the collaboration between related project stakeholders and a process of “cultural progression” (*wenhua de disheng de cengmian*) undertaken by local

²⁴⁸ This international symposium on ecomuseum was the first time Chinese ecomuseological practices were presented on the international stage. Key figures in ecomuseum development worldwide, including Hugues de Varine, Peter Davis, and Gerard Corsane, and Amareswar Galla, as many others, were present. Following this symposium, Chinese national leaders, namely Shan Jixiang strongly pushed for further development of ecomuseums across China and the interaction of the museum institution and local communities and their cultural heritage. As deputy director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and later as director of the Palace Museum in Beijing (in 2012), Shan Jixiang has called for no longer a static, traditional approach to heritage and museological practices. Instead, he sees museums as “marrying [China's] unique cultural heritage with her rapid development” and “should extend beyond the physical spaces in order to serve many functions” for public society (Asia Society 2012).

villagers.²⁴⁹ He claims that as villagers go through three stages in this process - benefits-driven stage, emotion-driven stage, and knowledge-driven stage - they will gradually become “owners of their culture” (*wenhua de zhuren*) and move from “surrogate cultural agents to cultural autonomy” (*cong wenhau daili huigui dao wenhua zizhu*).²⁵⁰ This is to say that villagers' motivation to protect one's culture beyond an interest or incentive for economic benefit, and the progression to a clear understanding of their culture's value and comprehension of the emic knowledge of their culture, suggesting a truly reflective individual, will bring them to a stage of cultural responsibility, and a capacity suitable to administer the ecomuseum as their own. Su Donghai (2006: 2) states, that only through this *long* process of ecomuseum development can the ecomuseum be said to be truly strengthened (or consolidated).

To address these very issues of community participation and ownership, Chinese museologists, including Su Donghai, in cooperation with a Norwegian professional group led by John Aage Gjestrum and Dag Myklebust, decided after the establishment the Guizhou ecomuseum program in the mid-1990s to compose a list of principles for ecomuseum development in China, called the “LiuZhi Principles”.²⁵¹ Su Donghai (2006: 9) states that “[t]he nine principles have been outlined in an effort to enhance the “in-situ” preservation of local cultures and to respect the villagers’ ownership of their cultures”. However, Su Donghai also offers criticism of their application stating to me that many of

²⁴⁹ The author has chosen to translate from the written Chinese text by Su Donghai (2006) instead of use the English translation provided. This is because the author has found discrepancies in the translation terminology and gaps in text translated from Chinese to English.

²⁵⁰ “Villagers motivation to protect culture comes from an interest in [economic] self-benefits, then comes to a natural feeling towards one's culture, and as far as one's cultural value it is still lacking scientific knowledge” (Su 2006: 2).

²⁵¹ LiuZhi is the name of the county where the first ecomuseum project in China, Suoga Miao Ecomuseum, was created.

them are “ideals” (*lixiang*) that have yet to be met (personal conversation 2008). He argues that “on the ground [the Liuzhi principles] really have not made any impression”, and the “most prominent challenge has been a lack of community engagement” and how the control over these project and cultural resources are being left to “public agents” not community residents (personal conversation 2008). Indeed, Su acknowledges that,

to build an ecomuseum of meeting our ideals is difficult, but to it is more difficult to consolidate [maintain and improve] an ecomuseum. Because the idea of the ecomuseum is a fruit of post-industrial society, it is not able to spontaneously come about on its own in China's primitive villages. In fact, in these established ecomuseum villages, villagers have said [the ecomuseum] is one kind of advanced activity [a head of its time] (*chaoqian de xingwei*)

Su Donghai stresses that this “experiment” of launching new museological practices in China been one of “trail and error”. He claims that China is now going through an evolution of this method and points to the second generation of ecomuseums in China under the Guangxi 1+10 program which has begun to address challenges met in the Guizhou program, “demonstrat[ing] a maturity in researching, displaying and sustaining local cultures” in a “more professional” manner (Su 2006: 6).

Leading the “1+10” ecomuseum program, Guangxi Culture Bureau vice-director Ms. Qin Pu emphasizes the progressive ecomuseum projects in Guangxi in making a break with the Guizhou model by establishing close collaboration between villagers, experts, and government authorities. However, Qin Pu follows a similar line of thinking as Su Donghai in stressing a collaborative project structure based on initial government-led sponsorship and expert guidance, to launch and direct the project, and processual forms of community participation and engagement. Qin Pu (2013: 14) states:

The ecomuseum's key characteristic is local people's participation, and is one measure of success of the ecomuseum ... Hereafter, it is required for our long-term work to place more emphasis on the organization of local people's

participation (*dandi jumin canyu de zuzhi*), fully recognizing local people's true mobilization (*renmin zhenzheng de dongyuan*). Combined with them ultimately becoming the masters (*zhuren*) of the ecomuseum, the objective and mission of the ecomuseum to effectively protect (*baohu*) and pass on (inheritance) (*chuancheng*) local *minzu* culture will be achieved.

Even through this rhetorical prose local populations remain seen by Qin, as well as Su and other scholars and government leaders, as subordinate students to expert and government teachers. Thus, the articulated process of community “mobilization” and stages of “cultural consignment” may demonstrate a degree of community participation, it does little to decentralize the structure of authority driving ecomuseum development. According to my fieldwork across ten ecomuseums in southwest China, along with arguments from critics like Yin Shaoting, this is one primary reason why most ecomuseum projects see persistent disconnection between village residents and the project itself and more focused on extra-local agendas than the needs and interests of local populations. That being said, the Guangxi ecomuseum program does take the ecomuseum initiative in China one step further towards reaching a more collaborative project.

An important component of the recent ecomuseum program in Guangxi that exemplifies this move is the call for community involvement through the operation of the ecomuseum on the ground. This is seen through the hiring of local community members to be ecomuseum operators. This has introduced a new actor to the structure of the ecomuseum and has shifted the role of the “curator” of the ecomuseum project. As I demonstrate below, it is one way, as Bennett (1995) suggests, in breaking down the “monologic discourse dominated by the authoritative cultural voice of the museum”, e.g. how knowledge is produced, organized, and presented, and how local discourses on

heritage come through. The ecomuseum in Huaili, represents the first project in China to effectively integrate community operators into the framework of the project,²⁵² and consequently has seen a redirection of the project and the balance of power within the museum-community relationship.

Charting The Course Of Community Engagement in the Ecomuseum

Interaction between local populations and museums exists in different forms depending on the local context (Karp et al. 1992; 2006; Davis 1999). In considering the complex arrangements of multiple actors involved the ecomuseum in China, I detail the nature of community participation in project intervention and the implications this has for shaping the project and the local community. The following section pays particular attention to the process of ecomuseum development in Huaili and the ongoing power relations negotiated between involved actors. What comes through is how the ecomuseum has become as a “contact zone” (Clifford 1997), a powerful and contested site for exercises of agency and power. Over the course of its development, the social space of the ecomuseum enlivens nuanced forms of community response and engagement that are seen to alter the direction of the project and shape the intimate lives of involved actors.

Each of the different sets of actors involved in the Huaili Ecomuseum Project operate have particular attitudes, interests and agendas regarding the project. Here, I consider five

²⁵² Huaili is the the only project, so far, to have full-time community member ecomuseum staff. Suoga ecomuseum in Guizhou does have ecomuseum staff but they are not community members, rather hired and brought in by the Liuzhi Culture Bureau. The majority of ecomuseums in Guizhou and Guangxi are administered by county level cultural bureau officials, and village leaders living in the ecomuseum site are provided a small stipend to maintain the upkeep of the ecomuseum center and open its doors for visitors. Throughout Guangxi, with the exception of Huaili, no ecomuseum has full-time staff from the local community.

principal sets of actors in my examination of their interactions through the Huaili ecomuseum: 1) the Guangxi regional government representatives from the Guangxi Culture Bureau; 2) museum professionals from the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities and Chinese academics; 3) the county government, in particular the Nandan Culture and Sports Department (here after *Wentiju*); 4) ecomuseum staff; and 5) local Baiku Yao village residents.²⁵³ In assessing the objectives of each group of actors, I expose how the power relations between each group and their associated the possession and distribution of forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). Examining the course of ecomuseum development in Huaili, I expose how the unequal distribution and exertion of capital that enables and constrains different actors is structurally reproduced in the social space of the ecomuseum and reciprocally constitutes the power of the ecomuseum itself. This demonstrates that the social function of the ecomuseum should not be viewed in an “essentialist” way as fixed by the interests of the dominant authority, but understood as a shifting, unstable, and contingent social space (Huang 2001; Fyfe 1996). As we see through the case of Huaili, asymmetries between groups do exist and dominant groups do try to secure authority over subordinate groups. Yet, viewed as an ongoing process, ecomuseums signify a space in which *frictions* generated over the negotiation of claims to meaning and interpretation of identity and heritage and the practice of the ecomuseum work itself can result in the redirection of the cultural project.

²⁵³ Agendas of the national government also plays a role in the overall development of heritage management projects and museums in China. The broader state agenda is discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. Another important actor, introduced to Huaili ecomuseum development is the Hong Kong-based NGO that was conducting work in Lihu township from 2002. Although I do not provide a separate actor category for this NGO, its interaction with the ecomuseum, which began in 2008, and other actors will be discussed below.

Defining Agendas and Forging Relationships: 2004-2008

In the first years (November 2004 to August 2008) of ecomuseum development initiated through collaborative efforts between Guangxi regional government, Guangxi Museum for Nationalities (GXMN) museum professionals, Huaili village became a tourist destination and a research base. The newly erected ecomuseum center situated on the roadside overlooking the Baiku villages of HuaQiao, HuaTu and Manjiang became the tangible embodiment of the ecomuseum. Han urbanites and government leaders traversed the mountainous countryside of northern Guangxi to visit Huaili and experience the spectacle of Baiku Yao culture in Guangxi's first "ecomuseum". A small minority of village residents joined together to commercialize their culture for paying tourists through choreographed cultural performances at the ecomuseum center. Hired Baiku Yao operated the ecomuseum and attended to demands from county government superiors, who mediated upper-level government and museum professional requests and ecomuseum management on the ground.

It was clear from the ecomuseum's inception that government agencies and extra-local professionals were in charge of the project. In fact, it was believed that the ecomuseum could not come to fruition without government sponsorship and exert guidance (totaling 1.8 million RMB or \$290,000 for the ecomuseum center alone). Although "development" efforts culminated over this early period of ecomuseum construction in improving infrastructure and living conditions of the village and local population and building the ecomuseum center, community engagement and collaboration was not a focus of initial ecomuseum development. Villagers had little understanding of the meaning and significance of the ecomuseum project and as a result,

the majority of Huaili village residents remained peripheral to the ecomuseum, viewing it as a government project and “museum” center as a tourist space.

Regional Government Project Initiator: Guangxi Culture Bureau

The Guangxi Culture Bureau is the initiator of the ecomuseum program and key financial sponsor of ecomuseum projects throughout the region. As discussed in Chapter 3, without the call by the regional government to launch the program and instigate site selection and project construction, ecomuseums would not exist in Guangxi. The Guangxi Culture Bureau (*Wenhuating*), under the direction of Rong Xiaoning and Qin Pu, proposed the establishment of Huaili ecomuseum and nine other projects because it met several contemporary state objectives. These include creating “protected areas” where currently “thriving” ethnic cultures could be preserved, to establish work and research bases (*gongzuo zhan yu yanjiu jidi*) for the newly constructed Guangxi Museum for Nationalities and to further promote the scientific documentation of ethnic culture, and to address concerns of underdevelopment and poverty in rural ethnic minority communities (Rong 2006). The ecomuseum program aligned with the recent heritage craze in China, beginning at the turn of the 21st century, that incited a dramatic push to identify and select distinct sites and heritages for regions and localities across the nation. The ecomuseum was perceived by the regional government as a new initiative to expand the heritage discourse in Guangxi and satisfy the larger state cultural policy on multiculturalism, highlighting and preserving the value and distinctiveness of local tangible and intangible heritage through the scientific endeavor of the museum institution.

A fundamental component of the ecomuseum endeavor has been enhancing the social and economic development of ethnic communities (Qin Pu 2013; Rong 2006). Like the ecomuseum program in Guizhou, the Guangxi program is bound to the state ideology of economic development and modernization and has been applied as a new poverty alleviation strategy for rural locales. This is why ecomuseum construction has involved a component of “development” for each site, interpreted by government authorities as centered on infrastructure improvement and the building of a local economy based on untapped resources such as culture. The Guangxi Culture Bureau, drawing on financial support from county government agencies and outside investment have led this effort to help, according to Rong Xiaoning, to “resolve obstacles to survival and development problems” (*jiejue zhongda shengcun yu fazhan zhangai wenti*) in rural ethnic sites like Huaili.

Heritage Management Guidance: Museum Professionals and Experts

Work by the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities (GXMN) and its professional staff for the ecomuseum program is closely bound by agendas and initiatives set by the regional Guangxi government. Significant power is held by these museum professionals because of their close association with the regional government as a state institution,²⁵⁴ which often translates into their objectives being fixed and clearly defined and their work in ecomuseum development as a politically-laden exercise.

²⁵⁴ GXMN represents a main appendage of the Guangxi Culture Bureau under the Cultural Relics Bureau. It is a state museum formerly headed by the director of the Culture Relics Bureau and vice-director of the Guangxi Culture Bureau, Ms. Qin Pu.

Museum professionals and experts are also situated in a disciplinary agenda of salvage anthropology.²⁵⁵ Following a Baosian method, these actors aim to safeguard “treasures” from a vanishing past and categorize, label, and describe them in an anthropological fashion in the name of heritage preservation. This is done to both support the field of anthropology and the broader social sciences, and satisfy interests of the Chinese state in promoting cultural diversity and an ideology of multiculturalism. For the Guangxi ecomuseum “1+10” program, salvage anthropology was identified as a primary purpose for developing each ecomuseum project. Director Qin Pu stated to me in 2012 that, “considering how cultural loss was becoming more a reality in a modernizing China...local actors - government, experts, and community members - must record past and present ethnic cultural rituals, beliefs, and customs so it will be preserved through time and for future generations to reflect on”.

As specialists in the fields of anthropology, ethnology, archeology, and history, the GXMN team and outside academics have brought a sense of professionalism to the ecomuseum development and heritage protection process. Involving experts from the ground up in the construction of heritage projects like the ecomuseum has been a rubber stamp for authorizing the professional status of projects. It has also contributed to the identification of local heritage items to be preserved and exploited through the creation of new local cultural economies.²⁵⁶ In shaping the ecomuseum project and social processes of heritage-making and cultural production, experts hold considerable power. Their

²⁵⁵ See Gruber (1959) on a description of the tradition of salvage from the 19th century that has shaped the discipline of anthropology.

²⁵⁶ Through their work they have become the regulators of anthropological practice and theory and played a key role in defining what constitutes heritage as part of an “authorized heritage discourse” - “a professional discourse that privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and its material manifestations, and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices” (Smith 2006: 4).

cultural capital is tied to investment. Identification of distinct, endangered and still “thriving” cultures, and extending the concerns of cultural loss and economic disparity by Chinese experts has often resulted in receiving considerable regional and national attention and is a means to accrue and legitimize investment for research efforts and protective and development measures. In ecomuseum projects across southwest China, experts' decisions for the course of ecomuseum project development has significantly dictated how heritage is to be preserved and financial resources are used and distributed.

Local Administrators: Nandan County Government

From the first announcement that Nandan would be a future site for ecomuseum development in Guangxi, the county government has been keen and quick to acknowledge that its was buying into a new cultural enterprise proposed by the upper regional government, and an innovative international approach that would attract considerable attention and investment. Thus, while it has extended the agendas of the regional state government into the rural periphery through its support of the ecomuseum, it also pushed its own objectives of regional economic development. Hosting the implementation of China's newest museum form was a move to create its Nandan’s own legacy in cultural tourism and the heritage protection movement.

GXMN museum professionals and Guangxi Culture Bureau officials have led the implementation of the ecomuseum in Huaili, and the Nandan county, and specifically the Nandan Culture and Sports Bureau (*Wenhua Tiyu Ju*), here after *Wentiju*), has been the

main local government authority sponsoring and administering the project.²⁵⁷ The *Wentiju* vice-director, who also serves as director the ecomuseum project in Huaili, explained to me that local management of the ecomuseum is conducted through “two regulatory work units” (*ercheng danwei*) - the village ecomuseum and the county level government. He declares his role is the “coordination of upper and lower” levels (*shangxia de xietiao*). For ecomuseum work, all decisions go through *Wentiju* vice-director even though it represents its own work unit and is operated by hired ecomuseum staff. In addition to mediating county and local objectives through the ecomuseum project, the *Wentiju* vice-director navigates and often pays lip service to upper regional government and GXMN sanctions and proposals on ecomuseum work through their constant monitoring of the project.

