

A Difficult Integration of Authenticity and Intangible Cultural Heritage?

The Case of Yunnan, China

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ABSTRACT: Authenticity is a concept that is not seen in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) discourse but is emphasised in Chinese ICH official discourse. An analysis of the origins, discourses, and practices of the notion of authenticity of ICH, as well as the difficulties generated from this concept, illustrates the creation of ICH in China, which mediates between local and international ideologies. This paper adopts historical and critical heritage discourse perspectives to examine cases in Yunnan Province, China, including the understandings, discourses, and practices of the idea of "authenticity" and related original ecology in regard to experts, officials, and ICH practitioners. Through the lens of authenticity, the paper illustrates the history of the complicated relationships between authenticity and ICH in the last 20 years, revealing the dynamism and difficulties in the integration of authenticity and ICH as an official discourse, and the possibilities and restrictions of reconceptualising authenticity in the current contexts of integrating culture and tourism, as well as the reform of cultural governance, in contemporary China.

KEYWORDS: Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), authenticity, Yunnan, authorised heritage discourse, integration of culture and tourism in China.

Introduction

China has been very active in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH hereafter) since the ratification of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH (ICHC) in 2004. Internationally, China tops UNESCO's Representative ICH List with 32 elements.¹ After the ratification of the ICHC, China quickly advanced its domestic ICH campaign, which led in 2011 to the launch of the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China (Standing Committee of National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China - SCNPC 2011).

It is interesting to note that, during the localisation in China of UNESCO's ICH discourse, the concept of authenticity has been gradually emphasised in the Chinese official ICH discourse. Authenticity was stated firstly in the Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China (General Office of the State Council 2005), and it has been emphasised as a key concept in the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage (LICH) since 2011. Internationally, however, it is clear that UNESCO regards the concept of authenticity as questionable for ICH (Bortolotto 2013; UNESCO 2004, 2015), and is problematic in all international heritage systems (Lixinski 2014).

Authenticity in the LICH is officially interpreted as: "when transmitting and disseminating this ICH, maintaining it as it was in the past, as well as

respecting its historical original;" consequently, "variations and distortions to the historical original are detrimental to ICH" (Xin and Huang 2011: 14). This statement can be described as either an objective perspective of authenticity (Boorstin 1961; MacCannell 1973) or a materialist perspective of authenticity (Jones 2009; Labadi 2012), as it is believed that the authenticity of ICH is attributed to the historical originality that is intrinsic to the ICH element per se. It is interesting, as well as controversial, to note that in the same law, ICH is regarded as "important resources for cultural industries and tourism" (Xin and Huang 2011: 106). As ICH was protected with objective authenticity, on the one hand, and commodified for cultural and tourism industries, on the other hand, authenticity of ICH in the law has become controversial. This can be seen in the fact that Chinese scholars hold dissonant opinions towards the relationship between protection and use of ICH in relation to authenticity (Gao 2016).

Authenticity is an analytical concept to examine the making process (Smith 2006) and control (Lixinski 2014) of cultural heritage and its values. It has been found that authenticity is understood in different ways

1. Jiang Bo 蔣波, and Wei Yanxing 韋衍行. 2019. "為什麼中國是擁有 '非遺'項目最多的國家?" (Weishenme Zhongguo shi yongyou "feiyi" xiangmu zuiduo de guojia? Why China is the Country with the Most ICH Projects?), *ICH China* (中國非物質文化遺產網), 6 November 2019, http://www.ihchina.cn/news_1_details/19280.html (accessed on 20 August 2021).

in terms of administrators and audiences in cultural heritage tourism (Cole 2007). Authenticity in the field of heritage protection is largely perceived in an objective and materialist perspective (Smith 2006; Jones 2009; Labadi 2012), whereas the subjective or existential perspective of authenticity perceived by visitors is crucial in the field of tourism (Wang 1999; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; Park, Choi, and Lee 2019). In recent years, international scholars began to explore the relationships of different authenticities in ICH tourism. Khanom and others conceptualised a model of ICH authentication from the perspectives of hosts and guests (Khanom *et al.* 2019). Nevertheless, existing research has not investigated the historical development of the relationships of authenticity and ICH from wider social stakeholders' perspectives and how authenticity is played out by these stakeholders in current cultural reform in China.

Among China's provinces, Yunnan is a representative case to examine authenticity in relation to ICH, as it was the first province to enact provincial ICH regulations, which paved the way for the central government to draft the LICH (Xin and Huang 2011). Based on textual analysis and fieldwork in Yunnan, this paper adopts historical and critical heritage studies (Smith 2006, 2012; Winter and Waterton 2013) perspectives to analyse the concept of authenticity of ICH in China over the past 20 years from two aspects: the first is how authenticity is constructed as a discourse by the government and ICH practitioners, and the second is how authenticity is practiced in the ICH engagement of experts and government officials. Finally, the paper reveals the possibilities and restrictions of reconceptualising authenticity in contemporary China.

Discourse of authenticity, original ecological culture, and ICH

Although authenticity is a key concept in the fields of heritage and tourism, it is a disputable concept because it is socially constructed (Cohen 1988) by various stakeholders with their differentiated perspectives (Theodossopoulos 2013). The critical heritage studies approach rightly points out the dissonance of authenticity, as well as the connotation of heritage, and advocates analysing the making of the concept of authenticity in terms of discourse and practice. Importantly, critical scholars such as Smith argue that the concept of authenticity bolsters the "authorised heritage discourse," a hegemonic discourse operated by international professional organisations such as UNESCO, in the recognition, registration, and management of cultural heritage (2006). A consequence of the "authorised heritage discourse" is that unofficial or alternative heritage discourses held by local cultural custodians and community members are likely to be neglected or marginalised. Recent studies indicate that a similar "authorised heritage discourse" has been established for both tangible and intangible heritage at the national level in China (Wu and Qin 2016; Su 2020). Nevertheless, alternative discourses and practices of authenticity in relation to ICH in China need further examination.

