

Ownership and Sustainability of Bai Intangible Cultural Heritage ICH: A Comparative Analysis of Educational Approaches

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Abstract

Through a literature review of scholarly and non-scholarly but credible literature, this study has explored the intricate relationship between ownership, sustainability, and education in the context of the Bai ethnic group's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in northwestern Yunnan, China. The Bai people have diverse ICH. However, as China's ethnic minority, they face challenges from China's dominant culture and globalization. Therefore, it is critical to sustain their ICH. The review has indicated that the issue of ownership is complex and multifaceted. In most authors have refrain from addressing it. However, there is evidence indicating creating awareness surrounding the ownership of IC can result in social-economic benefits. Such benefits are likely to motivate stakeholders to preserve and certain the. To create awareness and resulting sense of ownership and sustainability, educational approaches, combining formal and informal methods are recommended. So far, this approach exists but they need to be improved further.

Keywords: *Sustainability, Bai Intangible Cultural Heritage, Educational Approach.*

Introduction

The Bai ethnic group have a rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage (ICH). As an ethnic minority group, these ICH needs to be sustained to avoid being assimilated and hence eroded by China dominating culture, or by the effect of globalization. Fortunately, authorities in the Republic of China have already taken measure to protect the ICH. Further effort can still be made by providing education that could enhance a sense of ownership of the ICH. In essence, ownership, particularly legal ownership of the cultural heritage is a complex and multifaceted issues. Most literature have not discussed it. Instead, they have tended to focus on preservation. Nevertheless, the study that have direct or indirectly address the issue have indicated that creating a sense of ownership can motivate a community as well as other stakeholders to protect and sustain an ICH. It can even lead to a situation whereby the ICH provide national, community, and individual social-economic benefits. This sense of ownership and the resulting sustainability is likely to be developed if relevant parties engage in appropriate educational approach. The approach should involve providing ICH training in both formal and informal educational systems.

Background

The Bai people are an ethnic group primary residing in northwestern Yunnan province, China. They are concentrated in a triangular region from Shigu to Dali (Kuiper, 2023) but can also be found in other region such as Lijiang, Bijiang, Yuanjiang, Baoshan, Nanhua, and Anning County in Yunnan, as well as Bijie in Guizhou, Liangshan in Sichuan, and Sanzhi in Hunan (Song, 2023). Since the establishment of the People Republic of China, the Bai's have been recognized as an ethnic minority. However, their history can be traced back far beyond the establishment of the republic. Specifically, it can be trace back to Nanzhao Empire (738-937), which later became the Dali Kingdom (937-1253). It is believed that the Bai's are descendent of the Qiang people who migrated from western China and the Himalayas to settle in the lowlands of Yunnan. In the Nanzhao Empire, the Bai people (referred to as the White Men) were the underclass, while the Yi people (referred to as the Black Men) were the ruling class. A lower Castes, the Bai rebelled against the ruling class, thus establishing the Dali Kingdom (937). In essence, they converted the Nanzhao into the Dali Kingdom. Nevertheless, the Kingdome lost its independence to Yuan Dynasty.

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Cultural Values and Identity of the Bai People

In the modern world, the Bai people have undergone a significant process of sinicization. That means they have been assimilated or adopted into the Chinese culture, customs, and identity. As one of the most Sinicized minority, they still possess unique cultural values and heritage that they have maintained since their ancestral years. For instance, their reference as the White Men during the Nanzhao Empire hold a symbolic significance to this ethnic group.

In fact, the term "Bai" translates to "white" in Chinese. This color holds a significant cultural and traditional meaning for the Bai people. It is associated with dignity and high social status. The Bai people have incorporated this symbolism into their traditional attire, particularly in the clothing worn by younger women. The women wear white garments adorned with vibrant and intricate embroidery to express their cultural values of dignity and high social status (CGTN, 2020). Their rich cultural heritage is not only significant, but it is also diverse. It includes various art forms, inventions, and advancements in fields such as meteorology, astronomy, architecture, and medical sciences.

As a confirmation of how rich and diverse the cultural heritage of the Bai people is, their primary residence, The Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, was nominated by the Chinese authority to be a guardian of cultural ecology on a national levels. Through this designation the region's cultural treasures, that includes more 700 Intangible Cultural Heritages (ICH) and over 2,300 inheritors will be protected. Furthermore, the designation demonstrates China's efforts to develop and preserve traditional cultures and ICH resources (CGTN, 2023). Also, important to note is that the exceptional tie-dyeing techniques of the Bai people has been documented as a national ICH.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

ICH is an expansion of the concept of cultural heritage to include not just tangible but also non-tangible aspects of cultural heritage. Specifically, ICH refers to the expressions, skills, practices, and knowledge that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2023). These are the non-physical aspect of the cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2023). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has played a role in shaping this understanding (Petrillo, 2019). In its 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH, it proposed five broad domains of ICH. These domains are oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and finally the traditional craftsmanship. Under the oral traditions and expression, UNESCO recognize language as an instrument for transmitting ICH (UNESCO, n.d; Qiu, Zuo, & Zhang, 2022). Important to note is that this dimension is not mutually exclusive. An element of ICH can be categorized under more than one of the dimensions (Petrillo, 2019).