Although the regional government and GXMN’s “education” work to create county-level comprehension of the concept and mission of the ecomuseum as a community participatory approach and a mechanism that strikes a “balance between heritage protection and economic development” (Rong 2006) has been received by the county, local authority interests have seen the construction of the ecomuseum more as an opportunity for tourism development and the institution in terms of the traditional museum paradigm. For county leaders, economic development through the exploitation of Baiku Yao cultural resources has superseded objectives of cultural conservation by

²⁵⁷ In addition to providing necessary matching funds above and beyond the regional government's allotment for the establishment of the ecomuseum center, different county government offices have provided investment for infrastructure development for Huaili. And, unlike other local governments hosting ecomuseum projects throughout Guangxi, the Nandan has allocated funds to sponsor the hiring of three full-time ecomuseum staff from the Baiku Yao community. Nandan county government's undivided support has been a key factor in the construction and “survival” (*shengcun*) of the ecomuseum project in Huaili.

regional government officials and GXMN museum professionals.²⁵⁸ In terms of museum work, county authorities have supported the maintenance and operation of the ecomuseum, but primarily as a traditional ethnographic museum project, focusing on visitor satisfaction, collection management of material culture, and research documentation of local Baiku Yao culture.²⁵⁹ The *Wentiju* vice-director explained his thoughts on the intricate relationship between cultural protection and development through the ecomuseum to me in 2008:

“for the ecomuseum, first is to fulfill the mission of protecting *minzu* culture, second is the possibility to combine cultural protection with tourism. Without combining them, local villagers cannot obtain tangible benefits (*debudao shihui*). Without this, there is no sense in protecting anything. If you protect and no one comes to see, then what is the use. They have not gained any advantage. In order for them to can obtain benefits, you have to give them the concept (*linian*) [of cultural exploitation]”.

Although the vice-director proclaims an interest in serving the local population, with a lack of attention by county authorities on implementing collaborative measures, community participatory initiatives, and opportunities for local decision-making over the project, the ecomuseum has turned into a county government project with higher

²⁵⁸ Over the course of ecomuseum development in Huaili, the *Wentiju* has focused increasingly on promoting revenue generation through the utilization of the resource of Baiku Yao culture. In an effort to “make something someone would come to see”, the *Wentiju* vice-director has assisted township and village leaders in the development of the Huaili Baiku Yao tourist cultural performance by organized cooperative meetings between performance developers and county expert choreographers to aid in the “professionalization” of the performance. The *Wentiju* has also publicized Baiku Yao performances outside of the county, and the vice-director became the main coordinator of Nandan Baiku Yao performances throughout Guangxi and China. (The performance tours he coordinated combined the participation of local Baiku Yao performers and performers from the Nandan county public service dance troupe (*gouwutuan*). His collaboration with deputy director Wei Ronghui of the China Ethnology Museum, in Beijing, who leads tours of ethnic minorities clad in ethnic minority dress, called “Colorful China”, also brought Huaili villagers, with his accompaniment, to France and the USA.) In collaboration with the county Tourism Bureau, the *Wentiju* organized the construction of an outside reception pavilion and parking area for tourists at the ecomuseum center, and promoted annual Baiku Yao Spring festival events in the township of Lihu, which drew large tourist crowds.

²⁵⁹ Since its inception, ecomuseum staff, led by vice-director and Baiku Yao resident of Manjiang village, Lu Chaojin, have conducted documentation of Huaili Baiku Yao culture. Their data collection is stored digitally as a computer database with written, audio recording, photographs, and video materials focusing on aspects of Baiku Yao culture ranging from oral myths and legend, song, and religious rituals to vernacular architecture and material culture.

emphasis on the needs of the tourism industry and visitors, than on the social and cultural needs of the local population (see Peters 2013).

Project Hosts: Huaili Baiku Yao Village Residents

When I inquired to regional and county government officials on how villagers were introduced to the proposed ecomuseum in the early years of project planning, they explained to me that a meeting was initially held with them to make its mission known. The meeting they spoke of was in fact, the ground breaking ceremony, discussed earlier in this study. Village households from the three ecomuseum villages and Huaili village were invited to attend the ceremony, putting a local face to the project for invited upper-level government and expert guests, and to hear government leaders make declarations on the construction of the project on the very land that had already begun to be excavated. While several villagers attended, many did not. One reason was due to unawareness. Another was because of refusal. The former village leader of HuaTu village told me, “other village representatives and myself from HuaTu did not attend the ceremony because we disapproved of the project”. He expressed that the government just came in, bought up their land, and began to erect a museum with no consent and little say on what the museum actually was it could bring to them. Other village leaders I spoke with from HuaQiao and Manjiang explained that they also felt uneasy for letting such a large-scale government project that they knew little about to be built on their soil. Nonetheless, their attendance at this ceremony and the following ecomuseum opening was a form of playing to the government's symbolic capital.

It is clear the ecomuseum in Huaili did not begin as a community-driven initiative. For many village residents, the ecomuseum is a government project that they did not even openly welcome. Initial planning and construction of the ecomuseum involved “local” consultation that only made it down as far at the county and township authorities. Local villagers, on the other hand, remained distant and marginalized. This lack of inclusion and engagement has exacerbated a sentiment among Baiku Yao villagers of skepticism towards such forms of foreign project intervention, in particular instated by the Chinese government. Many villagers expressed to me in 2008 and afterward the unfulfilled promise of the ecomuseum project and related it to other government initiatives that did not meet villager needs and expectations.²⁶⁰ More than a direct and explicit call for engagement, exertions of power, and decision-making opportunities, villagers expectations²⁶¹ drew largely from government officials' public announcements for ecomuseum construction. Attendees to the government-led ground breaking and opening ceremony of the ecomuseum told me that the project was explained to them as an initiative that would draw visitors and incite tourism development (*lyyou fazhan*) in Huaili. For villagers, the ecomuseum was perceived as a new economic opportunity to bring investment into the village and provide a well needed added income to their rural

²⁶⁰ One example of this is the government effort to allocate poverty subsidies for individual households, such as *dibao*, the “Minimum Living Standard Allowance” and *weifang gaizao*, funds for reconstruction of dilapidated and unsafe residences, and the water pipeline system from Lihu town center. Many villagers I spoke with feel short-changed, claiming that while government subsidies have entered the village, most subsidies do not reach poverty-stricken households because of state bureaucracy and local level corruption. One village of Huaili, down the mountain from the ecomuseum villages, considered one of the more prosperous villages by other Huaili villagers and also the hometown of the village Party secretary, received enough *weifang gaizao* funds to rebuild almost all the residences in the village using brick and concrete. Other villages throughout Huaili received much less attention for such funds.

²⁶¹ It is difficult to define the Baiku Yao communities' objectives in the development of the ecomuseum because of two main reasons: The project, from its inception, is considered by villagers as not their own. To state villagers' objectives for the ecomuseum would be under false pretenses and assume they are custodians or partial custodians of the project. Also, interests of community members are diverse, and outlining a list of objectives would incorrectly assume the community in Huaili as a homogenous entity.

life of subsistence. However, after the construction of the ecomuseum center and various infrastructure projects that they were not consulted on, little effort from extra-local actors was made to create mechanisms or community capacity for a local cultural economy. Thus, many villagers felt conflicted about the ecomuseum and embracing a state-led project without knowing if clear benefits exist for them and their village.

The needs and interests of Baiku Yao villagers in Huaili can best be understood as holding a general concern for social and economic improvement and well-being. For the Baiku Yao, these concerns plays precedence to extra-local efforts for local heritage conservation. The severity of living conditions in Huaili is the main focus of villagers. The Baiku Yao of Huaili are a farming community facing intense poverty.²⁶² It is only in the past decade that have many residents of Huaili slowly crept out of the grips of poverty through engagements in alternative forms of income generation. This has come from earning incomes outside of selling locally grown crops and vegetables and renting crop land from landowners in greater Nandan county by engaging in local business ventures in Lihu and Nandan and expanding efforts in the sale of livestock. But, most younger villagers have left Huaili, engaging in the internal migrant labor movement currently taking rural China by storm. When I raised questions on change to Huaili to village residents since the construction of the ecomuseum, most pointed to tangible benefits, such as infrastructure improvement and the development of the tourist performance troupe. They stressed that, in particular, the construction of the new pave road leading to Lihu township has created greater conveniences for villager access. The tourist cultural

²⁶² Most villagers live off of the fruit of their labor, growing rice and corn in far away fields, averaging between 1-3 *mu* per household (1/3 to 1/2 an acre). Collected data on villager incomes reveals an annual income of 2000-3000 RMB (\$330-\$495) per household. This is just about the poverty line established by the Chinese government of 2,300 RMB (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>).

performance troupe, too, was recognized as providing some form of income for village participants. Many villagers, however, stated that tourist performance was the only form of tourism development induced from ecomuseum and it had a very minimal impact with only involving just over 30 villager performers. Outside of the cultural performance, benefits of being exhibited ethnic spectacles for visiting tourists, as stated at the beginning of the chapter, have not always been seen through direct host-guest contacts.

Although villager residents do engage in daily practices of cultural inheritance, i.e. dress-making, wine-making, bronze drum playing, wedding and funeral ceremonies, and religious rituals, they claim their lives of subsistence leaves little time to engage actively and collaboratively in heritage management as proposed through the ecomuseum initiative. Extra-local actors argue that the lack of community involvement is based on a community disinterest to participate and an unawareness of the importance of the the ecomuseum project by villagers. Indeed a heritage project that calls for community engagement, can only come to fruition when both an effort to put in place mechanism to induce community participation is made and the local population has a reason to be involved. However, from its inception the ecomuseum initiative has clearly not been built on forms of social inclusion and community engagement, or consultation, that has resulted in a greater divide between the local population and the project.²⁶³

²⁶³ The naming of the ecomuseum exemplifies a failure to consider the local community in project planning. With the declared title, “Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum”, it was clear to villagers that the ecomuseum was not their own. There was no reference to the place identity of Huaili, referred to as *Veli* in Yao language and the use of “Baiku Yao”, over the locally used term *dounou*, represented a state contrived *minzu* classification ascribed to them. From its very name, the ecomuseum was seen by villagers as a form of extra-local intervention and a state-sponsored endeavor that did not symbolize an initiative for the local population.

Project Operators: Ecomuseum Staff

Although clear efforts were not made to engage the local population as a whole in the initial stages of ecomuseum project development, the Guangxi Culture Bureau and GXMN did advance, with the support of the Nandan county government, a managerial structure that called for hiring of Baiku Yao community members as ecomuseum operators in Huaili. According to Qin Pu, by incorporating community members into the managerial operation of the ecomuseum a link between the ecomuseum and village residents could be created.

Lu Chaojin was first hired in 2005. A college educated man from Manjiang village, and former school teacher and principal, he was working as a vice-township leader in Lihu when his home of Huaili was selected as a future ecomuseum site. Guangxi Museum for Nationalities vice-director Wu Weifeng, a trained anthropologist specializing on Guangxi *minzu*, was leading the on-the-ground ecomuseum construction process with other professionals, and he met Lu Chaojin when he requested township leaders assistance in the project. Recognizing both Lu Chaojin's knowledge of Baiku Yao culture and rural life and interest in assisting project development, Wu Weifeng spoke to Lu on working at the ecomuseum and requested the Nandan county *Wentiju* to hire him as a formal ecomuseum employee. Shortly afterward, he was given the title of vice-director of the ecomuseum.

The following year two female Baiku Yao from Baxu county and Lihu township were hired as ecomuseum *jiangjieyuan*, or guides. Their main role was to facilitate tourism in hosting visiting tourists and government leaders frequenting the ecomuseum, offering explanations of Baiku Yao culture and providing guided tours of the ecomuseum

center exhibition and ecomuseum villages. In discussions with the two female staff, they stated they took the position at the ecomuseum because it meant a job fresh out of college and nearby their hometowns. Over the course of working in Huaili, the job's public service aspect of community development and cultural conservation and inheritance, in particular supporting their Baiku Yao culture, became a motivating factor for continuing their work.²⁶⁴

Although having no experience or training in museum development, heritage conservation, or social work, ecomuseum staff worked to perform the duties required by the county *Wentiju* and GXMN. Outside of basic ecomuseum center operation, their work focused on cultural documentation. Memoranda on ecomuseum work and funds sent from GXMN museum professionals²⁶⁵ called from staff to establish a research base for a “memory project”. Ecomuseum staff worked together to build an archive of collected data on Baiku Yao culture of Huaili, with Lu Chaojin leading the project due to his greater understanding of different aspects of his Baiku Yao culture and his strong rapport with local Huaili villagers.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Although they complained to me that their salary has remained low (now approximately \$200 per month), their work was expressed as rewarding.

²⁶⁵ Annually memoranda are sent from GXMN to the Nandan *Wentiju* and delivered to ecomuseum staff clear stating the required work of the ecomuseum, stressing field research and data collection and documentation of local culture, outlining different characteristics of collected data, e.g. oral culture, music and song, crafts, rituals, etc., building a resource archive, and composing written evaluations of project results. Financial support accompanies this memorandum in the way of 15,000 RMB (approximately \$2500). The county government also allocates 20,000 RMB (approximately \$3200) per year for museum operation costs, including water, electricity, maintenance, etc., which is beyond the salary of three ecomuseum staff.

²⁶⁶ Using audio recorders, cameras, and video recording equipment sponsored by the Nandan county government and GXMN funds, ecomuseum staff built a sizable database of collected materials focusing primarily on intangible culture, for example on oral folklore, the process of Baiku Yao dress-making, marriage and funeral ritual ceremonies, and wedding, funeral, and love songs. Lu Chaojin became so proficient in Huaili's Baiku Yao culture, that he became recognized as a “local expert” (*dangdi zhuanjia*) and was often called upon to explain Baiku Yao culture to upper government leaders, visiting scholars, and television crews and journalists coming to Huaili to publicize Baiku Yao culture and the

Ecomuseum Baiku Yao staff occupy an ambiguous position as both “insiders” and “outsiders” in Huaili (see Hampshire et al. 2005). Raised in Baiku Yao villages, brought up speaking Baiku Yao language in the home, and identified as Yao on their Chinese *hukou*, they all personally identified themselves as part of the Baiku Yao community. Their “insider” status has grown with their rise in social capital in Huaili by way of building rapport with local Baiku Yao and acquiring a deeper understanding of local cultural practices and customs and local rural livelihoods. However, they are set apart from the local Huaili community, who also ascribe them a form of “outsider” status. Although Lu Chaojin is seen as a local from Huaili, the two female staff are not from Huaili, they do not wear Baiku Yao clothing on a daily basis, like most female Baiku Yao in Huaili, and are highly educated.²⁶⁷ Moreover, they and Lu Chaojin, are paid government employees of the ecomuseum. Villagers I spoke with about their relationship with ecomuseum staff emphasized that they knew who they were, had seen them at the ecomuseum center hosting visitors, and in the village itself. But, they also referred to them as the only Baiku Yao really receiving any tangible benefit from the ecomuseum. Ecomuseum staff's close interaction with visiting tourists and government leaders and research conducted in the village is seen by villagers as forms of distinction.

The dual positionality of ecomuseum staff has certainly affected forms of engagement by the local community in the ecomuseum project. “Inside status” of staff did make a difference in a being able to create a social network of relations with villagers

ecomuseum.

²⁶⁷ Most Baiku Yao female village residents of Huaili over the age of 25 wear hand-made pleated batik skirts. Many older women also wear a batik and embroidered blouse. Similar to women in other ethnic minority populations in China (see Postiglione 1999; Hansen 1999), Baiku Yao women schooling levels are lower than men and most women I spoke with over the age of 30 in Huaili are illiterate. Those women with some form of education, often did not reach middle school or high school levels (vocational school is sometimes an alternative to high school), let alone college and university.

that has assisted in their work, such as conversing with villagers on daily life, interests, concerns, and current affairs, conducting research on local culture, making announcements on ecomuseum activities, and coordinating villagers for tourist cultural performances. (Of course, being native speakers of Baiku Yao language has played an integral part in their ability to conduct such work.) However, as ecomuseum staff remain under the administration of the Nandan *Wentiju*, their work has been focused on performing duties proscribed by this local government authority. Without declarations by the local government and the regional GXMN to integrate a participatory approach to their ecomuseum work, ecomuseum staff have maintained a clear “outsider” status in terms of their work at the ecomuseum.²⁶⁸

My first visit to Huaili in 2008 provides one example of the complicated relationship between village residents and ecomuseum staff. I arrived in Huaili in the summer, at the same time as a group of college students from Shanghai studying organic textiles. On our first day at the ecomuseum, one of the female staff members, Li Xia, offered to show us around the three ecomuseum villages of Manjiang, HuaQiao and HuaTu. I waked with Li Xia into HuaQiao village with the group of college students close behind dressed in vibrant red and white jumpsuits holding a large red flag branding their schools name and insignia. Li Xia explained the construction of the adobe homes, the forms of subsistence of the Baiku Yao, and introduced the surrounding biodiversity. We also met a young woman working outside her home in the daylight sun on some embroidery and Li Xia explained the time consuming process of dress making as she pointed to the intricacies of the woman's work while students continued taking countless photographs. Li Xia led us

²⁶⁸ Lack of training from the county and GXMN has also made it particularly difficult for ecomuseum staff to attempt to introduce community engagement techniques in Huaili.

further into the village, and a distance away from us a middle aged Baiku Yao man began to holler in Baiku Yao language. The closer we got to him along the narrow dirt path his yelling grew louder and his tone more agitated. Then a rock landed near my foot. And, another flew past us grazing the side of red waving flag. Li Xia stopped immediately, and told us to turn around immediately and return the way we came. Rocks thrown from the man continued to land around us as we left the village. As we walked with Li Xia to the large village of Huaili, she explained it was market day on Lihu, held on dates with 3, 6, and 9 (such as the 13th, 26th, etc.), and the man was drunk. The man's reaction to us, stirred Li Xia to express her feelings facing the ecomuseum and the community since the ecomuseum was established:

“The most important problem now is that villagers have not been involved (*meiyou canyu*)... we have a performance troupe but only those villagers that participate in the troupe see any form of money from tourism, it is only a select few.... When visitors come into the village and take photos of them, they are not happy. Visitors have become so many, villagers ask for money if their photo is taken, but visitors don't give any money, and villagers get upset and sometimes hit their cameras Their is really no tourism development here.... For many villagers, they feel the government has used them for publicity, and have made money off them, giving no benefit to them. Sometimes villagers also scold us [ecomuseum staff] as traitors (*beipanzhe*).... Another problem is that most villagers have no idea of what the museum is. The museum is an outside concept and is introduced to the villagers using Mandarin (*han yu*), not in their native language. What is a museum? Who knows?”