Authenticity was introduced to the international heritage field in the 1960s and became a crucial concept in UNESCO's World Heritage program in 1978.² Along with the introduction of World Heritage, the concept of authenticity was introduced to China in the 1980s (Xu 2005). Authenticity is regarded as a Western-centred term (Lowenthal 1995) that has no equivalent in Chinese (Xu 2005: 105). In the Chinese "authorised heritage discourse" of ICH, such as the LICH, authenticity is worded as *zhenshixing* (真实性), but it is also translated as *yuanzhenxing*

(原真性) in the tangible heritage domain (Xu 2005), and as *benzhenxing* (本真性) in folklore studies (Liu 2008). Authenticity has been regarded as a professional guiding principle for heritage protection, as it represents a rational, scientific, and systematic "discursive frame" (Yan 2012: 69). Consequently, it has been gradually enshrined as a key concept in Chinese "authorised heritage discourse" of tangible and intangible heritage.

The concept of authenticity in Chinese official tangible heritage discourse can be seen as an objective or materialist perspective that strongly influences the construction of Chinese "authorised heritage discourse" of ICH (Su 2018, 2020). The appropriation of authenticity from tangible heritage discourse to ICH discourse was synergistically produced by officials and reputable scholars as they worked together through a symbiotic government-scholar network (Maags and Holbig 2016) to construct the Chinese ICH "authorised heritage discourse." One typical example is the remarks by Wang Wenzhang, China's former Vice-Minister of Culture as well as the director of the National ICH Protection Centre. He articulated in his seminal theoretical textbook (Wang 2013) that although there are many difficulties when maintaining the principle of authenticity in protecting ICH, professionals still have to do so because "authenticity is one important principle applied by the World Heritage Committee for the World Cultural Heritage assessment" (*ibid.*: 308). It is clear here that the notion of authenticity in Chinese "authorised heritage discourse" has been deliberately appropriated by reputable experts and high-level officials from UNESCO's "authorised heritage discourse" of World Heritage.

Another important source of the notion of ICH's authenticity can be traced back to the characteristic Chinese term of "original ecology culture" (*yuanshengtai wenhua* 原生态文化). "Original ecology" was popularly deployed by Chinese elites and experts in the early 2000s to describe "premodern," "unpolished," "grassroots," "primitive," and "rustic" indigenous ethnic and traditional cultures (Luo 2018b). The emergence of the term manifests a cultural movement in ethnic cultural regions such as Guizhou and Yunnan provinces, where distinctive native ethnic and traditional cultures are mobilised for local socio-economic development and China's domestic agenda and international aspirations (Luo 2018b). Academics and the market are two major players in making the discourse of original ecology. Experts, scholars, and cultural elites advocate original ecology as a principle for the protection of ICH (Li 2011). As noted by Liu Xiaochun (2008) and Gao Bingzhong (2007), the idea of the authenticity of ICH is closely related to Chinese folklore studies, a subject in which the idea of original ecology is privileged. Original ecology is pertinent to historical authenticity (Luo 2018a) and can therefore be regarded as a prototype for the objective perspective of authenticity of ICH. Along with the notion of "traditional ethnic culture and folklore" being redefined as ICH in 2005, the concept of original ecology was gradually replaced with authenticity. The market is another significant player. As soon as the concept of original ecology was coined, it was specifically used to promote the commodification of traditional and ethnic culture for commercial singing and dancing performances in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces (Li 2011). As Luo demonstrated with cases in Guizhou Province, original ecology is a crucial concept in the branding of ethnic ICH for the Chinese cultural market (2018b).

2. It states: "In addition, the property should meet the test of authenticity in design, materials, workmanship and setting" (UNESCO 1978: 4).

An examination of the construction of the official ICH discourse in Yunnan can display how regional ICH discourses are naturalised into a standardised national “authorised heritage discourse” in a bottom-up manner, which then impacts the revision of regional regulations in a top-down manner. Yunnan Province, as the most ethnically diverse province in China and with rich ICH elements, is generally regarded as the first province to administer ICH through the legal system (Xin and Huang 2011). The enterprise of ICH in Yunnan, carried out in the name of traditional ethnic and folk culture, was initiated by local governments, experts, academic institutes, and other social organisations from the 1950s to the 1960s in terms of investigation, documentation, and academic studies (Wang 2005). However, these works were interrupted during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Investigation and documentation of ICH resumed in the 1980s when Yunnan participated in the nationwide campaign of the Ten Anthologies of Chinese Traditional and Ethnic Literature and Arts, which was completed in 2004.

Yunnan began to establish its experimental ICH administrative system in the 1990s. Yunnan investigated and listed ICH inheritors, under the name of “folk artists,” in the fields of ethnic and folk music, dance, arts, and handicrafts. It was the first programme of its kind in China to investigate and recognise grassroots ICH inheritors (Wang 2005). This project was initiated by academics and later drew the attention of provincial and national officials, who then suggested the enactment of regional regulations for the protection of ethnic and folk culture and set examples for other provinces and the state (Li 2000; Zhao 2014). Later in 2000, the Ordinance on the Protection of Yunnan Ethnic Traditional Culture and Folklore (the Yunnan Ordinance) was launched (Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Yunnan Province 2000). The Yunnan Ordinance reflected the discourses of ICH in Yunnan Province at that time from the perspectives of academics/experts and officials.