In addition, UNESCO also indicate that ICH should be community based, inclusive, representative, traditional and also contemporary. Community based refers to the fact that elements can only be recognized as an ICH by the community that creates and upholds it. An external entity cannot impose or determine what a community in question can consider to be ICH. Inclusive means that the ICH connect people across communities, regions, and even different cultures. This because it can be shared among different communities and even in different environments. The evolution ICH has undergone across the various generation is what makes inclusive and shareable across different people and environments. Likewise, ICH is representative particularly in relation to knowledge transmission. It allows the transmission of knowledge and skill from one generation to another. This transmission has social and economic value that is relevant to all social groups, not just the minority. It is also equally important for both developed and developing countries. Lastly, traditional and contemporary means that means that some ICH are inherited from the past and passed down to current generation. However, it can also include contemporary unique practices exercised by people from urban and rural areas. These practices serve to define and identify the cultural values of the modern people (UNESCO, 2023).

ICH plays a crucial role in preserving cultural diversity, especially in the face of globalization. To elaborate, globalization can erode cultural heritage by homogenizing local traditions, languages, and customs, and by

promoting the dominance of Western culture and values (Onoriode & Nwafili, 2021). Without proper safeguarding mechanism, unique cultural practices, languages, and knowledge systems of local and indigenous communities can be lost. In fact, such communities can also end up being marginalized (Folurunso, 2021). Furthermore, ongoing commodification of cultural expressions and the impact of mass media can lead to the dilution and distortion of traditional cultural practices (Zhang, Ruan, Li & Huang, 2023).

Fortunately, (ICH) provides framework for the safeguarding and promotion of diverse cultural expressions. It can provide a platform for communities to maintain their cultural identity and transmit their knowledge and skills to future generations. Cultural manifestation is not the main significance of the ICH, rather its significance lies in its ability to transfer knowledge and skill from one generation to another (UNESCO, 2023; Wulf, 2022). This transmission has a social and economic value that is relevant not only for minority groups but also for mainstream social groups within a state. It is equally important for both developed and developing country. As such, ICH plays a notable role in maintaining cultural diversity, fostering intercultural dialogue, and promoting social cohesion (Sančanin & Dramićanin, 2019).

Ownership and Preservation of ICH

Ownership of ICH refers to the legal and cultural frameworks that determine who have the rights, responsibilities, and control over the ICH element (Deacon & Smeets, 2018). In general, ownership of cultural heritage is a complex and multifaceted process. It involves recognizing the rights and responsibilities of individuals, groups, and institutions. Ownership can be attributed to communities, individuals and institutions like museums, other organizations, and even Government (Deacon & Smeets, 2018; Campfens, 2020).

Evidence from literature review suggest that legal ownership of ICH is often not described in many jurisdictions, especially in China. Thus, there is need to extend beyond the legal owners to include individual and ethnic claims of heritage (Campfens, 2020). While UNESCO safeguarding policy focus is on safeguarding and preserving ICH, it provides hints concerning ownership of ICH. For starters, it indicates that an element can only be recognize as ICH by the community that created it (UNESCO, 2023). This directive indicate the UNESCO assign significant ownership to the community. Nevertheless, it goes ahead to indicate that the ICH must be representative and inclusive of other communities, thus suggesting claims to ownership does not end with community that created or practice it. In fact, the Council of Europe suggests that an element can remain to be ICH even if a community does not own it but simply just identifies with it as a unique value, belief or culture (Sančanin & Dramićanin, 2019).

The 2003 UNESCO, despite recognizing the critical role of community in creating, recreating, and transmitting ICH, did not specially cover the issue of ownership of these elements. According to Sančanin & Dramićanin, (2019) failure to address ownership has created room for some parties to indicate that only member states are the legal owners of these elements. On the other hand, there have been claims that the work of the members' states should be confined towards identifying and defining the various elements of ICH present within their territory. The legal ownership should be left to community. Another strand of argument suggest that ownership should be assigned to the public while the community and government serve the role of only transmitting and protecting ICH.

The concept of ownership is without a doubt important. However, it would be more appropriate if more focus is placed on understanding the relationship between it and preserving ICH. UNESCO (n.d.b) suggest that close relationship exist between the ownership and sustainability of ICH. The researcher suggests that instituting proper intellectual property (IP) rights can go a long way in safeguarding and preserving ICH. The international convention on Folklore preservation and the development of an international register of Folkloristic Cultural right did indeed set the ground for states to develop national policies that will define ownership and promote effective safeguarding and preservation of ICH. IP protection can help communities control access to and benefit from their ICH. This can go a long way in preventing misappropriation and ensuring that benefits are returned to the communities. As indicated by Waelde et al.,

(2022) there is a need for policymakers to consider the relationship between ICH safeguarding and IP rights protection to maximize positive outcomes while being mindful of any potential negative effects.