In the beginning of ecomuseum project development, the imbalances of power relations to the control of resources and forms of exhibition was clear (Waterton and Watson 2007: 4). During the planning and construction stage of ecomuseum development, local township and village leaders were present, but a democratic process of decision-making was not enforced. Rather, it was regional and county government officials and experts who dictated the definition of the project and its mission, and project

construction and operation. The fact that the Huaili ecomuseum began as a government/expert-led initiative with a lack of consultation and engagement of the community has remained an underlining cause for a disconnected community-ecomuseum relationship. Although some scholars would argue that because the ecomuseum in Huaili is not a grassroots project and has not been community-driven, lacking considerable community involvement, that it is “completely un-ecomuseological” (Hauenschild 1988). To make such a claim for the onset of the project is justified. Closer examination of the evolution of the ecomuseum through its development, however, reveals sometimes a much more complicated.

Reframing the Role of the Ecomuseum: 2008-2013

Between 2003 and 2008, Huaili witnessed an onslaught of public and government attention. In the making of the ecomuseum, new relationships were forged between upper-level regional government organs and technocrats and Nandan county government, between village residents and local leaders, government agencies at different levels, and among village residents themselves. After a period of government-led initiatives including the construction of the ecomuseum center, museumification of the three ecomuseum villages, village infrastructure improvement, and basic operation by ecomuseum staff also involving cultural documentation practices, the ecomuseum project began to experience a reorientation of contact relations in the summer of 2008.

Ecomuseum staff, as the local mediator of ecomuseum development and involved actor relations, shifted the course of ecomuseum by introducing new participatory heritage initiatives in Huaili. They took it upon themselves to change the direction of the project

to address concerns facing the community and to encourage communication and collaboration between the ecomuseum and Baiku Yao villagers.²⁶⁹ This section explores the various community heritage initiatives they introduced and how this contributed to remaking the ecomuseum.

Baiku Yao Cultural Inheritance Class (Baiku Yao Wenhua Chuancheng Ban)

Over the course of his documentation work in Huaili, Lu Chaojin realized that the younger generations of Baiku Yao lacked knowledge on their own local culture. “I saw that many girls and boys knew little of our cultural customs and practices and had not heard the folk stories I listened to from elders when I was a boy ... that is part of our who we are”, he said. Reflecting on issues of cultural loss and forms of “cultural inheritance” (*wenhua chuancheng*) compounded by a growing feeling that the ecomuseum had little relation to the local community, Lu Chaojin began to reassess his work and the function of the ecomuseum in Huaili. At the same time Lu Chaojin began investigating different community education and heritage management approaches and techniques in China, his fellow staff member, Li Xia, had become involved with a Hong Kong-based NGO working in Lihu township on eco-agriculture and sustainable development. Li Xia had begun work with the NGO to assist in offering a night class for illiterate Baiku Yao women in the nearby Wang Shang village. After seeing the progress of the class, the NGO proposed developing the class further to incorporate aspects of cultural heritage education. Li Xia became enamored in developing the initiative and spoke with Lu Chaojin who had already begun to develop and plan to. When the NGO learned of Li Xia

²⁶⁹ See Perkins (2010) on a similar case on the community heritage project of Bendigo.

and Lu Chaojin's strong interest in introducing a community heritage educational project in Huaili through the ecomuseum, it decided to fund both of them to visit a similar project they had sponsored in a village in Dali, Yunnan province to understand the dimensions of the project. Upon their return, they developed a proposal to promote the education of Baiku Yao culture for local youth, and to create a setting where children could learn from knowledgeable members of the Huaili community.

In conversations with Lu Chaojin he said, "before our work was recording Baiku Yao culture, the protection of the village, and welcoming visitors, and that was it... now, I believe *cultural inheritance* is an integral and necessary part of our ecomuseum work ... work to conduct with the community villagers". With the support of the Huaili and Lihu Primary Schools and assistance by his friend and school teacher Mr. He, the ecomuseum staff launched the Baiku Yao Culture Inheritance Class in the Fall semester of 2008 with a single class of students held after school.²⁷⁰ Baiku Yao students were taught different aspects of local culture, such as ethnic dress making, the bronze drum, music, and folklore led by Lu Chaojin and teacher He. The curriculum also incorporated "in-village" class sessions in which volunteer village elders, called local "artisans" (*yiren*), taught students on a variety of topics they were knowledgeable of (see Fig. 30). These elders happily expressed to me that these classes were "the first time in a long time that they

²⁷⁰ Lu Chaojin initially went to the vice-director of the *Wentiju* in Nandan county, and presented his proposed project of a "Culture Inheritance Class". However, he was met with no support. Definitive reasons remain unclear as to why the *Wentiju* did not support the project initially. Yet, over my fieldwork it became increasingly clear that projects that involved an intangible element were not initially financially supported by the Chinese government. Tangible projects such as the building of pig pens for sanitation, restoration of village granaries, and the establishment of a village model home exhibit on intangible cultural heritage of Baiku Yao dress, however, were funded. In a later switch of *Wentiju* leaders in 2012, the new vice-director made it clear in meetings with ecomuseum staff, which I attended, that only after initiating the Cultural Inheritance Class and showing clear results over a (undetermined) preliminary period, would he consider providing funds for the purchase of necessarily educational equipment.

were able to retell oral legends and folklore and help younger generations learn about *dounou* cultural traditions”.²⁷¹

The course curriculum also integrated a research element for students. In discussing with students questions related to Baiku Yao folklore and cultural customs, ecomuseum staff and teacher He requested students get answers from their parents and relatives for homework. Some young parents approached Lu Chaojin later asking why he was sending their children home with such questions, expressing that they felt awkward in not being able to answer them. Because children could not receive answers from their young parents, they went to their grandparents. What began as an exploratory assignment for youth cultural awareness and education turned into a cultural dialogue on cultural practice and knowledge involving the whole family. Youth also learned that their elders held the key to unlock such answers, and consequently led to expressions of greater respect in elders holding the power of knowledge. In addition to such assignments, students were also put into small groups to conduct a research project on a topic of their choice on Baiku Yao culture, involving the collection of information by interviewing

²⁷¹ According to well-known Huaili storyteller Li Mincai who was an apprentice to two masters for over ten years, the inheritance class is a new but effective means to begin to remedy the decline in Baiku Yao singers. He states, “before there were many of us who studied story-telling and singing (for weddings). Now youth don’t study. There is not so much need these days for singers... the need for singers to reside over the ceremony and gift exchange, which has become more simplified, has declined with the decrease in number of who knows how to sing”. The process of training for singing and storytelling is described by Li Mincai as follows: After apprentices have spent considerable time listening to the master sing, learning different folklore and styles of singing, intonation, and rhythm, the apprentice will be called on to sing himself. The master will introduce a story through song, and apprentices are called on to add to the story through their acquired knowledge of the folktale. If an apprentice does not respond (in a form of call and response) to the teachers initial verse, then the next apprentice will be called on to sing. The core story of the folktale cannot be changed, but singers can add or change aspects of the story details. Apprentices customarily pay for training in the form of gifts of foodstuff, such as wine and cigarettes, to their maters. No money is exchanged. Today, according to Li Mincai, only four younger villagers across Huaili villages are proficient in singing folklore.

family members and village elders. At the end of the semester, each group displayed their project to the class and at an end of the year assembly to the entire school.



Figure 26. Baiku Yao Culture Inheritance Class in-village class (Courtesy of Nandan Lihu Baiku Yao Ecomuseum 2009).

What began as an experiment in 2008, developed into a two classes at the Huaili primary school and two classes at the Lihu primary school for the next three years. The Hong Kong-based NGO working Lihu assisting in providing financial support for project materials and sponsored formal training sessions for local teachers, and working with ecomuseum staff to develop a standardized Baiku Yao culture inheritance course curriculum. Most recently, the curriculum has been brought to the county Education Bureau to establish a government approved primary and secondary school curriculum on Baiku Yao culture.²⁷²

²⁷² The class has yet to be approved by the Education Bureau and become integrated as an elective in the formal school curriculum. Importantly, acquiring government approval from the Education Bureau would provide financial assistance to local teachers of the course, and would make the course sustainable. A similar approach was taken in collaboration with this NGO in a previous project in Yunnan province.

The inheritance class and these initiatives helped to stimulate cultural awareness and a sense of cultural pride among youth and community members. Students' encounters with village elders through the course has led to some children to approach elders outside of the classroom requesting to be their apprentice, such as from Li Xiaoming, a master bamboo flute player. Many students have also continuing learning wooden top spinning outside of the class under the guidance of primary school teacher Mr. He, who created a top spinning youth troupe in 2011 which has been invited to perform at cultural events in Nandan and Nanning. For ecomuseum staff the initial success of the culture inheritance class acted as a springboard to develop more community participatory activities.

Baiku Yao Folk Culture Protection and Development Association (Baiku Yao Minsu Wenhua Baohu yu Fazhan Xiehui)

In 2008 and 2009, Lu Chaojin started to discuss with ecomuseum staff, local teachers, and fellow Baiku Yao county officials Hua Mingjin and Li Shizhong the idea of creating a Baiku Yao association. Lu Chaojin told me that the idea grew from a feeling to create a social network of Baiku Yao across China and, more specifically, from an attempt to engage more Baiku Yao in the improvement and expansion of the Baiku Yao Culture Inheritance Class project. Collaborators of the project composed a proposal to host the first Baiku Yao association meeting at the ecomuseum in 2010. Funds were acquired by township and county government culture offices in Nandan and Libo and village and township Baiku Yao leaders and villagers, ritual practitioners, and local scholars from across northwest Guangxi and southern Guizhou came to attend. As the first time a formal meeting was offered to build a social network of Baiku Yao in China, participants

were adamant in discussing multiple aspects of Baiku Yao culture and ideas on how to promote Baiku Yao cultural inheritance (*wenhua chuancheng*). This and other meeting culminated in the establishment of the “Baiku Yao Folk Culture Protection and Development Association”.

On April 15, 2011, an inaugural meeting was held for the official declaration of association as a registered “civic institution” (*minjian tuanti*).²⁷³ Over 100 association members were in attendance and confirmed their association mission to “protect, develop, and promote the cultural inheritance of Baiku Yao culture”. The initial work proposed by the association was supporting efforts towards developing the Cultural Inheritance Class in Lihu, enhancing the research of Baiku Yao culture by local villagers and experts, and developing new methods for retaining certain cultural heritage practices, such as the growing of indigo and cotton for Baiku Yao dress making.²⁷⁴ Lu Chaojin explained to me that the association had been the impetus for a renewed interest in Baiku Yao culture: “After I launched the project, so many teachers and local leaders across Baiku Yao society came to me and stated to me how Baiku Yao culture has so many fascinating things about it. One teacher stated emphatically to me, “I want to learn about this and that... if you don't do it, I will go and conduct research and write it myself”. So, this

²⁷³ As an independent “civic/popular institution”, or “non-government organization” without its anti-government connotation, this does not mean they are outside the bounds of government control (see White et al 1996: 210-211). In the case of the Baiku Yao Association, its work is sponsored by a grant from the Nandan county government.

²⁷⁴ One example of the association's initial work is collaboration with the ecomuseum, to record traditional Baiku Yao songs and folklore. Baiku Yao skilled elders and ritual practitioners, from across Nandan were called upon to participate for a three day recording session on involving the singing of wedding and funeral songs, accompanied by in-depth descriptions. Data collected from this activity has become an important part of a larger project by the association to compose a book volume series on Baiku Yao culture and history, composed by Lu Chaojin and eight Baiku Yao local “experts”. The first part of the series is expected to be published later this year, 2014, and represents the first comprehensive study by Baiku Yao authors on Baiku Yao culture.

project has been very important for people to discover and learn about their culture”. Furthermore, the Baiku Yao association represents a new social organization that can assist in ecomuseum work and development, with the ecomuseum as a hub for its continued work.

Youth Volunteer Cultural Experience Project (Qingnian Zeyuanzhe Wenhua Tiyan Huodong)

Another initiative that has been developed to expand the Baiku Yao social network and the ecomuseum's new focus on cultural heritage education has been the Youth Volunteer Cultural Experience Project. In mid-fall 2010, Li Xia and Lu Chaojin, using the internet service now available at the ecomuseum, accessed the online “Baiku Yao People” (*baiku yao ren*) forum set up by a Baiku Yao university student in Guangxi on the popular internet-based social network called “QQ”. They decided to post a proposal to attract Baiku Yao youth to the Huaili ecomuseum to participate in a cultural program led by ecomuseum staff. They received over 20 high school and university student applicants the first year. According to Lu Chaojin, the program “brings students from a common ethnic background from across Guangxi and Guizhou together, and promotes cross-cultural learning and youth’s understanding of their Baiku Yao cultural heritage” (personal conversation 15 July 2010). Through hands-on educational activities, visiting Baiku Yao youth learned more about Baiku Yao folklore, dress-making, and other cultural customs. They also developed close relationships with each other and engaged in rich discussions on similarities and differences of Baiku Yao traditions across Guangxi and Libo, Guizhou

province.²⁷⁵ The program has continued each year since its inception and many youth have come back to Huaili to assist in local cultural events, like the Lunar New Year festivities discussed below. In 2011, Lu Chaojin adamantly explained to me, that “through projects like the youth program Baiku Yao youth *really* have become “masters” (*zhuren*) of their culture. Not by being taught, but in a devoted effort to change and bring back the importance of their culture”.

Lunar New Year Cultural Events

With a dual purpose of providing a social space of enjoyment during the winter holiday season and to narrow the distance between the ecomuseum and the village community, ecomuseum staff decided to host a Lunar New Year cultural event at the ecomuseum center that complemented the larger Lihu township festival. Unlike in Lihu, ecomuseum staff were keen to hold a cultural event that was specifically for the Baiku Yao local community. Oral announcements were made throughout Huaili village and villagers from the surrounding natural villages came to the ecomuseum center, some for the first time, to engage in fun activities including wood top hitting, female embroidery, and arm wrestling. The 2010 event represented a break with previous years in which the ecomuseum center laid dormant during the Lunar New Year and seen as distinct from village resident’s lives. For the first time, the ecomuseum center became a space not for tourist and government activity, but for the local Baiku Yao community itself.

The ecomuseum also connected itself to the larger township-wide Baiku Yao

²⁷⁵ Ecomuseum staff assisted students to contact their respective home county and township culture offices and acquire funds to support travel and living expenses for the program. The ecomuseum provided accommodations.

community in promoting and partially sponsoring the Lihu township Lunar New Year cultural festival.²⁷⁶ Attracting a Baiku Yao from across the township and the county of Nandan, the cultural event was focused more on providing entertainment for local residents. Baiku Yao villagers actively participated in a variety of cultural activities, such as rifle marksmanship, cock fighting, bird fight singing, elder singing contests, and handmade dress viewing and competitions. The popular township event also provided a means to exhibit large signs filled with student projects from the Cultural Inheritance Class, display the Baiku Yao Huaili cultural performance from Huaili, as well as present video documentaries on aspects of Baiku Yao culture composed by the ecomuseum and local community members.

Community Digital Heritage

With new video recording equipment supplied by the the *Wentiju* and Hong Kong-based NGO, ecomuseum staff started to focus on composing video footage of Baiku Yao customs and practices in Huaili to complement their cultural documentation project. Instead of capturing just still moments of a cultural practice, ritual, or an event, video documentation as a new methodology allowed them to capture living and moving aspects of Baiku Yao intangible cultural heritage and a more extensive portrayal of Baiku Yao culture and its preservation as digital heritage (Cameron and Kenderdine 2007; Hennessy 2012). Video recording also provoked a vehicle to create a more intimate relationship between ecomuseum staff and the local population of Huaili. Videography

²⁷⁶ Sponsors of the event, that has been held every year since 2010 and a few times prior under a different township party secretary, were the Lihu government, the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities, Huaili Ecomuseum, and the Hong Kong-based NGO.

created both a distance and closeness between staff and villagers in terms of a physical division of those conducting the viewing and those being viewed and brought them together by creating greater dialogue and an enhancement of understanding of both of their work. If staff conducted such work with respect and consideration for the local population and the activity or scene to be captured, the latter positive side of digital heritage came through.