The idea of authenticity/original ecology emerged in the Yunnan Ordinance. Article 10 of the Yunnan Ordinance states that “attention should be paid to the protection and rescue of traditional ethnic and folk culture with native form (*yuansheng xingtai*, 原生形態), and the work should be precise and scientific.” Meanwhile, Article 31 affirms that local governments should “take effective measures to develop traditional ethnic and folk cultural programs in a planned way” for tourism and cultural industries. Native form can be regarded as the origin of the term “original ecology” (Yin 2018). Thus, it can be seen that the idea of original ecology/authenticity of ICH first appeared in the regional official discourse for two obvious purposes: the first being to protect/preserve ICH, and the second to develop/market ICH. This intrinsic contradiction of maintaining authenticity and commodification later appeared in the national “authorised heritage discourse,” the LICH.

While the ICH protection initiatives in Yunnan provided experience and examples for the state to make the “authorised heritage discourse,” the national ICH campaign in the early 2000s gradually naturalised the Yunnan discourses. Yunnan was selected as the first pilot site for the national Project of Safeguarding Chinese Ethnic Culture and Folklore. Consequently, a comprehensive investigation of traditional ethnic and folk culture was conducted from 2003 to 2005, under the lead of the Department of Culture of Yunnan Province (Huang 2008). Meanwhile, the Yunnan government intended to adjust the Yunnan Ordinance so as to standardise and scientify (*kexuehua* 科學化) the existing ICH work in Yunnan while at the same time incorporating the development of the national ICH campaign and the new socioeconomic situation in

Yunnan (Huang 2009). The need for a revision of the Yunnan Ordinance became imperative in 2011 when the LICH was enacted, so the national “authorised heritage discourse” had to naturalise regional regulations in a top-down manner.

When the Yunnan Ordinance was revised into the Ordinance of Yunnan on the Protection Intangible Cultural Heritage (Standing Committee of People’s Congress of Yunnan Province 2013), the term of authenticity was clearly added and highlighted. The statement in the Ordinance of Yunnan on the Protection Intangible Cultural Heritage is the same as that in the LICH: safeguarding of ICH “should pay attention to authenticity, integrity, and inheritance” (Article 4 in the Ordinance and Article 4 in the LICH), and it is forbidden to “use ICH in any way that may distort or belittle the form and connotation of ICH” (Article 4 in the Ordinance and Article 5 in the LICH). Similar to the Yunnan Ordinance, it also encourages the commodification of ICH; as stated in Article 23 of the Ordinance of Yunnan on the Protection Intangible Cultural Heritage, the government “encourages and supports reasonable exploitation and utilisation of ICH resources” for the tourism and cultural industries.

In line with the revision of the ICH ordinance at the provincial level, local governments in Yunnan either revised or enacted new regulations on ICH in their regions under the top-down national “authorised heritage discourse.” Among these, for example, Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan, enacted a new regulation, The Ordinance of Kunming on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Standing Committee of the Congress of Kunming Municipality 2018), and the Lijiang Government issued the Implementation Opinions of the Lijiang Municipal Government on the Strengthening of the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Lijiang Municipal Government 2018). In these documents, the concept of authenticity is clearly stipulated.

The situation of Yunnan has inspired other provinces of China where regional traditional ethnic and folk culture regulations were drafted in the early 2000s, such as Guizhou, Guangxi, Fujian, etc. This process, in which regional regulations are standardised and naturalised into the national “authorised heritage discourse” system, is a two-way interaction. On the one side, the upper “authorised heritage discourse” should naturalise the diverse regional ICH discourses for the national agenda; on the other side, provinces would like to be naturalised into the national “authorised heritage discourse” so as to benefit from national preferential policies and funds for local socioeconomic development (Huang 2009).

Practices of authenticity by experts

Following the critical heritage studies approach, the “authorised heritage discourse” of authenticity and ICH in China is not just a discourse that is constructed by experts and officials in the form of documents and policies, but also a cultural practice (Smith 2006) that is engaged by those players who accommodate the discourse into reality. This section examines the ways experts operate authenticity and the challenges they encounter.

Before Yunnan Province joined the national ICH campaign in the 2000s, various endeavours for protecting traditional ethnic and folk culture had been initiated in Yunnan. Among these, Tian Feng 田豐 and his Yunnan Ethnic Cultural School (*Yunnan minzu wenhua chuanxiguan* 雲南民族文化傳習館) can be seen as a typical case in China in regard to the practice of authenticity/original ecology from the perspective of experts. Tian Feng was a well-known musician in the China National

Symphony Orchestra. He travelled in Yunnan many times to study ethnic traditional dance and music. Regretting the changing and disappearing of ethnic cultures under globalisation and modernisation, Tian Feng established his school in the suburbs of Kunming in 1994 with limited funding from donations and personal support (Du 1997; Yin 2018). Tian Feng's educational concept, which is stated as "pursuing the real and forbidding change" (*qiuzhen jinbian 求真禁變*) (Hong 2010; Yin 2018), can be described as a good example of an objective perspective of authenticity and original ecology. He required young students, who were recruited from various ethnic areas in Yunnan, to learn and inherit their music, dance, and other traditional and folk culture in an "authentic" way with no change at all. To separate the young students from the influence of modern society and the market, Tian Feng did not allow collaboration with business and even prevented the students from watching TV, listening to radio and popular music, and making contact with the outside world without permission (Yin 2018). The school operated for seven years and closed at the end of 1999. There were several reasons for its closure, but a major reason, as pointed out by observers, was that Tian Feng did not accept the commodification of performances, while the resources for carrying on were economically unsustainable (Hong 2010).