In 2010, the Guangxi Museum for Nationalities held an ecomuseum documentation training workshop that significantly changed the focus of cultural documentation in Huaili ecomuseum. Lu Wendong, current GXMN director of the 1+10 Ecomuseum Program and specialist in video documentation, decided to integrate a participatory research approach to cultural documentation. Attendees across the ten Guangxi ecomuseums, including two Huaili ecomuseum staff and Lu Chaoming, a young Manjiang Baiku Yao villager, came to participate in the workshop held at Rongjiang Ecomuseum, in central Guangxi, and learned techniques in audio visual documentation and compose small film projects over the training period. For the three attendees from Huaili, this workshop contributed to their experience from the previously year in which they attended the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival, or YunFest (*Yun Zhi Nan*).²⁷⁷ YunFest acted as an important stepping stone for them to learn about professionalizing their documentation and to see how film could be used by villagers to document their own culture.

²⁷⁷ YunFest is a film festival for independent documentaries on China sponsored by BAMA Mountain Culture Research Institute under the supervision of the Yunan Academy of Social Sciences. Many of the films shown at the festival are produced by Chinese villagers.

Twenty-six year old Lu Chaoming first became involved with the ecomuseum project as a performer in the tourist performance troupe. He lived in Manjiang village with his wife and two boys and identifies himself on the lower end of village community poverty.²⁷⁸ As a man often curious in the happenings at the ecomuseum center and interested in conversing with outsiders, he one day stopped at the center to attend a workshop for villagers on eco-agriculture held by the Hong Kong-based NGO. In offering his assistance, the NGO program officer asked if he could help in video recording the workshop. What began as a moment of courtesy, turned into a growing desire to document his culture and produce films. Although he faced hardships in providing for his family, he found time to come to the ecomuseum center to borrow the video recorder and to improve his production skills from the more experienced ecomuseum staff. Opportunities to attend the YunFest and Rongjiang documentation training workshop, motivated him compose his first film, entitled “Zhanggao Shu”, or “zhanggao tree”.²⁷⁹ This was followed by two other short films on a Baiku Yao funeral service and the restoration of granaries in Huaili. His first film was later presented at YunFest in 2013 and the Guangxi Documentary Film Festival hosted by the Guangxi

²⁷⁸ Lu Chaoming's family is poorer than most in Manjiang. He lives in an adobe home surrounded by neighbors with newly built brick, multi-story houses, and his family continues to collect government minimum living allowance, or *dibao*, while he manages small plots of land growing rice and corn and raise a few pigs. His sisters married off and his two brothers live outside of Huaili - one a migrant laborer in Shenzhen, and the other farming with his family in the nearby village of Gaozeng. His father, who even at the age of 60 continues to work as a migrant laborer for different jobs throughout Guangxi. With the small amount of money coming from his father and his work in the fields providing staple food for his family, Lu uses his motorcycle to make extra income taxing people around Lihu. His poverty was especially pronounced considering Manjiang has become the most prosperous of the three ecomuseum villages in Huaili. In my surveys on household income, Manjiang villagers made the highest out of the three villages and also had the least number of villagers collecting *dibao*. Primary reasons for this was most villagers were earning incomes from migrant labor. Another indicator of wealth, was form of residence of villagers (see below for details).

²⁷⁹ The film follows Manjiang elder Gu Piathon conducting the arduous work of extracting wax from the zhanggao tree, that is later used for the batik in dress-making of Baiku Yao clothing.

Museum for Nationalities, where he won the top film award across 30 film presentations. With his expressed spirit in documentation and diligence in improving his filmmaking aptitude, Lu Chaoming has become a representative of how the local community has begun to be engaged in both the ecomuseum project and activities of local cultural documentation. This is articulated clearly by Lu Chaoming himself when interviewed at the Guangxi documentary film festival stating that in his work to document Baiku Yao culture he hopes to “use some of his power to further the inheritance of his *minzu* culture”. And, it is shown in a statement he made to me in 2012 on how he equated his work with the ecomuseum with assisting his own community: “I think to help the museum to do things is also to help my *minzu* to do things”.

It is important to note that the video documentation workshop and film festival event represented a new push by GXMN to promote the development of ecomuseum work for projects throughout Guangxi. This effort was led by GXMN’s Lu Wendong. Although he agreed with his GXMN predecessors in maintaining the regional state museum’s facilitatory role in ecomuseum development across Guangxi, Lu believed ecomuseum projects were failing to produce tangible products and to engage local populations. Using GXMN’s overseeing power on the ecomuseum program, he employed the workshop and annual film festival at GXMN as a stimulus for each ecomuseum project to produce video documentaries on local cultural heritage and life for public display. This also led to greater pressure on local community involvement in this initiative, seen specifically through the case in Huaili.²⁸⁰ For Lu Wendong, the documentary film festival also

²⁸⁰ Lu Wendong and I discussed with ecomuseum staff the development of new participatory initiatives. With his focus on cultural documentation, Lu Wendong pushed the method of videography and pointed to the important role Lu Chaoming had already played. With assistance by Li Xia and Lu Chaoming we

marked an important opportunity in establishing a stronger network of ecomuseums in Guangxi and create cross-cultural dialogue on a common theme.²⁸¹

After the film festival at GXMN in early 2013, in which Huaili ecomuseum presented the most films out of any ecomuseum in Guangxi, ecomuseum staff and current ecomuseum vice-director, Li Xia, decided to draw on decisions with Lu Wendong and myself on participatory digital heritage and take video documentation in Huaili in a new direction. She took the initiative to convene a video documentation training workshop for Baiku Yao community villagers attracting the participation of ten villagers from Huaili and surrounding villages in Lihu, including Badi, Yaoli, and Wang Shang. Li Xia, other ecomuseum staff, and Lu Chaoming drew on their experience and skills in film production to lead the training of villagers. In my ongoing conversations with Li Xia and Lu Chaoming over the course of 2013, Baiku Yao community videographers have worked with them to compose 16 short video documentaries, which will be shown at the 2014 GXMN Documentary Film Festival.

prepared a film screening in the ecomuseum village in the winter of 2012 to display documentaries by ecomuseum staff and Lu Chaoming. Over 100 villagers, young and old, attended the event. After the screening, Lu Chaoming and Li Xia explained their films and their feelings regarding video documentation of Baiku Yao culture and introduced our collaborative decision to make cameras and video recording equipment available to village residents to share ethnographic authority (see Hennessey 2012: 36).

²⁸¹ This effort overlapped in many ways with a forum and roundtable discussion Lu Wendong designed at GXMN one year earlier in 2011. The forum brought together administrators and operators from each of the ten ecomuseums in Guangxi to introduce their work so far, engage in a dialogue over prospective work approaches, and learn from invited academics on different approaches of ecomuseum development and participatory development in China and worldwide. Those museum professionals and scholars invited to present for the forum included Cao Bingwu, editor-in-chief of Cultural Relics journal and community member of the National Commission on Ecomuseum and Community Museum Construction, Pan Shouyong, professor of museum studies and anthropology at Central University for Nationalities and also committee member of the commission, and the author. Cao and Pan presented on the ecomuseum concept and ecomuseum projects in China, specifically new projects they were involved in Fujian, Anji, Anhui, and Shanxi. The author presented on worldwide ecomuseum projects and approaches to community participation and participatory research.

Dress-making Workshop

When nineteen year old Xiao Wang heard the ecomuseum was recruiting participants for the tourist cultural performance troupe after moving to Manjiang from the nearby village of Badi as a married woman, she jumped at the opportunity. She quickly became a lead dancer among female performers and was often called on to orate the cultural performance. Her work at the ecomuseum center also opened a new door to her through work with the Hong Kong-based NGO working Lihu. Under the guidance of ecomuseum staff Li Xia, Xiao Wang received a paid internship in 2012 under a joint project with the NGO and Guangxi University for Nationalities to assist in the operation of the ecomuseum and conduct community development work in Huaili.²⁸²

Six months after starting the internship, Xiao Wang received a small grant to conduct a community-based project in Lihu she developing on the inheritance of Baiku Yao dress-making (*baiku yao fushi chuancheng*). The project consisted of hosting an informal in-village class for Baiku Yao youth on dress-making at both her mother and husband's aunt's home, both recognized as very skilled dress makers in Lihu. By going around each village - Manjiang and Badi - and telling female villagers that she was getting women and children together to make clothing “so that children can have a better opportunity to learn”, she received a over ten attendees on the first meeting, and double that on the second. When I spoke with Xiao Wang on her intentions for the project she explained that, “this is not a project with a clear outcome or goal to be reached. Young girls now attend school and have little opportunity to learn our Baiku Yao tradition of dress-making. This

²⁸² Xiao Wang also assisted me in household surveys in Huaili to gain experience and improve her capability in conducting in fieldwork data collection methods for her own work.

[project] is more about awareness and providing a place young girls can learn dress-making from older generations and have fun doing it with each other”.²⁸³

Traditional Structures of Power and the Transformative Ecomuseum

At the same time ecomuseum staff have worked to redirect the ecomuseum project to be more participatory and inclusive, they have been faced with the entanglements of state control and the implacable traditional structure of power that has underpinned the ecomuseum since its inception. Interestingly, in the past few years of ecomuseum development the Nandan county government has introduced a collaborative approach to government-led initiatives which represent new forms of cultural governance. These are seen through the Baiku Yao Residence Reconstruction Project, the construction of a Intangible Cultural Heritage Station in Huaili, and curatorial practices for the ecomuseum exhibition’s expanding collection.

Baiku Yao Residence Reconstruction Project

One of the main reasons for selecting Huaili and the three ecomuseum villages of Manjiang, HuaQiao, and HuaTu for the ecomuseum project was because they possessed a “traditional Baiku Yao landscape”. When discovered by the Guangxi Culture Bureau ecomuseum investigation team, all of the residences in the villages were made of adobe with red-tile roofs or thatch. However, with the recent rise in the number of new brick and concrete homes, concerns have risen among Chinese government agencies and experts over the retention of the traditional Baiku Yao cultural landscape (*wenhua*

²⁸³ The the gradual decline in young girls engaging in and understanding how to make Baiku Yao clothing is strongly attributed to the recent implementation of compulsory education for both girls and boys.

jingguan) and Huaili's designation as a "residence protected zone" (*minju baohu qu*) under the ecomuseum label. This concern is closely related to Nandan county not "losing face" in the inability to maintain cultural protection as well as for preserving the "authenticity" of the villages for the sake of tourism.

In the past decade, many Baiku Yao have leveled their adobe homes to build new "modern" residences creating a discontinuity of Huail's physical appearance. This has been possible through income earned from migrant labor (*dagong*). Leaving to urban centers such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen for months at a time or years on end 40 something and younger villagers have been able to earn more in a month than they do in a year in the village.²⁸⁴ One 35 year old resident of upper Manjiang as he was stacking bricks for his new home told me , "although we spend a lot to live in cities where we work, we have enough to provide for our families here in Huaili. Without *dagong* I would not be able to build this new home for my family". Villagers were very clear in explaining to me the different reasons for wanting to rebuild in my household interviews as: brick and concrete homes created a sense of home stability and longevity; new homes would not have water leakages (*lou shui*) like adobe tile roof homes²⁸⁵; and new flat roof homes would provide ample space to dry staple crops. Today, the move to develop new residences has resulted in 25 of the 57 residences I surveyed in Manjiang in 2012 build using brick instead of adobe, and 21 of these new homes built in the last five years.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ According to interviews with villagers, on average migrant labor income is 2,000-3,000 RMB (\$320 - \$480) per month. Several households I spoke with had accrued around 10 thousand RMB (\$1600) from earnings for a year of migrant labor.

²⁸⁵ Prior to using red tiles for roofing, thatch was used. According to collective memories of interviewed villagers, prior to the 1980s most homes had thatch roofs.

²⁸⁶ While lower HuaQiao homes remain adobe, 7 of 12 homes in upper HuaQiao are brick, built since 2009. Some households in HuaQiao and Manjiang have also received government housing subsidies. But such subsidies (approximately 4,500 RMB (or \$725) was not enough to rebuild a new home and households

To address this perceived “detrimental change” to Huaili, the county government in 2012 proposed a new home construction plan for Huaili residences. The Lihu township government collaborated on the proposal and escorted home construction experts into Huaili to make assessments to develop a formal plan. Ecomuseum staff, Li Xia, seen as a mediator between government and village community, was requested assistance in proposing the plan to Huaili villagers. Accompanied by Lihu township leaders, Li Xia went to the center of Manjiang village and with the help of the village leader called a village meeting conducted in native Baiku Yao language. The idea was to consult with villagers on their opinions and perspectives on different possibilities for new residence construction to gain feedback for developers and to create greater local understanding of the project.²⁸⁷ The plan involved the combination of “modern” and “traditional” with the construction of two-story homes made of brick and concrete with the facade covered with adobe or painted adobe color with roofs lined with red tiles. Homes would retain the pen for household livestock and the design of the home’s interior would remain open to the household’s personal discretion. Li Xia explained to me, that overall villagers agreed with the project, and looked forward to government support in building “modern” homes, and expressed certain planning requests that she relayed to the Lihu and Nandan government agencies administering the project.²⁸⁸

The follow-up meetings between township leaders and village residents, however,

had to draw on earnings from migrant labor to supplement the cost.

²⁸⁷ Li Xia asked villagers their preferences on different types of roof tiles, walls, windows, etc. presented to them in the proposal’s printed diagrams.

²⁸⁸ Such villager requests included: the house should be long enough for them to conduct their wedding “long table” ceremony; roof tiles should not be used, and instead roofs should be flat with concrete in order to prevent water leakage, commonly experienced in current homes; livestock pens should be under the house but should be separated into individual rooms; and next to the home a small plot of land should be allocated for female villagers to work on dress-making.

demonstrated that this was a project not for the local community but more for government benefits and to satisfy a tourist gaze. met with villagers in the three villages of Manjiang, HuaQiao, and HuaTu to . Villagers became apprehensive through discussions on the finalization of the decision for the home reconstruction plan introduced by the Lihu township leader (*xiang zhang*) accompanied by Lu Chaojin, who accepted a new position as new vice-township leader in late 2011. First, the main requests of villagers were disregarded in the final proposal. Second, the allocation of government support for the project did not meet villager expectations with the county requesting village households pay the majority of the cost for the government's proposed new residences. One villager in his late 20s explained to me the tensions that arose among villagers during the meeting:

That night, township government told us about the houses and said, "If you built a brick and concrete storied home (*pingfang*) you should not build it here, you should follow our direction ... if you want to spend your own money, and don't need government subsidy, then do whatever you want". Then we all asked how much to build the proposed home, upon which the leaders said we need at least 100,000 RMB, and the government could give us between 15,000-18,000 RMB for each home. After that we didn't say anything. But we all discussed later together that if we have 100,000 RMB to build a home then we don't need government subsidies. Then we can do as we like. You don't even need that much to build a house actually; only 30,000 RMB is enough to build a simple one-story home. It's so much money [they request], who could possibly do that. I wouldn't do it any way. They only provide 15,000 for me to build this house and I have to follow their design restrictions.... I heard in the HuaTu meeting with the local leaders that there was a serious fight between villagers and leaders. Villagers got really upset and made the government leader run off. But that's tied to problems in HuaTu that no one really gets government support on *dibao* and *weifang gaizao* (subsidy for dangerous home reform). Later that night, my neighbor had the Lihu town leader over for dinner, and when they discussed the new houses more, the Lihu leader said frankly "if you build a new house or not, it doesn't matter, don't worry about it too much, I just want to be at ease". Then another villager sitting with them stood up and stated angrily to the leader before storming off, "Fuck, it doesn't matter if you do the project or not, we won't follow you, we'll build on our own!"

The government guided residence reconstruction project, at first seemed a means to improve rural livelihoods through an approach of village consultation and collaboration. Yet through a political framework of upholding state authority and marginalizing the local community, it turned into an initiative similar to the initial phase of ecomuseum planning and development. For villagers, the project has become another failed promise of government intervention and community improvement. Lack of government allocated subsidies and limitations on construction in accordance to government sanctions have not only jeopardized the implementation of project, but moreover put a significant strain on the very right of villagers to control one of the main thing they feel is their own. Indeed, this has also put a strain on the village resident and government relationship.

For now, the project has an uncertain future and has been tabled for future revision, leaving the need and action to “protect” the “cultural landscape” also unclear. To rethink the project, maybe in looking beyond common cultural destination strategies for maintaining imaginaries of the ethnic minority toured subject and creating the pristine ethnic village, a new method for cultural tourism that focuses less on physical appearance and more on the intangibles of cultural heritage, which is so important to the Baiku Yao, can be introduced. However, to do so would mean engaging in the task of trying to break the strong mold of the shared repertoire of ethnic cultural destinations and reorienting the imaginations of tourists in China. For local government agencies, however, this seems more difficult than just reproducing them. Indeed, failure to address and come to an agreement on the retention of the “traditional cultural landscape” may result in a greater focus on the more stable “museum” of the ecomuseum center, in curating a new permanent collection and expanding the collection, which has been mentioned by

government officials, or even a more dramatic push to exert state authority in the ecomuseum village like that found in other cultural destinations like Tang'an ecomuseum.

Challenging New Museology in the Ecomuseum

The establishment of the ecomuseum in Huaili has also led to new tensions between ecomuseum staff and county government leaders. One event that defines this relationship and county leaders' disinterest in extending its new museological practices through the new museological approach of the ecomuseum is the expansion of the ecomuseum center's material culture collection. By 2011, it became increasingly clear to both ecomuseum staff and the county *Wentiju* that the ecomuseum center's permanent exhibition collection was minimal in scope. The lack of objects was noticeable in comparison to the abundance of large signboard images on Baiku Yao culture and life, and even villagers who viewed the exhibit expressed to ecomuseum staff that many cultural objects were missing from the exhibition. Under a proposed collection expansion project with funds provided by the *Wentiju*, ecomuseum staff decided to take a new approach from the acquisition of local material culture for the exhibition. Ecomuseum decided to not only collect important objects, but also each object's biographical history and its connection to the Baiku Yao community or a specific household or individual. According to Lu Chaojin, "I didn't want to just collect an object and bring it into the exhibition. Rather, I wanted it to be recorded, like that of our documentation research, understanding how an object was acquired or made, how it is used, or how it has been

passed down from generation to generation”. Over the course of the collection process, 100 new objects, from raw silk to a new wooden loom to a bird catcher net, were acquired from villagers throughout Huaili.²⁸⁹ Ecomuseum staff detailed every piece added to the collection with a short description provided by its owner and a photograph, some with their respective owner. It was their intention to not only use this information to create a collection database, but to include these descriptions in the exhibit for each object along with its name in both Chinese and Baiku Yao language (transliterated in written Chinese). The goal, according to Lu Chaojin, was to engage a new museological approach in collection management and exhibition in order for local Baiku Yao community to feel this was their own material culture on display. As Lu states:

If we do this, then youth will know in our Baiku Yao language what these things are called....Because, I believe, in reality, this ecomuseum should be first and foremost for the Baiku Yao, then second it is for outsiders to view. So, it is necessary to let local people understand their own culture.... Especially for the future, if you don't do this now, then youth won't know what these things are and that is not right.

When time came to create the implement the ecomuseum staff's idea through the curation of the exhibition, the county *Wentiju* stepped in. As the funder of the initiative, the *Wentiju* decided that signage for exhibition objects would only include object names in both English and Chinese and descriptions would be significantly edited down to a single line, leaving out names of villagers whose object it was.²⁹⁰ As a result, the exhibition remained fixed in a traditional museum paradigm.

²⁸⁹ Similar to the collection process for the initial construction and curation of the ecomuseum center in Huaili, which is also seen across ecomuseums in southwest China, material culture was purchased from villagers. The idea of object donation was not broached. Although ecomuseum staff did tell me that this was an ideal, considering the poverty of local community members, they felt it was important to give something back to villagers for their objects.

²⁹⁰ The push to internationalize the institution led to a request for me to assist in the translation of object names and descriptions into English.

Huaili's Intangible Cultural Heritage Station

Under a nation-wide call from regional and national government Culture Bureaus to protect the new cultural heritage aspect of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), a new Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in Nandan county. The center, under the jurisdiction of the *Wentiju* and headed by one of the vice leaders was composed of staff from the county *gongwutuan*, a team of professional dances and choreographers. The Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage focused on initiatives to highlight the intangible cultural heritage in select locales throughout Nandan, placing emphasis on visual performance such as dance, clothing, and celebratory ritual. As an appendage of the larger heritage protection movement, Huaili ecomuseum became the location of one of the center's first projects. In particular, Baiku Yao dress-making, which was placed on the national intangible cultural heritage list as part of “Yao *minzu* dress (*fushi*)” in 2006, was the main focus of the Center. In 2012, work began to establish a village exhibit (*zhanshi*) and work station (*gongzuo-zhan*) on dress-making (*fushi*) in the village of Huaili.

When Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage officials initially went to the ecomuseum to consult with staff on the proposed project, only Xiao Wang, the new intern, was available. She was asked to accompany county officials from the ICH Center to the home of He Jinxiu home, who was recognized as an honorary “cultural inheritor” of Baiku Yao dress-making by the region of Guangxi. Upon seeing that He Jinxiu’s home has undergone reconstruction using brick and concrete, the official team changed plans to establish the exhibit and workstation there. On their way back to the ecomuseum center,

they explained to Xiao Wang that they were looking for a more *yuanshengtai* (connoting “original” and “authentic”, see Chapter 5) location for their project. Akin to this foreign discourse in engagement with visitors to the ecomuseum center, Xiao Wang exclaimed that her husband's aunt, Li Xinghua, who she lived with, resided in an adobe home located in the ecomuseum village of Manjiang and was known as one of the most skillful dress-makers in Huaili. Officials insisted in meeting her and they became immediately impressed. Although Li Xinghua understood little of their Chinese, with suggestions by Xiao Wang she consented on the officials’ plan to convert part of her home into a small exhibit on dress-making.

Today, red ribbons are placed alongside a large plaque on the entrance of Li Xinghua’s home declare. Posters providing descriptions of the multiple procedures for Baiku Yao dress-making composed solely by the ICH Center team cover the walls of a corner of Li Xinghua’s home right inside the entrance. They stand over Ms. Li’s four-post wood loom and various labeled resources and tools needed in the process of dress-making which have been collected by Li Xinghua upon government officials request. Newly constructed floor-to-ceiling glass showcases display her hand-made Baiku Yao clothing. The construction of the exhibit is proclaimed by the Nandan ICH Center director as a means to both display the unique craftsmanship of Baiku Yao women in the “art” of dressmaking and to create a space where locals can learn about their cultural heritage. With most Baiku Yao unaware of its existence, it has become more a stop on visitors’ infrequent tours through the ecomuseum village. What’s more, the exhibit and workstation represents the Chinese government county making a more pronounced foot print through the state authorized heritage discourse in the village of Huaili and further

extending their reach in cultural governance. Interestingly, Xiao Wang's own new project on the inheritance of Baiku Yao dress-making is held at her aunt's home with female women and children surrounded government narratives on what they are making.

Discursive Struggles

“In China, rural areas, no lets not say just rural areas, but for counties, towns, and villages, ordinary people (*laobaixing*) have never before had a relationship with museums. They have regarded museums as a commentary of cultural history (*wenhuashi shiping*), a form of high culture. Even today, 80% of all counties in Guangxi do not have museums. Most Guangxi people have not really encountered or come in contact with the museum. So we have arranged the “ecomuseum” down to the village. We have put an institution of high cultural in a very *backward* place. So given this, [for local people] to come to *know* what is an “ecomuseum” (*shengtaibowguan*) is sure to be a very long process.... The Chinese government should really do more of this work as a potential cultural project that is also counted as a charitable and a welfare project for the Chinese people that certainly will influence the local people and improve their cultural quality (*wenhua suzhi*)”.²⁹¹

From this statement made to me in 2013 by the vice-director of the Guangxi Culture Bureau Ms. Qin Pu, it is clear that the museum and the ecomuseum institution is regarded as an important government-led initiative to bring the Chinese masses into the fold of mainstream modern China. For Qin Pu and many others ecomuseum program leaders and government authorities I spoke with, there is an agreed necessity for the government to lead such projects, considering its dominance of economic and symbolic capital and the

²⁹¹ Hoffman (2010: 105) explains that *suzhi* and *wenhua* “coalesce around ideas of self-improvement and self-enterprise” and are linked to national discourse of progress and modernization, in that raising *suzhi* and *wenhua* can reciprocally foster national development. Sigley (2009) explains that *suzhi* is part of a larger campaign to raise the level of the people as a whole, and in particular the rural population. And, Kipnis (2006) explores *suzhi* as central to contemporary governance in China as a notion to denote forms of hierarchical order in Chinese society. Shepherd (2012) explains that in China, to possess *suzhi* is to be understood as modern and Chinese and in terms of heritage both material and spiritual development will be improved by bringing higher quality urban residents into contact with rural inhabitants of heritage sites, consequently boosting rural people's *wenhua suzhi*.

proclaimed notion of the “incapability” of rural ethnic minority populations.²⁹² What this reflects is that ecomuseum projects in China, from their inception, are entangled in a political power structure of government and expert control that represent a new form of governing through culture in China’s periphery.²⁹³ As a community-based cultural strategy for heritage preservation, the safeguarding of cultural diversity, rural development, and civic engagement, the ecomuseum represents an assemblage and discursive practice of government.

In the interest to introduce new experimental approaches to heritage protection and museology in Guangxi, regional government officials and GXMN professionals have become sensitive to the fact that key principle of the foreign ecomuseum concept is community participation and participatory development, seen through Chinese government literature and academic articles (Rong 2006; Qin 2009, 2013). Yet, through the process of project implementation it is difficult to affirm that community participation is a central objective of their work, with claims to its application seen as largely rhetorical. Seen through the cases presented in this study, only after the project conditions representations of an iconized and ossified local culture and identity and transforms rural life in heritage and a quotidian spectacle for a viewing public, are village residents called on to participate in the appropriation of the authorized heritage discourse and as “enterprising subjects” (Hall 1997; see Oakes 2006) through the engagement of the newly ascribed “value” of their culture and place. This occurs within a structure of “regulated participation”, whereby community members are called on to “learn through participation”, “learn through experience”, and “learn through action” (Hauenschild 1988)

²⁹² The Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Program set a precedence for this.

²⁹³ See Oakes (1998) for one of the first works on southwest ethnic China to address this topic.

as active cultural citizens and marginalized hosts to extra-local government intervention and what government leaders purport as “community participation” (*shequ canyu*).

Many reasons are associated with the failure to integrate an inclusionist approach to ecomuseum development in China by project developers. When reviewing the pace of ecomuseum development in China, it is clear to see how a “present-oriented” mentality of project developers, and the sense of immediacy has effected development and efficacy of such projects.²⁹⁴ It is often seen among governments agencies that that it is simpler and more efficient to manage and deliver project goals, even purporting community engagement strategies, with power, leadership and direction of the project within their control from the outset (see Perkins 2010). In China, often times application of a purported community participatory approach does not imply that the development process has to start with the community, and in fact is often discouraged. Li (2006) makes clear a commonly held conception of project development in China that developers claim “efficiency is more important than fairness” and that local community involvement “can be very costly, and thus decrease efficiency”, slowing down the development process. Li (2006) also states that at the beginning of project development, despite apparently weak local participation in the decision-making process, with especially minimal involvement by the community in the planning process, a successful development project can materialize with satisfactory benefits for the local community. With immediacy and efficiency in mind, ecomuseum developers decided to bypass the consultation and collaborative stage with the local population, which would have created greater dialogue,

²⁹⁴ In China, immediacy often predominates long-term planning, with many claiming that development happens too fast (see Broudehoux 2004). The push for rapid development is due in part to the necessity to spend available funds, made on credit or loans, and because of the under riding push for rapid growth at any cost.

understanding, and transparency in the project for village actors, helping developers, too, to comprehend the needs of village residents, and established a sense of community inclusion in a project that was introduced externally. Even for those developers who pushed for more participatory measures, these challenges make it particularly difficult to go beyond current needs of the institution or agencies implementing the project and that could take considerably more time to develop (Tosun 2000; see Huang 2006).

The lack of experience and qualifications by project developers and associated experts in conducting participatory development practices, and their doubts concerning the reliability and generalizability of its results has also affected the development process (see also Cornwall and Jewkes 1995 cited in Hampshire et al. 2005; Tosun 2000: 620). This was made clear to me by museum professionals at GXMN who expressed that their work in Huaili and other ecomuseum projects in Guangxi has been a difficult and formidable task that goes well beyond their training in museum practices and development to include many aspects of social work.²⁹⁵ While experts and academics involved in ecomuseum development may propose participatory approaches in the local context, such plans many not culminate on the ground as these individuals typically do not dictate the day-to-day development process.²⁹⁶ All of these issues are inherently tied

²⁹⁵ For many professionals, social work is seen to involve promoting collaboration among different stakeholders, techniques for participatory development, and enhancing social and economic development of poverty-stricken communities.

²⁹⁶ It is important to note that throughout my fieldwork on China's ecomuseums, I did encounter examples of implemented government and expert-led initiatives for community participation. One case in Guizhou is Su Donghai and An Laishun's work in initiating the participatory "memory project" (*jiyi gongcheng*) among Miao villagers in Suoga, Guizhou province, mentioned in Chapter 4. Other examples are seen in recent ecomuseum initiatives in eastern and northern China. Under a new national charter for ecomuseum and community museum development, a group of scholars including Su Donghai, Cao Bingwu, Zhang Jinping, and Pan Shouyong, have assisted in ecomuseum and community museum development efforts in Anji county (Zhejiang province), Fuzhou city (Fujian province), and Pingxun county (Shanxi province). In Anji, Zhang Jinping and Pan Shouyong collaborated with county

to deeper formidable operational, structural, and cultural limitations (Tosun 2000),²⁹⁷ such as degrees of decentralization, villager dependency on government, and local passivity and skepticism.²⁹⁸ They point to the political nature of implementing participatory approaches to development and heritage work in China and how these terms are never neutral (Mohan and Hickey 2005; Cooke and Uma 2001).²⁹⁹ For these reasons,

leaders to launch a participatory approach for ecomuseum development, having each of the selected 12 village and township ecomuseum communities define their own ecomuseum theme. Village community members worked with together to draft a proposal for ecomuseum development and present it to the county government. Village communities also donated personal funds to assist in sponsoring the construction of their ecomuseum center. Zhang and Pan later were invited to develop an ecomuseum project proposal in Pingxun county, which the author was invited to collaborate on. To start the proposal and planning stage of the project, for each of the three selected ecomuseum villages, the team of experts consulted directly with village leaders and villagers in a village-wide community meeting. The needs and interests of villagers were voiced on ecomuseum project construction strategies and what aspects of their village, history, and culture were important to them. From these meetings, and additional interview and survey data, we developed a proposal for ecomuseum construction in Pingxun that drew on the interests and concerns of local communities members. Su, An, Zhang, and Pan, as well as Qin Pu and Wu Weifeng in their effort to push for the hiring of local community members as ecomuseum staff in Guangxi, saw the engagement of community members as a means of democratizing the ecomuseum project and a path to its success as a community-operated museum initiative (see also Davis 2008).

²⁹⁷ Tosun (2000: 618-620) emphasizes the “centralisation of public administration”, “lack of co-ordination”, and “lack of information” as clear limitations at the operational level. At the structural level, limitations are seen in “attitudes of professionals”, “lack of expertise”, “elite domination”, and “lack of appropriate legal system”, “trained human resources”, and “financial resources” (Tosun 2000: 620-624). For cultural limitations, Tosun (2000: 625-626) identifies the “limited capacity of poor people” and “low level of awareness in the local community”.

²⁹⁸ Although degrees of “decentralization” have been reached in China (Bardhan 2002; Oi 1995), the central government continues to play an active role in development projects, exerting great influence on actions of local administrators, especially in rural ethnic minority regions (Keyim 2012). “Participation” during the Mao regime, has instilled in local populations ideas of collective production and ideological consciousness based on state governance. Memories of mass and political participation of decades ago are often brought out in many local communities through “participatory” project intervention. There is also a tendency of local Chinese people of adhering to hierarchical rule and having a reliance on the government. According to Plummer (2004: 10), it seems that Chinese villagers are extremely reluctant to take the initiative without orders from above and “farmers expect to defer to the views and will of those representing the state”.

²⁹⁹ Usage of the term and approach of “participation” proclaims the instrumental purpose, efficacy, and importance of development programs in local contexts (Mohan 2001; Mayo and Craig 1995). Many governments, agencies, and social groups employ such terminology in order to attract the attention of upper government and domestic and foreign investors, and for national and international acclaim. China is no different. Cornwall and Brock (2005: iii) assert that these terms are ensconced in today's “one-size-fit-all development recipes, spun into an apoliticized form that everyone can agree with”. In many ways, this is similar to the use of the “rubber stamp” of “heritage” and “heritage protection” that we see applied in China to attract tourists, funders, and international community attention such as UNESCO.

projects like the ecomuseum in China remain closely linked to government and a top-down approach of implementation.

What this chapter has tried to show is that while Huaili ecomuseum is ensconced in this political structure, community actors are not necessarily bound by it. The cultural process of the ecomuseum development actually creates a social space of encounter whereby *friction* through actors' interactions generate new capabilities for actor mobility (Tsing 2005). Government aims and influence has remained prominent throughout ecomuseum development in Huaili, but the work of the ecomuseum staff and community members demonstrates that these priorities are not absolute. Although it has been difficult to push the boundaries of the ecomuseum framework to address concerns more pertinent to the local Baiku Yao community, once ecomuseum staff realized that they were the representative operators of the ecomuseum and could use their respective capital - social and cultural - to change the course of heritage work, the way became clearer for them to reorient the ecomuseum development process using a more participatory approach.