Tian Feng and his ideas on the protection and inheritance of ICH triggered heated discussion after the closure of the school in 1999 and his unfortunate death in 2001. Anthropologist Yin Shaoting 尹紹亭, who was familiar with Tian Feng, regarded Tian as the pioneer of "original ecology culture" in China and analysed why this idea failed in practice (2018). The failure of the experiment of objective authenticity may be reflected, nevertheless, in the success of the students after the closure of the school. Li Huaixiu 李懷秀, a young student recruited to Tian Feng's school in the 1990s, learnt not only Yi ethnic music and dance, but also those of other ethnic minorities. After the school's closure, she went back to her hometown in Shiping County, in southern Yunnan, to teach local students, including her younger brother Li Huaifu 李懷福. The sister and brother performed on stage and engaged in other work in their hometown before they had the chance to join a national performance competition in 2003. Their characteristic ethnic singing and dancing quickly drew the attention of the audience and later won first prize in the "original ecology singing" category of the China Central Television National Young Singers TV Competition in 2006. The Li siblings rose to fame overnight in China.

In contrast to the closed and isolated training in Tian Feng's school, the Li siblings actively participate in various social activities, including teaching in their hometown, participating in competitions and commercial performances, and performing in China and abroad. In 2019, in collaboration with the local government, the Li Huaixiu and Li Huaifu ICH Inheritance Centre was established in Shiping County for the teaching, learning, and exhibition of Yi ethnic performing ICH elements. Now they still advertise the notion of "original ecology," but they use it to promote the characteristics of their ICH performance.³ Unlike Tian Feng's School, the Li Centre collaborates closely with governments, schools, and the market. They have grown from students to ICH experts and cultural elites, experimenting with new approaches to transmitting their ICH. While original ecology/authenticity was practiced by their teacher Tian Feng to "fossilise" the ethnic traditional culture/ICH, the Li siblings practice the authenticity/original ecology of their ICH to develop their identity, cultural market, and regional cultural reputation.

Practices of authenticity by officials

Officials, with their political power, work with experts/elites to construct Chinese ICH "authorised heritage discourse" through the making of official ICH documents and implementing these textual "authorised heritage discourse" in a top-down manner (Su and Chen 2020). This section analyses the measures through which ICH officials implement the concept of authenticity and the accompanying challenges they encounter in practice.

The ICH movement in China after the Cultural Revolution can be generally divided into three phases. The first phase began from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, during which many investigations and research works were mainly undertaken by experts and scholars, especially those working in the fields of folklore studies and anthropology (Kang 2011). Then the Chinese government took the lead in the ICH enterprise and politicised it into a nation-wide ICH campaign in the second stage, which began in the early 2000s, when China participated in UNESCO's ICH program, and continued until 2011, when China established a comprehensive legal ICH system. This is also the stage when international discourses of ICH and authenticity were accommodated into Chinese domestic heritage discourse. The third stage, from 2013 onward, followed Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks on the "revitalisation" and "creative transformation and innovative development" (*chuangzaoxing zhuanhua yu chuangxinxing fazhan 創造性轉化與創新性發展*) of cultural heritage for social, cultural, and economic construction of Chinese society in the "new era" (*xinshidai 新時代*). In this period, the issue of authenticity has been increasingly problematised as ICH is protected, commodified, and created to a wider extent by multiple social actors, in addition to experts and officials.

As a key concept in the Chinese ICH system, authenticity is nevertheless a new concept to most officials. This situation can be understood from two aspects. The first is because of the fact that authenticity was not an existing concept in the previous national works of traditional ethnic and folk cultural protection and was only written into the legal system in the 2000s. The majority of officials working for ICH, in particular those at middle (provincial) and lower (municipal and county) -level ICH Centres, are not trained in the field of ICH. For instance, interviews at the ICH Centre of Lijiang City, Yunnan, in 2014, found that the majority of the staff specialised in the fields of Chinese and ethnology, where the term authenticity is not commonly used. They said they were learning ICH-related knowledge, such as authenticity, from academic and professional texts. In an interview with both the Lijiang ICH Office and ICH Centre in 2014, officials acknowledged that they have limited knowledge of international ICH information, such as UNESCO's ICHC. In some remote and hilly rural areas, for example Huaping County of Lijiang, Yunnan, local ICH staff are in short supply and are unable to write a qualified ICH document with correct terminology (interview with staff at Lijiang ICH Centre, 12 November 2013).

The second factor is due to the diversity and stratification in the understanding of ICH officials from the higher to lower levels. National-

3. "2020年李懷秀李懷福非物質文化遺產傳習所'龍朋八期'傳承班招生簡章" (2020 nian Li Huaixiu Li Huaifu feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuanxixuo longpeng and baqi chuanchengban zhaosheng jianzhang, Enrolment Introduction of the No. 8 Longpeng Inheritance Class at the Li Huaixiu and Li Huaifu ICH Inheritance Centre in 2020. WeChat Official Account of the Li Huaixiu & Li Huaifu ICH Inheritance Centre (李懷秀李懷福非遺傳習所官方微信公眾號), 27 July 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/pf1Mqjv5VlPdbe3WdAc1g> (accessed on 20 August 2021).

level officials are knowledgeable of the concept of authenticity because they work with experts to make national policies, while officials at the middle and lower levels understand the authenticity of ICH from reading policies and documents, and from their connection with ICH practitioners and local communities (Su 2020). Officials at the provincial level encounter difficulties in the implementation of authenticity, and this situation is common at the lower levels. In an interview in May 2014 with the ICH Office of the Department of Culture of Yunnan Province, for example, the then vice-director admitted that it was difficult to implement authenticity. The director explained that the majority of villagers in rural Yunnan would like to have a “modern” life with better living conditions, so it was difficult to ask them to maintain ICH in an “authentic” way in their domestic life such as housing and clothing.

Further interviews with officials reveal that the difficulties of authenticity lie in conflicting perceptions of authenticity. The vice-director of the Yunnan ICH Office explained that the authenticity of ICH concerns genealogy, history (longer than 100 years),⁴ locality, venue, ethnicity, and the way it was practiced in the past (interview, 7 May 2014). It is clear that this understanding comes from an objective or materialist perspective of authenticity (Jones 2009; Labadi 2012), which can be compared with the idea of original ecology with which Tian Feng experimented. The problem with the materialist perspective of authenticity can be clearly observed in the case of a pottery handicraft ICH in Lijiang, where an authenticity dispute occurred between local ICH officials and the ICH practitioner (Su 2018). While the officials regarded the materials and forms of the products as central to the authenticity of ICH, the craftsman boasted of the distinctiveness, creativity, and traditional making crafts of his ICH (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, such disputes are not common in reality, because officials at the middle and lower levels construct their understanding of authenticity from diverse perspectives. In interviews in May 2014 with the directors of the ICH Office and ICH Protection Centres at Yunnan’s provincial level, new perspectives of authenticity are noted in their understanding of authenticity, such as the subjective perspective and constructivist perspective (Cohen 1988). These diverse perspectives are common at the local levels. In Lijiang, for instance, local officials at the municipal and county levels do not regard an ICH as either “authentic” or “inauthentic.” Directors of both municipal and county ICH Centres in Lijiang explicitly questioned the existence of “original ecology culture” in reality (interviews with the director of the Lijiang ICH Centre, 15 April 2014 and the director of the Gucheng County ICH Centre, 19 March 2014). Similarly, the director of the Dali Prefectural ICH Centre in Yunnan disagreed with the objective perspective of the authenticity of ICH as claimed by some national ICH experts (Yuan and Gu 2013), arguing that ICH will always change in accordance with the changing socioeconomic context because practitioners will have to adjust their cultural practices in accordance with the changing society (interview with the director of the Dali Prefectural ICH Centre, 18 August 2020).

While the “authorised heritage discourse” of authenticity is tenuously sustained by local officials, they actually deconstruct authenticity by actively promoting the use and creation of ICH, in particular through tourism and cultural industries. Since the integration of the governmental sectors of culture and tourism in China in 2018, authenticity has been gradually practiced by the government as a brand to market ICH, in the same way as the branding of original ecology in Guizhou’s cultural market (Luo 2018b), rather than as a principle to preserve ICH. Dali and Lijiang

are two regions of Yunnan where ICH tourism and cultural industries flourish. In interviews with the directors of the Dali and Lijiang ICH centres in August 2020, they all expressed that it is necessary to integrate the protection of ICH into the development of local tourism and cultural industries for sustainable ICH.



Figure 1. A performance in the yard of Sky Ground in the old town of Lijiang, Yunnan, in August 2020. Credit: author.

The Lijiang local government, in particular the World Heritage Old Town of Lijiang Protection and Management Bureau, has launched more than 24 “cultural yards” (*wenhua yuanluo* 文化院落) with differentiated ICH elements in the old town since 2016 so as to provide distinctive heritage tourism programs to tourists. The yard of Sky Ground (*tiandi yuan* 天地院) (Figure 1) is one of the cultural yards that showcase performing ICH and folk cultural relics of the Naxi people to tourists. In the introduction to the show, a description of “authentic” Naxi culture is highlighted to promote local ICH, such as “the oldest multi-voice symphony,” “ancient music,” “classics from an agrarian age,” and so on. In visits to this yard in August 2020 and August 2021, I saw excerpts from several characteristic singing and dancing ICH elements, including Dongba (东巴, explained later) folk religious dances performed by local Naxi people (some of them listed ICH inheritors) in a yard full of tourists, who generally enjoyed the show (interviews with tourists, 1 August 2021). It is clear in this case that authenticity is practiced by the government, in collaboration with experts and local ICH practitioners, with mixed objective, constructivist, and performative measures to market Lijiang ICH. These perspectives are therefore more complicated than the singular objective stipulation of authenticity in the “authorised heritage discourse.”

Perceptions of authenticity by ICH practitioners

As demonstrated in previous sections, authenticity is an academic and professional term manipulated by experts and officials in the regulation of ICH; meanwhile, ICH practitioners usually do not use the term “authenticity” in their everyday life. In fieldwork conducted in Lijiang and Shangri-La, Yunnan, I studied ICH practitioners, either registered or not, for their personal perceptions of authenticity in regard to their ICH.

4. The Chinese official text book for ICH bureaucrats states that ICH should be older than 100 years (Yuan and Gu 2013: 4).