Ecomuseum staff saw that ecomuseum work on research and heritage conservation and management should be altered to embark on a new *community-centered* approach. Rather than upholding the dominant expert discourse that focused on traditional museological approaches and the research and collection of material objects, looking at historical “authenticity” and aesthetic value (Smith 2006), ecomuseum staff diverted ecomuseum work to the interconnected “intangible” - the oral folklore, songs and music, craft-making and spirituality - aspects of Baiku Yao culture. For ecomuseum staff, intangible heritage and local knowledge was seen as a fundamental resource for the production of a sense of belonging and cultural pride and the enhancement of community

development (Dicks 2003; Davis 2008).³⁰⁰ Collaborative community heritage initiatives introduced by ecomuseum staff drew on intangible cultural heritage and practices of inheritance to make statements about who are the Baiku Yao by the local people themselves and to construct social cohesion and a collective identity among the Baiku Yao of Huaili (Lowenthal 1998; Dicks 2003).³⁰¹

By engaging community members in participatory heritage research and management, ecomuseum staff have advanced the active negotiation of local knowledge, cultural values, and claims to heritage by extra-local government authorities and experts (Smith 2006: 37), and have generated new capabilities for local community members to engage in different forms of heritage management. As a result, many local resident Baiku Yao have become new cultural agents within the ecomuseum context and larger heritage discourse. From ecomuseum operators and interns to educators, elder storytellers, and villager videographers, local Baiku Yao have negotiated the heritage discourse, made claims to cultural interpretation and representation, and produced heritage for consumption (not only for outsiders but also for themselves), resulting in new expressions of Baiku Yao heritage, place and cultural identity (Groote and Haartsen 2008: 181 cited in Hawke 172). In their ability to strategically negotiate their “insider” and “outsider” status and their engagement in the dominant heritage discourse introduced by experts and government through the ecomuseum project, ecomuseum staff have been able to wield their capital to advance inclusive ecomuseum work and an alternative

³⁰⁰ While this ecomuseum development process does not reflect cases in Europe and the Americas, it does signify an attempt to what Corsane (2008: 11) claims as “giv[ing] people the opportunity to participate in heritage management processes that bring together heritage resources (both intangible and tangible), place, identity construction, self-representation, affirmation, local pride and feelings of belonging”.

³⁰¹ Hawkes (2012) explores this notion through the ecomuseological practices in England.

community heritage discourse. According to Rosenberg and Hulst (2012: 3), “actors who have become powerful as a result of a dominant discourse, can drift away from it or develop an alternative discourse, and that existing power relations can function as a vehicle for a discursive struggle”. By redirecting the course of the ecomuseum work through a complex field of power (Bourdieu 1986), ecomuseum staff have become key cultural brokers in the mediation of the dominant and community heritage discourses. As discussed above, projects like the Culture Inheritance Class, Youth Cultural Program, Baiku Yao Association, Community Videographers, and Dress-making Workshop, are evidence that partnerships of community collaboration and consultation can take shape through the ecomuseum in China.³⁰² It is through the work of cultural agents and the expansion of the network of actors involved in the ecomuseum project, that these community heritage initiatives have manifested, a pronounced community heritage discourse has been enacted, new forms of social empowerment have emerged,³⁰³ and a shift in the balance of power has taken place through the ecomuseum.³⁰⁴

The development of the ecomuseum is seen to be a catalyst for discursive struggle over the discourses that define the Baiku Yao and their future. In this way, the

³⁰² It must be noted, that without local knowledge and community support, and financial assistance from extra-local organizations, the ongoing development of new initiatives for the ecomuseum would be extremely difficult (Hampshire et al. 2005). Even the Cultural Inheritance Class project that began with no funding, proves that local and extra-local support is needed to make projects like this sustainable. Since 2008, exactly 38 Huaili community village residences, not including the students in each of the Cultural Inheritance classes in Huaili and Lihu have been involved in these community heritage initiatives. Three teachers and five “artisans” have been involved in the Cultural Inheritance Class, ten villagers for video documentation, and twenty female women and children for dress-making.

³⁰³ Ames (1990: 161) defines cultural empowerment in the context of museums as “transferring skills to others and providing opportunities for them to present their own points of view within the institutional context”.

³⁰⁴ Dicks (2003) describes a similar case in the mining museum in Rhondda, Wales. This change is premised in the fact that local actors have accumulated different forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital through their interactions with the ecomuseum project. In particular, there was a significant change to the lives of the community members who were closely involved with ecomuseum staff (see Corsane et al 2007: 235).

ecomuseum is understood for its transformative and agentive role in how it has brought things about, how it lends voice to certain people, and silences others, and triggers new relations and power structures. Ironically, it is the top-down approach to ecomuseum development in Huaili that ecomuseum staff have reacted against and has been the impetus for the creation of ecomuseological, community heritage initiatives. The malleable power relations between involved actors in the ecomuseum project explored above allow us to take into account the presence, creation, and workings of different discourses and to understand the process and outcomes of discursive struggles in decision-making about heritage and identity through the contact space of the ecomuseum.

CHAPTER 7

ETHNOGRAPHIC VIGNETTES

Ecomuseum initiatives on local cultural heritage preservation, rural development, and museumification are seen to incite local population's engagement in present-centered aspects of heritage production. The relations forged through the ecomuseum space in between social actors and between them and local cultural heritage have provoked the formulation of different interpretations and claims to heritage and practices for its protection. This is seen to also invoke a redefinition of local cultural knowledge and the value of heritage. Throughout my fieldwork on ecomuseum projects in China, I have discovered cases where villagers, directly and indirectly, engage their heritage and the ecomuseum project to redress their own subjectivity. The following ethnographic vignettes present the interactions and negotiations experienced by two villagers in two ecomuseum spaces - Zhenshan Buyi Ecomuseum, Huaxi county, and Longli Ancient Village Ecomuseum, Jinping county, Guizhou Province. Interactions in the ecomuseum space concerning these villagers and their respective village communities and cultural identities indicate an added the implications of the ecomuseum in rural China.

Museum Within a Museum

After being designated an “ethnic cultural protected village” (*minzu wenhua baohu cun*) by the provincial Cultural Relics Bureau, and a Buyi ecomuseum in the late 1990s under the Sino-Norwegian Ecomuseum Partnership Program, Zhenshan village transformed into a heritage site and a tourist cultural destination. Zhenshan was selected

as an ecomuseum because of its long history, dating back to 1596 as a Ming dynasty military garrison, and distinct Buyi culture with 18 generations of village descendents from the inter-ethnic marriage between a Han Ming dynasty general and a local Buyi woman. Since its establishment as an ecomuseum, Zhenshan villagers have actively worked to develop tourism. They have focused less on the exploitation of ethnic culture of the Buyi and more on village scenery and the essence of a picturesque, tranquil rural escape from urban life. In the process, villagers collaboratively created a community-run tourism site, filled with small-scale tourist ventures such as *nongjiale* family restaurants, inns, waterfront vendors, and rental boats. With easy access from the county of Huaxi and provincial capital of Guiyang only 21 km away, Zhenshan village has become a weekend hotspot and “rural” destination for urbanites. On a typical Sunday over 200 cars are packed into the paid parking lot and line the paved road leading up the village. As visitors disembark from their vehicles they are approached by Buyi women, often not in traditional ethnic dress, aiming to escort to their guesthouse for a meal and to relax. Walking down the stone pathway overlooking the clear reservoir below and through the stone archway entrance of the village, visitors experience a liminal space of escape from city life into the scenic rural place of Zhenshan.

Elder Li Lao Han of Zhenshan is keen to the flood of tourists. However, he is less interested in the exploits of his hometown for its scenery. Rather, he is more concerned with its cultural heritage assets. It was during the construction of the Zhenshan Buyi ecomuseum documentation center on a small road outside the village, that elder Li Lao Han began to rethink the meaning and significance of his Buyi heritage. When I sat with him on my first visit to Zhenshan in 2008, he explained that his initial visit to the

documentation center's exhibition on local Buyi culture made a lasting impression. It was the first time he had seen his hometown and ethnic culture on display. The mirror effect of the ecomuseum center (Maggi 2006), however, reflected a Buyi history that was not what elder Li imagined. He stressed to me that much had been omitted from Zhenshan's cultural history and he felt "it did not represent *his* history of the Buyi of Zhenshan". He felt so strongly about the "false" (*jiade*) display of his culture curated by provincial government agencies, that he decided take the exhibition process of local Buyi culture and historical narrative of Zhenshan into his own hands.

With 10 thousand RMB of his own money, elder Li decided to transform half of his two story home into a private museum. He converted the ground floor into an exhibit on Buyi material culture. Buyi clothing made by his wife and passed down from his wife's mother adorn the exhibition walls similar to the ecomuseum documentation center exhibit. Farming tools sit at the base of the wall. While his museum offers no signs detailing the displayed objects, elder Li sits outside or accompanies visitors through the exhibit providing explanations.

The second floor is the core of the museum with two main sections. The first is an exhibit of hand-painted pictures by elder Li depicting each of the 55 ethnic minority nationalities with a male and female couples wearing "ethnic" dress in a dancing or singing pose. The collection of images represents, according to elder Li, the "Unity of the Chinese Nation (*minzu tuanjie*)³⁰⁵. The second section consists of three rooms with walls lined with hand-painted pictures on the cultural history of the Buyi people of Zhenshan. A

³⁰⁵ This section of Mr. Li's Buyi museum is also seen to represent the appropriation and reproduction of *minzu* positionalities and identifications, perpetuates the dominant state discourse of *minzu tuanjie* (see Schein 2000).

chronology of the Buyi origin myth juxtaposes his historical narrative of the Buyi people, which intertwines the official state narrative (from the *xianzhi*, or county historical records) and personal records drawn from his family geneology (*jiapu*). This narrative is based in his own published book, which elder Li sells at the entrance of the museum. Purchase of the book allows free admittance to his private museum.

While heritage has long been seen as a discourse that implies “closure around a single legitimated narrative”, it has recently been explored as a contested terrain of competing multiple meanings and interpretations, where “more than one story can be told” (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Rowlands 2002). The case of elder Li's museum demonstrates a new found determination to reinterpret and reconstruct local heritage, forming what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) call “dissonant heritage” - “the discordance or lack of agreement and consistency as to the meaning of heritage”. Interestingly, it is the creation of the government-led ecomuseum itself that has been the impetus for elder Li's dissonance and the expression of his interpretation of Buyi heritage through the development of his museum. The process of disinheritance, intrinsic to the creation of heritage (Graham 2002), that elder Li experienced through the government curated ecomuseum exhibition center led to an effort to redefine local heritage and create an alternative narrative on his own terms. This represents a form of agentive power, described by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 387) as “the capacity of human beings to shape the actions and perceptions of others by exercising control over the production, circulation, and consumption of signs and objects, over the making of both subjectivities and realities”. Elder Li's agentive power is not only seen through his ability to reshape tourists' interpretations of Buyi heritage. Moreover, it is through fostering greater

community-wide cultural awareness of Zhenshan's past through fellow villagers' questioning of the legitimacy of his museum exhibit. When asked about elder Li's museum, many Zhenshan villagers knew of his work and expressed to me their aggravation over his exhibition. They argued that his words "fall short of the reality of Zhenshan" (*bu fuhe zhenshan de shiji*) and his displayed cultural history is rather "imaginative and subjective". From their perspective, the museum represents the narrative of elder Li and not that of the community. To fellow villagers, the very creation of his museum has marked his seizure of a false ownership over the cultural and historical narrative, laying grounds for contestation. Aware of these claims, elder Li nevertheless proudly states, "this *is* the history of the Buyi people that has been passed down to me from past generations".

Writing A Community Heritage

Jiang Hua Yuan laid out three paper back books in front of me on the dining table of his home and told me a fourth would be published by the end of the year. Each book was composed by elder Jiang as sole author. Each was about his hometown of Longli. "After retirement", he said, "I returned to Longli and became engrossed in learning about the history and culture of this ancient village".³⁰⁶ The three texts were a product of this. The selection of Longli as part of the Sino-Norwegian Partnership Ecomuseum Program and increasing attention given to Longli by many government leaders and international and Chinese scholars actually gave him a significant push to pursue his interests. He took it upon himself to photograph local cultural practices, old residences and structures, and

³⁰⁶ Personal conversations with Jiang HuaYuan regarding his work were conducted between 28-30 July 2008 and 3-6 August 2011.

collect historical records on the ancient village and lineage of the 72 Han families that had migrated from northern provinces to settle there over 600 years ago. He openly contributed these materials to the ecomuseum project for its development. And, Jiang Hua Yuan became recognized by ecomuseum developers and operators as an important asset to the project's mission of cultural exhibition, research, and protection.

Mr. Jiang found great cultural pride in contributing to raising understanding of his hometown. Recognizing the lack of public knowledge of the village's cultural history and growing interest in his hometown, he decided in 2000 to begin to compose a brief introduction of Longli. He drew from his archival research to develop and personally finance the first locally published book on Longli. Afterward, he began working on a more in-depth history of Longli. For one year, he collected data from Longli residents' household geneologies (*jia pu*) and other literary sources and he composed the first and only anthology to date of Longli ancient poetry. As he became more interested in writing about Longli, he decided to take a collaborative approach to compose his third work on Longli folklore. He posted announcements throughout Longli on his plans for his next book and called upon villagers' to participate in the project, specifically requesting contributions by villagers on Longli oral folk legends, customs, and rituals. Over the course of one year, he met with many village elders and transcribed over 100 narratives. Village folklore was compiled into an edited volume for publication, called *Longli Ancient Town Folklore (minsu chuanshuo gushi)*. After publication, each villager contributor was given a copy of the text. Hu Chaoxiang, provincial leader of the ecomuseum project in Longli, states in his preface to the volume that this text marks “a

major contribution to Chinese ancient town intangible heritage” and provides “hope for work of the ecomuseum”.

When I sat with Jiang Hua Yuan in his home discussing the history of Longli and his unwavering interest in his hometown, a large plaque hung from the wall behind him. The plaque recognizes Jiang Hua Yuan as an honorary “Cultural Heritage Inheritor” (*wenhua yichan chuancheng ren*) of Guizhou Province. For his devotion to the production and dissemination of knowledge on the ancient village of Longli, the Guizhou Culture Bureau bestowed this honor to him in 2010, following a national and adopted international policy for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. When I inquired on the official honor, he stated: “I have published several books on Longli, it is not about making money. I receive very little from the sale of these texts. They have all been personally sponsored... My work is in service of the community and Longli. I want to help youth of our village and those who visit Longli understand our long history”. Indeed his work has made a significant contribution to the local community and ecomuseum project with his published texts used to educate local tour guides and ecomuseum staff, offering a local perspective on the village's history and cultural practices. They are also found in many homes of village residents and in the ecomuseum center.

Most recently, Jiang Hua Yuan has also become the elected villager representative (*cunmin daibiao*) of Longli. He has been afforded decision-making power in heritage preservation and tourism development practices and is consulted by the local heritage management office and ecomuseum staff on village affairs. He has become a strong advocate of the protection of Longli and opening the village to tourism. In our conversations, Jiang Hua Yuan stressed to me that the protection of villager residences

and ancient structures in Longli must be upheld by both villagers and the local government agencies as a collaborative effort: “We must work together to retain the culture, traditions, and history we have held intact for over 600 years. Retention is not about static preservation but maintenance and adaptation, which is important for the survival of any society”.

Conclusion

What these vignettes signify is how local residents have become part of the heritage process through the ecomuseum. They, like ecomuseum staff and some community members at Huaili, as discussed in depth in the previous chapter, have become active in promoting, saving, and reinterpreting their local heritage and its management. Villagers themselves wanted to preserve built, natural and living heritage that have a meaning to them and are important for their identity and for the locality (see Svensson 2006). Huaili ecomuseum and these cases demonstrate how involved local actors can articulate an alternative community heritage discourse within the political framework and discursive practice of the ecomuseum. In Huaili, Zhenshan, and Longli, the ecomuseum project has brought forth interactivity between involved actors and between actors and heritage. It has also incited a greater number of voices to come through in this dynamic social space. Doing so has led to a reworking of power relations within the ecomuseum and, consequently a reexamination and rearticulation of heritage and identities in rural China.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: CONTACTS AND FRICTIONS

Contacts and Contested Spaces

This study has attempted to interrogate the implications of the manifestation of ecomuseum projects in rural China as they are orchestrated by government and museum professional agents and negotiated by local rural communities. By presenting the cases of ecomuseum sites in Guizhou Province and the detailed ethnographic account of Huaili ecomuseum in Guangxi, this study has exposed how ecomuseum development in China is a complicated process involving multiple actors and internal and external agendas.