The results show that ICH practitioners are usually unfamiliar with the term “authenticity,” but they are able to articulate their perceptions of differentiated aspects of authenticity in a series of colloquial Chinese words (Table 1). Literature shows that the authenticity of heritage can be described from several different aspects (Howard 2003: 227), and there are several notions used to describe the authenticity of ICH (Bortolotto 2013). This section shows not only the contestations and rupture among different perceptions of authenticity of ICH but also the practitioners’ attempts to use certain aspects of authenticity to argue for their ICH values and ownership.

Table 1. Colloquial Chinese words related to authenticity in fieldwork

Colloquial Chinese (in adjective)	Explanations
<i>yuanzhiyuanwei de</i> (原汁原味的)	authentic (in an objective perspective) or original ecological
<i>chuantong de</i> (傳統的)	traditional
<i>minjian de</i> (民間的)	folk, civilian, and community-based
<i>zhengzong de</i> (正宗的)	orthodox, similar to <i>yuanzhiyuanwei de</i>
<i>zhen de</i> (真的)	real and true
<i>yuanshengtai de</i> (原生態的)	original ecological

Source: author.

As indicated in previous sections, Lijiang has become a popular heritage tourist destination in China since being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. While tangible heritage, such as the traditional Naxi people’s architecture and townscape, is considered important to the outstanding universal value of World Heritage, various manifestations of ICH are significant to the value of Lijiang World Heritage as well as the rapid development of heritage tourism (Zong 2006). ICH in Lijiang is always situated in various value contestations. In the fieldwork, it is clearly noted that authenticity, as paraphrased in various colloquial words, is used to define various understandings and constructions of ICH values so that the relationship between authenticity and ICH is complicated and polemical among the ICH practitioners. This section displays these complicated relationships through the cases of Dongba religious activities and Naxi music performances.

The term Dongba can refer to both Dongba religious culture and the title of a knowledgeable Naxi person, the Dongba priest, who can perform religious activities. Based on animism, Dongba is a folk religion that was believed and participated in by the majority of Naxi people in the Lijiang area before the early twentieth century. Dongba religion went through various social disruptions and declined after 1949, and it was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution as feudalistic superstition. It was only able to revive after the 1980s in the new name of Dongba culture, as its religious meanings were weakened and its artistic and cultural meanings promoted. As tourism developed in Lijiang in the 1990s and Dongba culture was generally listed as official ICH at various administrative levels in the 2000s, Dongba culture has been redefined by the Lijiang government as “the essence of Naxi culture” and has become an important ICH element (He 2008: 20).

Stimulated by tourism, Dongba culture has been gradually commodified in various forms in Lijiang. One typical case is a Dongba cultural theme park called Yushuizhai (玉水寨) (Figure 2), where tourists

can observe most of Dongba culture, such as religious rites, celebrative performances, and writing and painting arts. Meanwhile, it is also a well-developed Dongba cultural transmission base for training young Dongba practitioners.⁵ Other cases of commodified Dongba culture concern the performance of Dongba blessing and marriage rituals in tourist shows, such as Impression of Naxi (納西印象) and the yard of Sky Ground. These shows, including excerpts from Dongba dances and other ICH singing and dancing elements, are performed by local Naxi people for tourists in Naxi traditional courtyards. In particular, several listed ICH inheritors of Dongba culture and Naxi music and dance are among the performers.



Figure 2. Dongba practitioners performing rites in the courtyard of Yushuizhai in April 2014. Credit: author.

Compared with these two commodified Dongba cultural performances in Lijiang, the Dongba practice in Baidi Village, Shangri-La County, north of Lijiang, illustrates another scenario where Dongba rituals are practiced for the local community. Baidi is an under-developed village in a hilly area, but it is well-known for its rich Dongba culture because it is regarded as the birthplace of Dongba religion, according to Dongba legend. Noticing the dramatic decrease of Dongba culture, local Naxi elites applied meagre funds from the government and donations to establish a local Dongba training school to cultivate Dongba successors (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Young Dongba students learning Dongba scripts at the Baidi Dongba Training School, Shangri-La, April 2014. Credit: author.

5. Sun Guisheng 孫貴升, “探尋東巴文化的傳承保護” (*Tanxun Dongba wenhua de chuancheng baohu*, Exploring the Inheritance and Protection of Dongba Culture, *Minzu shibao* (民族時報), 1 June 2020, https://www.sohu.com/a/398952882_100121976 (accessed on 20 August, 2021).

ICH practitioners use colloquial words (Table 1) to argue for different aspects of their ICH practices situated in community-based and tourism-based contexts. Firstly, Dongba practitioners in Yushuizhai, Lijiang, and Baidi, Shangri-La, deliberately employ certain authenticity-related words to describe their ICH. As a result, a tension has emerged between “authentic Dongba culture” in a non-commodified context and “inauthentic Dongba culture” in a commodified context. The head of Baidi Dongba School proudly claimed that the Dongba culture in Baidi village is “the most traditional, *zhen de*, *yuanshengtai de* and *yuanzhiyuanwei de*” (interview with the head of Baidi Dongba school, 6 April 2014). While commenting on the Dongba culture in Yushuizhai, a reputable Dongba practitioner at the Baidi School complained that “the one (Yushuizhai) that serves tourists is not real Dongba culture” (interview with Mr. He, a Dongba, in Baidi, 7 April 2014). Conversely, a senior Dongba who has been teaching at Yushuizhai for several years said confidently that “Yushuizhai is the best place in the world for the inheritance of Dongba culture” (interview with Mr. He, a Dongba, in Yushuizhai, 4 April 2014). Clearly, Dongba practitioners in the two scenarios held differentiated perspectives of authenticity to describe different aspects of Dongba culture. Here, both commodified and non-commodified ICH practices are symbolised with authenticity; nevertheless, different perceptions of authenticity are in conflict.

The contestation of authenticity is not only manifested in the case of commodified and non-commodified ICH practices but also in the case of different commodified ICH practices. The case of Baishaxiyue (白沙細樂) music in Lijiang is one example. Baishaxiyue is the Mandarin name for a Naxi repertoire including instrumental performance, folk singing, and dancing, and it was performed mainly for farewells and funerals in the past. It experienced decline and was only able to resume in the late 1970s, and it began to be promoted for tourism development in the late 1990s. Among other ICH elements, Baishaxiyue, along with other local folk music, is one of the earliest commodified ICH elements in Lijiang. The performance of Baishaxiyue was listed as a national ICH element in 2010.



Figure 4. The performance of the Dayan Naxi Ancient Music Association in the old town of Lijiang, October 2013. Credit: author.

There are two examples of commodified Baishaxiyue performance in Lijiang. The first is the performance by local players at the Dayan Naxi Ancient Music Association (*dayan naxi guyuehui* 大研納西古樂會) directed by Naxi elite Xuan Ke 宣科 in the centre of Lijiang old town (Figure 4). This tourist performance features several genres of Naxi ethnic and folk music, including Baishaxiyue, and it has enjoyed great social and economic benefits since its debut in the late 1980s. This performance, according to Xuan Ke, is unique because of the “four olds,” namely old

players, old music, old instruments, and old town (interview with Xuan Ke, 11 December 2013). Xuan Ke and their advertisements also boast that this music performance maintains “authentic music” from China’s Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279 C.E.) (Zong and Bao 2005). It is clear that this performance exemplifies objective and materialist authenticity of tangible and intangible heritage elements.

The other case is a performance by the He family, from father He Maogen 和茂根 to his son He Linyi 和凜毅. He Maogeng was one of the few inheritors of Baishaxiyue in the 1990s when he experienced difficulties in the transmission of Baishaxiyue in his hometown in rural Lijiang. Later, the He family troupe performed in Yushuizhai Park and the old town of Lijiang for several years as they were welcomed by tourists. Baishaxiyue is a national ICH element, and He Linyi and his younger brother He Juyi 和舉毅 were listed as representative inheritors at the national and county levels in 2018 and 2013 respectively. Thanks to their titles, the He brothers established their family troupe, which was immediately invited by a local businessman to perform in a tourist attraction in the suburb of Lijiang in 2013. During the fieldwork in 2013, their performance was popular among tourists and they were sustained comfortably by the tourism market (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The He brothers Baishaxiyue troupe performing at Guanyinxia Park, Lijiang, November 2013. Credit: author.

As two kinds of commodified performance of Baishaxiyue music, authenticity is articulated and practiced by Xuan Ke and He Linyi in two forms to justify the value to themselves, and as a brand to market the value to tourists. As a result, conflicts have arisen. Xuan Ke staged his performance in an “objective and materialist authentic” way as he emphasised the “four olds.” In the golden times of Naxi folk music performance in 2003, Xuan Ke advocated the authenticity of “Naxi ancient music” and even urged the local government to nominate the music for UNESCO ICH status. This endeavour failed, however, because the claimed authenticity was questioned by some ethnomusicologists in Beijing.⁶

During my interviews with Xuan Ke and the He brothers in 2013, they also held different perspectives towards Baishaxiyue performance. Xuan Ke defended the authenticity of his Baishaxiyue performance, saying that they had been playing the music the same way as in the ancient times.

6. Zhou Yi 周益 and Lü Shufei 呂蓀菲, “納西古樂真偽風波: 唯一性和真實性被懷疑” (Naxi guyue zhenwei fengbo: weiyixing he zhenshixing bei huaiyi, The Issue of the Authenticity of Naxi Ancient Music: Uniqueness and Authenticity are Questioned), *Nanjing zhoumo* (南京週末), 3 December 2003, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2003-12-03/1122271789.html> (accessed on 20 August 2021).

Conversely, the He brothers claimed that the authenticity of their music was well maintained because they were learning and playing the music according to the traditional *gongche* (工尺譜) notation method. This notation has been changed to the widely adopted numbered musical notation for use in Xuan Ke's troupe, so the He brothers regarded Xuan Ke's performance as "inauthentic." The contestation of ICH values has intensified in tourism commodification because both of them are not only making their own ICH but also claiming ownership of the commodified ICH, which is a serious problem in the nexus of authenticity and ICH (Lixinski 2014).

This section suggests that authenticity can be articulated by ICH practitioners through diverse perspectives to argue different ICH values and compete for ownership. Unlike experts and officials, ICH practitioners have no equivalent professional knowledge of the "authorised heritage discourse" of authenticity. While the ICH practitioners claim authenticity through their colloquial words, they also create conflicts between different aspects of ICH values, ultimately leading to a contestation of the ownership of ICH (Lixinski 2014). If authenticity can be mutually accepted among ICH practitioners, it should be reconceptualised as an inclusive concept to accept diverse perspectives of ICH values (Su 2018).