Examining the intricacies of ecomuseum development in these localities, I have revealed how different actors become entangled in the construction, negotiation, and contestation of cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and cultural difference. Through their interactions, they define the ecomuseum as a dynamic social space and shape its course of development. Huaili ecomuseum offers a unique case of the ecomuseum effect in rural ethnic China as a political heritage experience that marginalizes and objectifies as well as transforms and empowers. Through the case of Huaili, I have exposed the logic of ecomuseums in China as a part of the globalizing process and a governmental assemblage and discursive practice. The ecomuseum is also seen as an instrument of modernity, a transformative agent in creating a platform for the social change of the rural sector and as a vehicle to industrialize culture. More broadly, the emergence of the ecomuseum in China introduces the configuration of a new museum-community relationship. This study,

thus, has attempted to address the critical question on what can be achieved through the agency of the ecomuseum in rural China.³⁰⁷

Historically, across China we have not see a dramatic call to recast the museum as a “forum” from its traditional “temple” (Cameron 1971). Museum institutions have remained predominantly embedded in a traditional museum paradigm and caught in a web of governmental control. Even as the museum institution has changed in form and function over the last 150 years in China, as discussed Chapter 2, interpretations, cultural meanings, and historical narratives have predominantly remained not stirred. This is particularly why, at a time of rapid social transformation and intensified globalization, the ecomuseum, as a twist on museological and heritage management practices, is so important in contemporary China. It signifies not just a fancy new “Western” method for heritage preservation, but a new apparatus to articulate and expose local histories and memories and alternative heritage discourses in China at the community level (Pan 2008, 2013), and a means to reevaluate the stewardship of culture in Chinese society.

Although the establishment of ecomuseums in China works to designate “protected zones” of museumified ethnic villages, it is best not to assume that these are static “safe zones” where local ethnic subjects are mere “objects of observation”, “confined to the passive, speechless and motionless position of the inanimate world” (Varutti 2011). As this study has shown, ecomuseums create more a dynamic space of ongoing contact, friction, and conflict over ideas of identity, community, place, heritage, and development. I recognize the ecomuseum here as a “contact zone”. Borrowing the term from Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Clifford (1997) popularized the idea of museums as “contact

³⁰⁷ This question is drawn from Sandell's question on “What, if anything, can be achieved through the agency of museums?” (1998: 401)

zones”³⁰⁸ and recast the museum as “a space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (Pratt 1992: 6-7 cited in Clifford 1997: 192). The power-laden culture of the museum institution comes through as a contact zone in the trafficking and forging of diverse interactions and power relations, where discourses and “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 1992).

My ethnography of the ecomuseum in China has shown how its localization and implementation in rural ethnic localities, and the ongoing process of development are shaped by a power-charged set of cross-cultural encounters and interactions where different articulations of culture, memory, meaning, and values are expressed, negotiated, and often contested (Whitcomb 2003; Clifford 1997). As a result of these exchanges and confrontations, new relations between actors are forged and new subject positionalities shift and are constituted (Pratt 1992: 6-7). This reveals that the ecomuseum “functions more as a permeable space of transcultural encounter than a tightly bounded institution disseminating knowledge”, showing its malleability and transformative nature (Mason 2006: 25). What’s more, through the “conjunctions of disparate constituencies, interests, goals, and perspectives” the manifestation of the ecomuseum initiative in ethnic rural China has generated new museum frictions and recast old ones (Kratz and Karp 2006: 2). This study has attempted to expose these frictions through an exploration of the

³⁰⁸ Scholarship on museums have drawn from Clifford's (1997) work and proposed to explore the museum as “collaborative” space to reexamine the political, often contested, relationship between museums and communities. Studies have highlighted the social role of museums as “agents for social inclusion” (Sandell 2000), as spaces for multivocality and a means of empowering communities (Corsane 2002; Fuller 1992; Crooke 2006; Witcomb 2003; Peers and Brown 2003), and as collaborative spaces for the articulation of different cultural expressions and new forms of agency (Simpson 2007; Stanley 2007; Kreps 2003; Watson 2007).

ecomuseum development process in China, pointing to their intended and unintended consequences, and the broader economic and political processes they are entangled in.

The scope of encounters and frictions through the ecomuseum cannot be limited to the local context. They are generated along global, national and local scales through which multiple actors - Chinese government officials, museum professionals and scholars, foreign museum and heritage discourses, international governments and experts - interact. The global-national-local nexus (Appadurai 1990, 1996; Escobar 2001; Zhu 2013) is complicated by the variety of actor interests in and across each of these scales, along with the different debates surrounding preservation, cultural survival and economic development and cultural exploitation. In a transforming China, the idea of ecomuseum is constantly changing - from its first generation, second generation, and now third generation of projects - and so, too, is how it develops in particular rural locales. This is seen through shifts in the structural format of ecomuseum implementation from programs in Guizhou to Guangxi and most recently in northern and eastern provinces. This mutually constitutive nature of the ecomuseum demonstrates that it is not simply a spatial zone of encounter but also temporal.

In each of the chapters of this study, I have charted the interactions that take place between involved “stakeholders” in ecomuseum development in China and between broader ideological currents and practices. In addressing key questions and concerns in museum making, cultural production, and practices of social change concerning the mediation of heritage protection and economic development within a framework of state-led cultural governance, this study has pointed to the global, national, and local orientations and connections and social actors that have shaped and take shape through

this new museological process and the field of museum development and heritage protection in China.

Highlighting the nature of *friction* incited through ecomuseum development, my study distances itself from scholarship on ecomuseums and community museums, as well as community heritage initiatives. It does not view the ecomuseum merely in terms of beneficial contacts and as a vehicle for empowerment and democratization, or in creating a clear sense of place and identity on local community terms. Rather, it critically analyzes the ecomuseum as possessing a political nature that involves manipulation and contestation through cross-cultural power relations.

Scholarship that explores ecomuseums worldwide mainly remain on one side of the “heritage debate”. It views heritage as having the potential to offer representations of local life that provide an ongoing public forum for the expression of local identities and the interpretation of the stories told and experienced, rather than being linked to its demise, and its attributes of fabrication and manipulation intertwined in ideological agendas, and tainted tendency of commodification of culture and landscapes. As a philosophy based on the democratization of heritage practices and management with a focus on community-based *in-situ* natural and cultural heritage conservation and community participation, the ecomuseum incorporates many critical issues explored through museum and heritage work, including inclusion/exclusion, authenticity, ownership and voice, the exhibition of culture and related processes of cultural production and representation, etc. However, literature on ecomuseums have remained focused on the assumed emancipatory nature of the approach for local communities and its positive benefits attributed to its innovativeness of *in-situ* heritage management and

combining museum work with community development. Scholarship on ecomuseums often explore the contact relations through the ecomuseum and the social and cultural engagements between different actors and discourses within this dynamic space as *frictionless*. Scholars' concentration on the ideals of the ecomuseum philosophy and its potential for the attainment of beneficial community social change, seem to overshadow the challenges faced in its ongoing development on the ground. Conflict and contestation and issues surrounding inclusion and exclusion and multivocality do surface in ecomuseums projects throughout the world. But even for cases where museum practitioners write on the intricacies of the process of ecomuseum implementation and development (Rivard 1984; Nabais 1985; Murtas and Davis 2009), these critical issues are often not raised nor are the political dimensions of community involvement and participation, expressions of forms of agency, and shifting subject positionalities addressed. Across the present literature, it seems that because the ecomuseum is defined as a new museological approach and situated in a Western rhetoric of empowerment and participation, the ecomuseum has become equated to a direct act of community participation and community regeneration, as if it has been freed from its originally intended politics³⁰⁹.

My study drawing from Hubert's (1985: 188) early observation that underneath these idyllic notions of the heritage loss prevention and community development utilizing the ecomuseum approach, are political and economic aims that shape ecomuseum development and its initiatives. My study has attempted to address the gap in the literature on community museums and community heritage by exploring these

³⁰⁹ See Leal (2007: 544) on this argument for the notion of participation itself.

multifaceted objectives in China, illustrating how processes of heritagization and cultural production, expressions of agency and power, the politics of display and identity formation, and engagements in tourism and notions of authenticity, ownership, and community participation constitute the complex workings of the ecomuseum. Drawing on empirical evidence from cases throughout China, I engage a critical exploration of ecomuseum development and its diverse outcomes revealing how they are implicated in several seemingly different, and sometimes contradictory global, national, local discourses. As such, I point to the ideological underpinnings and the political motivations behind the implementation of ecomuseum projects, and shown the complex and nuanced encounters and ‘relations of disjunctures’ or *frictions* that provoke the changeable politics of its local, regional, national and global orientations.

Ecomuseums and Cultural Governance

It is through a traditional museological paradigm that has long served the Chinese state and has bestowed museums nationalizing power, that new museological forms and heritage work have developed in China. A critical examination of ecomuseums demonstrates how ecomuseums are entangled in relations of government in which local peoples, heritage, and ethnicity are enlisted for programs of conservation, development, and civic management (see Bennett 1998; Boast 2011). What kind of connections are activated between various actors at different levels through project development is called into question as the ecomuseum takes on a form of cultural governance in rural ethnic China. Here, the ecomuseum is seen to recast old museological and exhibitionary

processes at a time when different globalizing processes and national campaigns are at work in China.

Although Chinese ethnic minority peoples' agency in the past was not formulated with direct reference to the question of museum politics (Varutti 2011), the introduction of the ecomuseum on the one hand has intensified subject positions of marginalization, and on the other hand has complicated them. Importantly, what the ecomuseum does in rural China is enact forms of local agency of ethnic minority populations in relation to the museum and the processes of modernity the museum incites (Harrison 2011). What we see across ecomuseum sites in southwest China is more the maintenance and strengthening of power inequalities, than a positive reversal of unequal power relations. This takes place, as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, most profoundly in the curatorial process of ecomuseum construction. The ecomuseum is seen to perpetuate the colonial endeavor of positioning ethnic minority peoples as marginalized, disenfranchised and objectified subjects of spectacle and difference, and rural ethnic life converted into "heritage", as part of a proclaimed "living museum" (see Smith 2006). Here, the ecomuseum acts as an powerful cultural apparatus of "internal orientalism", articulating "axes of difference" - urban/rural, rich/poor, minority/majority - that ethnic villages and local populations are situated in (Schein 2000; Chio 2009; see also Gladney 1994).³¹⁰

Drawing on the work of Bennett (1995, 1998, 2006), we can understand this further as ecomuseums caught up in processes of government, as mechanisms for assembling

³¹⁰ Drawing on the work of Said (1978), Schein (2000: 73) explains internal orientalism as the "adoption of Western orientalist logics and premises for self-representation in the course of Asian processes of identity production", which create clear social and cultural binaries, reinforce ethnic hierarchies, and accentuates Han fascination with the exotic ethnic "other". Instances of internal orientalism is seen through ethnic minorities conducting singing and dancing performances of their cultural heritage in ways that reinforce their inferior or backward status and distance from the Han (Hillman 2003; Davis 2005; Schein 1997; Gladney 1994).

and reassembling forms of power and authority which are directed at constructing representations and identities as well as regulating behavior and the conduct of people and things. Bennett's work is particularly pertinent in analyzing the workings of ecomuseums in China as they represent discursive practices of government. His early theoretical analysis of “exhibitionary complex” (1988) and later work on “assemblage” (2008), helps to highlight how ecomuseums extend governmental messages of cultural difference, protection, and social and economic development as far as they can reach into rural China (Bennett 1998: 213). Bennett pursues a Foucauldian and Gramscian perspective to point to the hegemonic power of the museum institution. He argues that the museum is a tool through which the government can civilize people by exposing them to the refined dispositions of the dominant classes (Bennett 1995) and by creating the illusion of people's power over the institution through practices such as interpretation (1995: 67). According to Bennett, although the museum is subject to constant reform (1995: 90) and the ideological apparatus has remained constant in organizing citizens around new cultural understandings (Toon 2011) to “improve' the populace and encourage citizens to regulate and police themselves” (Bennett 1995: 59-88 cited in Mason 2006: 24). Across the world the museum has withheld its civilizing effect, even as the messages they foster change over time.

In China, museums have long been discursive practices of government and are closely associated with state cultural bureaucracy (Denton 2005). Even as a new museological approach that assumes to push the bounds of traditional museology, the ecomuseum further many of the same practices of the traditional museum. The processes of branding and museumification - the selection and exhibition of ethnic villages and

communities - and the reconfiguration of “heritage” within the ecomuseum context, discussed in Chapter 3, 4, and 5, is a new discursive strategy for enlisting objects, landscapes, and peoples as part of a program of civic management, safeguarding cultural diversity, and extending the cultural industry (Bennett 1988: 212; see also Witcomb 2003; Crooke 2006; Oakes 2006). As rural ethnic minority communities and their “living heritage” become products as well as effects of the ecomuseum through their entanglement in dominant systems of power and “knowledge”, they come to constitute a “body politic” (see Herzfeld 1991, 2004). They are brought into the fold of mainstream modern Chinese society, the discourse of cultural difference, and bound to constructed cultural meanings of the larger national story (Hall 2005: 24). The creation of ecomuseum in rural locales not only implicates people and landscapes but also local “heritage”, as shown in Chapter 5, in processes of cultural production and recontextualization through the workings of an authorized heritage discourse and market-driven heritage industry. When local village residents and local government authorities identify and reproduce imaginaries of an “authentic” ethnic “other”, they become, according to Hall (2005), “subjects” of the discourse that frames them. Thus, the identification and reconstitution of poverty-stricken ethnic communities as “living fossils” and “living heritage”, a counterfoil to the “modern” Han, and proclaimed as important in protecting through an ideology of multiculturalism, is seen as a signifying practice and form of civic management introduced to order local populations and cultures through the institution of the museum (Dibley 2005: 15). Unique to these processes of traditional museology, is that they are recasting meaning set within certain expressive state parameters in the local context, *in-situ*. This has deep implications for the local

cultural landscape, heritage, and local population itself as they are entrenched in the state cultural policy, ascribed values of difference and culture, and linkages between tradition and modernity.

Because the cultural institution of the ecomuseum is framed from its inception by government edicts, a top-down development approach, and the dominant heritage discourse, calls for “community participation” and “community engagement” have often not been met (highlighted in Chapter 6). This is further strained by high level of poverty in selected ethnic villages and the assumption by developers that local villagers want to engage in such experimental government-led projects. Responsive extra-local actors who have pushed for a more inclusive participatory institution, even if this is suggested to take place after initial stages of government-led implementation, have met significant challenges, limited by internal historical, political, and social stabilities.³¹¹ Despite the recent embrace of foreign museological forms, practices, and principles and the import of new dimensions of the global heritage discourse by the Chinese, the new experimental ecomuseum remains confined by a persistence of “rhetoric” and “rationality” (Bennett 1995) that subsumes the museological paradigm and the cultural field in China.

Poulot (1994) is one of the few scholars who highlights the contested nature of ecomuseums. As an assemblage of a recent move among new museology and community museology advocates to speak of museums as a collaborative enterprise, ecomuseums are seen as a means of empowering communities by encouraging their participation in, and control over, museum programs often through practices of “self-discovery” and “community development” (Poulot 1994: 75; Bennett 1998: 201). With a focus on

³¹¹ See Meers (2010: 100) supporting this argument for Art institutions.

collaboration and communication, the ecomuseum, according to Poulot (1994: 78), is “concerned less with representation than with involvement - the ecomuseum searches, above all, to engage (voir faire) its audience in the social process. Yet, Poulot (1994) argues that the ecomuseum is deeply implicated in a paradox whereby it is cultivated by the workings of government, yet seemingly stands opposed to traditional structures of power (see also Bennett 1998). According to Poulot, the ecomuseum “embodies a form of “civic pedagogy” in aiming to foster self-knowledge of the community by providing it with the resources through which it can come to know and participate in its culture in a more organised and self-conscious way” (Bennett 1998: 202). Looking at ecomuseum projects where government organizations have played a lead role in establishing such museums, Poulot stresses in France, as I interrogate in China, that this practice is seen to be motivated by a similar process of civic management as that of traditional museums, focused on particular regional communities and in engaging the general public in notions of cultural diversity and difference. Indeed, driven not from the bottom by civic aspirations by the community or characterized by notions of community empowerment and community control, ecomuseums in China have been deeply implicated in the workings of government and programs of “cultural development” and as economic socializing vehicles. Thus, their political nature must not be overlooked and even for ecomuseums and other ecomuseological and community heritage projects focused on community development that do exist outside of government programs and governmental practices, there is, as Bennett (1998: 203) argues and I stress, a “need to be alert to the fact that being 'for community' may also mean working through and by governmental means”.

Ecomuseum Frictions

In my exploration of ecomuseums in southwest China, and the detailed case of Huaili, I have not looked for positive heritage experiences, but rather I have focused on the meanings of both colonial and emergent museological encounters that encompass and shape the ecomuseum social space (see Witcomb 2007; Kreps 2003). Bennett's general claim is pertinent to the case of the ecomuseum in China, especially as it reflects a program that is dependent on "top-down activities of government". However, I do want to make clear that in the context of China's rapid transition and transformation, and as a site of global conversability and cross-cultural dialogue, the dynamics of the ecomuseum in China should not be understood as so cut and dry and deterministic. The notion of the museum as contact zone also does much to highlight the dynamic context of the ecomuseum, and in particular the diversity of interactions and encounters that transpire through the museum space and how they shape expressions and representations of culture and knowledge. However, to see the contact zone as an antidote for refuting the meta-narratives of traditional museum practices, overcoming exclusions, and having the effect of transforming and breaking down dominant, universalizing, hierarchical modes which structure the governmental role of museums is not my intention in in this study (Dibley 2005; Harrison 2011). I want to instead push the idea that the ecomuseum takes on multiple roles and functions as a governmental assemblages and as a social space of contact that is constitutive of and, simultaneously generates *friction*. The complicated, nuanced development process of ecomuseums in China reveals "how both structural/institutional dynamics and social actors and agencies shape and take shape

through museological processes and museum frictions” (Kratz and Karp 2006: 22).