Integration of authenticity and ICH in current cultural reform

Recent research indicates that the concept of authenticity in ICH tourism should consider the perceptions of both hosts (i.e. ICH inheritors) and guests (Khanom *et al.* 2019). The case of Yunnan further shows that new perspectives of authenticity practiced by various emergent social actors will continue to deconstruct the "authorised heritage discourse" of authenticity, while also opening possibilities for reconstructing inclusive notions of authenticity, as well as a rethinking of the notion of ICH.

Commodification of ICH has been accelerated by the government and other social actors since the 2010s. Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the idea of "revitalisation of cultural heritage" (*rang wenhua yichan huoqilai* 讓文化遺產活起來) in 2013, and the idea of "creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture" in 2014. These remarks triggered the mobilisation of ICH for not only political considerations but also economic and social purposes. China's segmented management systems of cultural heritage and tourism used to be an obstacle to the integration of the protection and commodification of cultural heritage (Su and Chen 2020). Following the integration of the governmental sectors of culture and tourism in 2018, the institutional obstacle has been resolved, and an integrated protection and commodification of cultural heritage, including ICH, has become imperative.

Contemporary ICH safeguarding in China is a public cultural undertaking that centres on the cultural lives of the general public (Gao 2020). According to the Report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Xi Jinping 2017), one characteristic of Chinese society in the "new era" is that the principal social contradiction has changed to the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing need for a better life. In particular, the National 14th Five-Year-Plan of ICH Safeguarding was issued in May 2021, stating that people's "sense of identity" (*rentong gan* 認同感), "sense of participation" (*canyu gan* 參與感), and "sense of gain" (*huode gan* 獲得感) should be enhanced noticeably so that ICH can better play a role that benefits contemporary society and the Chinese people.⁷ Commodification and creative use of ICH by various non-official stakeholders is therefore a

necessary and effective measure to complement the government's limited supply to satisfy people's diversified and ever-increasing cultural and spiritual needs.

Experts and institutes directed China's ICH safeguarding enterprise before the 2000s. Later, the government took the lead and incorporated the ICH campaign into political and social development in the 2000s. It is during this period that authenticity was stipulated for ICH. As argued by scholars, Chinese "authorised heritage discourse" is characterised by the political considerations of nationalism and international cultural diplomacy, as well as the social and economic considerations of modernisation (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Shepherd and Yu 2013; Zhu and Maags 2020). Authenticity in the "authorised heritage discourse" at the national level is basically formulated in an objective and materialist perspective for national political and cultural agendas (Su 2018). By comparison, authenticity tends to be perceived in the constructivist and subjective perspectives (including existential perspective) for developing ICH-based tourism and cultural industries by unofficial social actors, whose perspectives are nevertheless not involved in the "authorised heritage discourse" of authenticity.

The developing enterprise of ICH safeguarding is a process of cultural governance initiatives since ICH has been gradually integrated into broader national socioeconomic development, such as inclusive urban development, rural revitalisation, and employment (Gao 2020). It is therefore possible that multiple emergent unofficial social actors will participate in multiple levels of cultural heritage governance with the government (Su and Zhang 2018). In recent years, the central government has encouraged social actors to participate in the management of cultural heritage, as seen in the Several Opinions on the Strengthening of the Reform of the Protection and Use of Cultural Relics (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council 2018) and the National 14th Five-Year-Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China 2021).

In the critical heritage studies perspective, these national new cultural reform measures will allow unofficial social actors to engage with the making of heritage, as well as the notion of authenticity, through their inheritance, visits, consumption, creation, entrepreneurship, and management of cultural heritage. All these participations will urge the conventional administration of cultural heritage in China to transform from the management of cultural heritage per se in a static manner to a multi-cultural governance of heritage-making in a dynamic manner. As explicitly stipulated in the ICHC and argued by scholars (Bortolotto 2013; Su 2018), the ICHC advocates the agencies and subjectivities of relevant practitioners in the processes of inheritance, creation, and recreation of their ICH for their identities and daily lives, rather than the objective or material authenticity of the ICH per se.

Conclusion

This paper has elaborated on the origin, trajectories, and future development of the concept of authenticity, as well as the related concept

7. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism 文化和旅遊部, "文化和旅遊部關於印發'十四五非物質文化遺產保護規劃'的通知" (*Wenhua he luyou bu guanyu yinfa "shisiwu feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu guihua" de tongzhi*, Notice of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on the Print and Distribution of the 14th Five-year Plan of the Protection of ICH), *Official Website of the Central Government of the People's Republic of China* (中華人民共和國中央人民政府官方網站), 25 May 2021. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-06/09/content_5616511.htm (retrieved on 20 August 2021).

of original ecology, in relation to ICH in the discourse and practice in Yunnan Province, China. The paper reveals that authenticity and ICH seem integrated into the national “authorised heritage discourse,” but this integration has been continuously challenged by diverse discourses and practices over the past 20 years. During the 2000s, authenticity was used as a scientific discourse to replace original ecology to naturalise regional ICH discourses. In the vertical dimension, authenticity has been integrated into the ICH legal system from the national to local levels. Nevertheless, the practice of authenticity by experts and officials has been challenged, in particular in the 2010s, following the mobilisation of ICH for economic and social development in contemporary China. Meanwhile, the possibility of an integration of authenticity and ICH has appeared as emergent social actors engage with cultural heritage in various ways. This integration is not easy, however, as tensions exist between the national “authorised heritage discourse” and diverse heritage-making practices, the government, and unofficial heritage social actors, as well as domestic conventional knowledge of traditional ethnic and folk culture and critical rethinking of the connotation of cultural heritage.

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