Understanding the ecomuseum through the notion of friction not only helps in exposing how the ecomuseum manifests and develops in China and in the local context through the movement and interactions of things, ideas, capital, and people, and its implications for local communities, landscapes and heritage and related extra-local stakeholders. It also aids in understanding the viability of such Western concepts and attached Western cultural values in non-Western contexts like China, pointing out how the ecomuseum finds salience within national, regional, and local political, economic, and cultural agendas.

The work of Anna Tsing (2005), together with the third volume of a series by Karp and company (2006), provide illumination on the ecomuseum as a site where emergent interactions and blurred boundaries between ideology and practice create particular museum frictions. Tsing’s (2005: 1) work in particular points to the undertones of global connections and particular actor interactions that generate “friction”. Through her ethnography of global connection and the case of encounters through the Kalimantan rainforest in Indonesia, she articulates the complex, uncertain, and often unequal nature of cross-cultural interactions, and relationships between various actors (2005: 3-4). Tsing demonstrates how the friction of contingent cross-cultural encounters of people and things is a creative force in the co-production of culture. In the context of museum politics, Harrison (2011) states, “it is necessary to take account not only of globalised ‘flows’, but also the sense in which moments of assembling and reassembling within the museum network also often produce friction and conflict” (see Kratz and Karp 2006). Through the ongoing process of ecomuseum development, and intensification of

interactions between involved social actors, the production of friction and conflict becomes ever more evident. Ecomuseums in China are indeed similar to what Tsing (2005: xi) calls, “zones of awkward engagement”.

I adopt the notion of “friction” here as a theoretical stance to expose the overlooked political effects of the ecomuseum in China and worldwide. In my study I aim to undermine the harmonious overtones of the advocated ecomuseum approach. Rather than assuming ecomuseums as projects “without friction” and only of contact and unimpeded flows of goods, capital, ideas, and people, I hold with Tsing (2005) in that this is not how such dynamic spaces work that are intricately implicated in local, regional, national, and global connections. Attention to how the ecomuseum in China operates in friction shows, as Tsing (2005: 6) suggests, that particular contacts are not smooth and interactions of difference can disrupt. The social space of the ecomuseum is made up of diverse and conflicting interactions that are not confined to a village, a province or region, or a nation, but also include Chinese technocrats, international museologists, government officials, local ecomuseum brokers and cultural agents, village performers, NGOs workers, and more. They shape the internal dynamics of the ongoing cultural process of the ecomuseum as an institution of social change and an economic socializing vehicle.

According to Tsing (2005: 4), “the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interaction across difference” is the friction which keeps things in motion. I employ “friction” as a productive way to think through the ways the global, national, regional and local coalesce to shape the workings of the ecomuseum.³¹² The overlapping, shifting, and often conflicting objectives of interacting social actors and discourses that coalesce

³¹² Gupta (2011: 18) draws on Tsing in a similar way through her analysis of identity and mediation of subjectivities in Mozambique.

around and through the ecomuseum project move the project itself. The international engagements between Chinese and foreign museum professionals and scholars in the mid-1990s that incited the movement of the idea of the ecomuseum into China and the adaptation of international ecomuseum principles, bringing together the negotiation of Western cultural values and Chinese national and regional discourses on museums and heritage and state policies, which has led to its manifestation in rural ethnic China are just some of the frictions seen through the ecomuseum.

Like Tsing, I have attempted to show how capital, knowledge, and human actors collide, push against each other, and interact to form a politically imbued social space of the ecomuseum. As a cultural institution situated in the local context, the ecomuseum is also seen as both a structure of confinement and a social space that enables mobility. It creates a structure of confinement for ethnic villages and cultural landscapes, and local villagers and heritage as it defines and constitutes what is defined as valued and “protected”. This is seen through processes of cultural and spatial construction through the museumification and exhibition of rural locales. At the same time, the ecomuseum creates a social space that enables the movement of ideas, capital, things, and people in and out of the rural locality which did not exist before at this degree of intensity. As a result of interactions between extra-local and local actors, identifications, classifications, and values are produced and new relationships between people are forged. For example, village residents collide with the ecomuseum project intervention only to be disenfranchised by state authority and extra-local decision-making practices to curate the local culture and landscape and establish new cultural destinations and research bases. New engagements through the ecomuseum position local populations as “living heritage”,

establish musealized villages, provoke the creation of modern subjectivities, and enact new idioms of heritage and collective identity. Ecomuseum staff interact with government agencies and local actors, and their respective heritage discourses, negotiating the parameters of their own social positionality and broker that of the local population. Sometimes there is traction - the productive side of friction - between the ecomuseum project and local resident actors, as seen through the creation of cultural performance and ecomuseum staff-led community heritage initiatives. But, these, too, are often a result of or catalyst of conflict between related actors over claims to capital, interpretation, and ownership. As Tsing (2005: 6) states, friction “inflicts historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing.... the effects of encounters across difference can be compromising and empowering”. Thus, while the ecomuseum creates motion, it, too, limits it. In tracing the connections which shape and through which the ecomuseum operates in rural China and how different actors engage in and respond to these projects, I have exposed the nuanced and complicated realities, risks, and opportunities of mediating heritage politics and rural development in contemporary China.

As I have illustrated through the case of Huaili, while it is clear that a hierarchical framework continues to remain intact and is reproduced in different exhibitionary processes, even by village community actors themselves, cross-cultural interactions and interpretations can generate friction and new forms of contestation that “pull against established hierarchical legacies” (Clifford 1997: 214). Through extensive field research in Huaili and other ecomuseum sites, I have not only observed the ecomuseum as a regulatory apparatus of the traditional structure of power and dominant state narrative,

but also as a cultural locus where local actors negotiate the political framework and museological processes to carefully articulate local claims to identity, heritage, and development and even an alternative community heritage discourse. Although this is seen to take place in only a handful of cases, it does prove that the ecomuseum can provide a platform, specifically through its generated frictions, to stimulate such activity. What we see in cases like Huaili is that even as community involvement in heritage management and decision-making seems to be incited by the vertical structure of the ecomuseum initiative, community actors and social agents are not just “tinkering” with the inherited form of the museum to refunction it in a manner to bring about a redirection and reform in accordance to a government program of cultural tolerance and diversity (Bennett 1998: 212). Huaili is not simply a case like those in ethnic minority cultural destinations of local populations reproducing imaginaries of ethnic difference and notions of authenticity (see Schien 2000; Oakes 1998, 2006). Forms of engagement are much more nuanced. Even though the tourist cultural performance does represent local accommodation of a shared performance repertoire and reproduction of cultural stereotypes, as discussed in Chapter 5, the majority of village residents are not swayed to engage in the government-led ecomuseum project and local cultural economy, remaining mainly disassociated and even resistant to it. When instances of engagement do arise, such as the ecomuseum staff-induced community heritage activities, and to elder Li's private museum and Jiang Huayuan's community heritage texts discussed in Chapter 6, the ecomuseum signifies a space of polyphonic dialogue - multiple dialogic exchanges. These forms of engagement and local agency occupy the same space where powerful civic programs of government also exist.

What these practices represent is the creation of new modern subjectivities and a “discursive struggle” over the discovery of “who we are” and a “refusal of what we are” within the ecomuseum context (Dibley 2005:22; Oakes 1998).³¹³ As ecomuseum work and meaning is rearticulated through a new set of relations between the museum and the community, whereby the project becomes more community-centered, a “break down” of the “political-discursive space of the museum” begins to occur (Bennett 1995: 102). Bennett, who is aware of the internal contradictions of the new democratic mood to contemporary museums (Trinca and Welmer 2006: 63), acknowledges that new “relations” that redress the museological principles of “public rights” and “representation” can evoke a “dismantling” of the “monologic discourse dominated by the authoritative cultural voice of the museum” (1995: 103), e.g. how knowledge is produced and organized and presented. He (1995: 102) states that a break down of this discourse can occur through a shift in the role of the curator, “allow[ing] [the museum] to function more adequately as an instrument for the self-display of democratic and pluralist societies” (see also Kreps 2003; Crooke 2006; Witcomb 2003). In the case of Huaili, this has begun to be seen in the shift in project operation in which local community members, or Baiku Yao ecomuseum staff, take on this role as “curator”. Since 2008, Baiku Yao ecomuseum staff have already shown how a move to be more inclusive and participatory can alter the rights of local actors in the articulation and representation of their own heritage and identity, seen through projects like the Baiku Yao cultural inheritance class and local documentation by community videographers. While Huaili is a unique case in

³¹³ Dibley (2005:) draws from Foucault's (1982: 216) quote: “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are.”

China in terms of this shift in course of ecomuseum development, it reveals that the ecomuseum initiative can be redirected away from purely a government and expert-led directive. Even if staff are doing the work of government as operators of the government initiated ecomuseum project, they are not just advancing government edicts. In negotiating their role as insider and outsider and mediating local and state dominant heritage discourses, they also work to redress the regulatory government control of decision-making practices and forms of engagement.³¹⁴ This reflects the productive process of power Foucault presents in his later writings. Although ecomuseum staff and village residents are situated in cultural and institutional systems that organize articulations of identity, heritage, community, and place, individual social actors are granted more agency in the social space of encounter the ecomuseum creates and the frictions generated through it; this allows for them to critically and reflectively maneuver within these systems, detach themselves from them, and sometimes modify them (see Litzinger 2000: 26). Therefore, sharing in a statement made by Oakes (1998: 17), we must not view power as confined to apparatuses of the state and market, but also reproduced through modern subject positions themselves.

While the “ecomuseum” in China does not closely adhere to international principles of ecomuseology (Corsane et al 2009; Davis 2008), I demonstrate that it can act as an impetus for such practices to emerge. What this illustrates is that “colonial experiences are ongoing with repercussions in the present” (Clifford 1997) and that relations and forms of power and agency can change for those who come into contact with the ecomuseum (Witcomb 2003). The institutional structure of the ecomuseum in China,

³¹⁴ Stanley (2007), Fuller 1992, and Crooke (2006), to name a few, have shown that this has also happened in several museums of indigenous peoples and community museums.

which situates the government in a role to lead, experts to guide, and the local population to participate as defined by government leaders and extra-local experts, is actually the impetus for cultural maneuvering and shifts in power relations among involved social actors. Ecomuseum staff, who have gained substantial capital as operators of the ecomuseum and as a result of the dominant discourse surround ecomuseum programs and heritage protection in China, can articulate new power relations as mediators of the project, thus setting in motion a discursive struggle over ecomuseum development and the heritage discourse. Local responses and reactions to the government-led initiative thus show how alternative practices can emerge which resemble much more of the ecomuseum philosophy. Interestingly, this has taken place not only in Huaili, but also in other locales such as Zhenshan and Longli, as seen through the two ethnographic vignettes. In exploring such cases, I emphasize that ecomuseums should not be taken out of context and should be understood as embedded in and arising from a political framework and various cross-cultural interactions.

The cultural contexts in which ecomuseums exist today in China are shaped by larger historical, economic, political, social, and cultural influences that emanate from local, regional, national, and international sources (Kreps 2003). It is clear that even as ecomuseums emerge in local contexts, they continue to reflect agendas that extend well beyond the local community (see Crooke 2008: 415). These projects developed across China's ethnic minority regions, are often framed in terms of how excluded groups may be recruited into existing heritage, museum, and cultural tourism practices often under the tropes of "inclusion" and "participatory heritage protection" (Smith 2006). This creates a practical framework that government agencies and associated experts use to integrate

ethnic peoples into the fold of modern mainstream Chinese society (Sofield and Li 1998).

The attempt to integrate ecomuseology in China indeed still remains a patchy achievement where inequality in decision-making and heritage management persist and minority peoples are significantly marginalized, objectified, and exploited for their cultural resources. In several cases throughout China, the ecomuseum has only formed a surface relationship with its local community. This has resulted in the project having little meaning to the local population (see Crooke 2007: 131), with several villagers expressing to me throughout my fieldwork that the ecomuseum has no connection to them and their lives. In many ways, the implementation of the ecomuseum concept in China has also provoked rather than alleviated concerns around the loss of distinct cultural heritages threatened by rapid development, economic development, and community participation and development. In ecomuseum projects in Guizhou and Guangxi have induced development and social change that ultimately redirects and seems to run counter to their proposed mission of maintaining “intact”, “preserved” cultures. As we see in the case of Huaili and in the sites of Suoga, Tang'an, Longli, and Zhenshan, changes such as a rise in outward migrant labor, the construction of new homes, and the sale of culture for the flood of tourists, have led to the faster transformation of local tangible and intangible heritage as these communities encounter processes of modernity incited through ecomuseum development (see Nitzky 2012; Lu 2013).

The mechanism of the ecomuseum is further compounded by motives of poverty reduction, modernization, and regional economic growth, which paradoxically threaten China's rural heritage (Svensson 2006). The effort to establish “protected areas” of unique and exotic ethnic cultures and peoples, to be put on display and preserved in rural China

through the innovative, foreign approach of the ecomuseum is seen as a political and economic act to satisfy the state ideology of multiculturalism in safeguarding the nation's cultural diversity through the ossification and museumification of distinct ethnic cultures. It is also a means to commercialize culture by creating local cultural economies that are part of the expanding cultural heritage tourism industry and are proclaimed to address issues of economic disparity and poverty. Finally the establishment of ecomuseums throughout China promotes the mission to build a "civilized China" through the development of museum and heritage institutions, which also epitomizes China's engagement with globalizing currents and trends of developing "humanitarian" approaches to protect culture and to cover the nation with multi-million dollar museums as monuments of modernity.

Rather than representing the transcendence of the traditional museological paradigm or that museums have "gone postmodern" (Denton 2005: 569), ecomuseums in China exemplify a recent shift in rethinking the form and function of the museum in Chinese society and the relationship between the public and the museum. As a reflection of a radically changing Chinese society and part of a neoliberal present and larger museum development boom, ecomuseums introduce a new museological approach that does work to alter the "ethos of museums" in China. It does this not simply by bringing the museum into the local context or signifying a "museum without walls", but, moreover, by calling public attention to local and plural heritages and historical narratives that have historically been unrepresented in Chinese museums and by creating a platform, even if rhetorical, that local communities are to become "masters" of their cultural heritage through social inclusion and collaboration. Furthermore, it extends the scope of the

museum in China in terms of engagement with intangible heritage in the areas of display, research, collection, and work with communities (see Alivizatou 2008).³¹⁵ These attributes signal an important move in museological practices in China that have long been steeped in serving the communist revolutionary rhetoric, and upholding grand, meta-narratives of the nation and political legitimacy.

To know the ideological currents of the institution, narratives promoted by them, and power relations that shape them, is to understand how museums work. To know how they work allows us to understand how to work within them. Specifically in China where museums are positioned in and reflect overlapping and changing state discourses and engage with foreign practices and the global heritage discourse, it is important to critically analyze museums and their contexts. The analysis presented through this study on the complex nature of ecomuseum development in China is indicative of how more research is needed to further critically explore locality-specific cases of “community museums” and community heritage initiatives found throughout the world and the broader processes they are implicated in. This research is a response to the lack of critical analysis in literature on ecomuseums and community museums, and failure to explore the inner workings and political nature of ecomuseum projects. Employing nuanced theoretical tools, such as the “circuits of culture” (moments of representation, production, consumption, and regulation), ways that heritage is used, displaced, and recontextualized, forms of agency and relations of power, and assessments of the politics of participation

³¹⁵ In the development of the ecomuseum, the concept of intangible heritage is seen to significantly affect the function of the institution according to growing demands to reassess practices of conservation and preservation and the museum-community relationship. Highlighting the significance and value of oral and living cultural traditions as part of the “scientific” endeavor of the museum is something very new in China (Pan 2008).

and engagement, in conjunction with ethnographic methods, as this study shows, can enable greater exposure of the interconnectedness of museums, heritage, and communities and the complex interactions and multiple actors that shape them. Examining the agentic force of the museum and the global connections found within and through them can assist in understanding the dialectical and dialogical engagements and transformations of subjects, cultures, and spaces and how social struggles are exacerbated over interpretations and the control of cultural resources (Shelton 2006: 79). Interrogating the engagements and entanglements of ecomuseums and heritage in China and the complex mediation of preservation and development, I hope that the cases of Huaili and other ecomuseums in Guangxi and Guizhou can assist in charting a new course for rethinking the politics of community heritage and museum-community relations. Attempts in liberating the discursive field of museums and museology must move beyond just the integration of more community voices and local knowledge into the museum space, and reflect on making significant alterations to the goals and priorities of the museum institution and heritage discourse, in addition to large scale shifts in the cultural policies and structures of power currently in place in each cultural context. A more critical exploration on the dynamic interactions between museums, communities, and publics and the friction that define and shape them through different forms of interaction and collaboration has significant implications for such movement.

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