Bai's Intangible Cultural Heritage

Minimal empirical evidence exists on the topic of Bai's ICH. The existing peer review sources have however covered various aspect of Bai's ICH. For instance, Wenlong (2021) conducted a study who's focused was to use the Myths and the legends of the Bai ethnic group to promote globalization of the Chinese ethnic cultural. The researchers established that the myths and legends of the Bai ethnic group have similarities with Western mythology. They particularly had similarities with the Genesis Myths in Western culture. Such similarities were established to be critical in promoting the globalization of Chinese ethnic culture with Bai characteristics.

Xiufang (2015) indicated that was a notable erosion of the ICH of the Bai people. This was arguably because of the impact of modernization and changing environment. To elaborate, the environment has changed in that the current successors of ICH are elderly, otherwise referred to as empty nesters, and children, otherwise referred to as lifted children. The author uses this reference to highlight the fact that cultural heritage is being received by isolated people, thus undermining the process of transmitting it from one generation to another.

While analyzing an ethnic consultative forum held in 1956 in Dali, Yunnan Province, to negotiate the ethnonym of the Bai people, Yongjia (2022) noted that there was a brief "liminal" period. This was a period of transition and adjustment for the Bai people as their understanding and relationship with their own cultural heritage was affected. In addition, certain aspects of their traditional practices or knowledge were de-familiarized, thus allowing for the people to be incorporated in the broader national identity. Yongjia (2022) findings highlight the fact that dominating entities, such as government, can intentionally erode the ICH of minority group to allow them to be more accepting of a dominant culture. In this case, the communist party collaborated with elite members of the Bai community to erode some of the Bai's people ICH. Arguably due to the influence of dominant and elite groups, the Bai people were easily reeducated to accept communist envision national identity as opposed to some of their traditional identity.

Ownership and Sustainability of Bai Intangible Cultural Heritage

Various types of literature have analyzed the process of preserving, and hence sustaining the ICH of the Bai people. For instance, CGTN (2023) discusses China's commitment to preserving and sustaining Bai ICH by designating Dali as a national-level cultural ecology reserve. This initiative aims to protect the region's cultural treasures and promote traditional cultures rich in ICH resources. The move by the government highlights the significance of the Bai people's cultural practices and their contributions to various fields of knowledge and art forms (CGTN, 2023).

Saudi Gazette (2022) highlights the significant role women from China's 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups play in protecting traditional knowledge and preserving cultural heritage. These women nurture and educate the next generation, transmitting languages, practices, beliefs, and other forms of cultural heritage. Such cultural heritage plays a critical role in protecting and preserving both the intangible and tangible cultural heritage. They extend to even preserve and protect the environment. For instance, the researcher indicates that the Bai and Naxi women have reached an agreement regarding the sustainable collection of morille mushrooms. They have established guidelines that specify the size at which the mushrooms can be picked (when they are more than 5cm in size and open), allowing the mushrooms to release their spores fully. Additionally, the women ensure that the mushroom ponds are not destroyed during the picking process. Furthermore, these women take on the responsibility of patrolling and supervising to prevent theft of wood and herbs.

In general, the action undertaken Bai women serve to not only protect the environment but, is also related to ICH. As earlier mentioned, ICH refers to the living cultural practices, traditions, knowledge, and skills transmitted from one generation to another within communities (Saudi Gazette, 2022). This living cultural

practices include activities geared toward protecting and sustaining environmental resources. Traditional knowledge of ecological protection is actually passed down from one generation to another, and thus may be considered as ICH. The mentioned activities of Bai and Naxi people of promoting and passing down to future generation the process of sustainably collecting mushrooms, protecting mushroom ponds, and preventing theft of wood and herbs can thus be considered as examples of ICH practices aimed at preserving cultural and ecological heritage (Saudi Gazette, 2022).

In fact, Fan, Cheng, Zhang...et al., (2022) demonstrate how certain cultural traditions and practices are intertwined with environmental conservation, thus contributing to the general well-being of the communities. To elaborate, the researcher investigated relationship between the Bai people's traditional Meizi-consuming culture, the conservation of local plum resources, and the development of the plum industry in Eryuan County, Yunnan, China. The Meizi-consuming culture involve the cultivation, preservation and utilization of plum resource. According to the researchers, the Bai people have a long history of consuming the fruits of *Prunus mume* (plum). This cultural tradition has contributed to the conservation of local plum resources and the economic development of the region. The cultural practice basically involves the Bai family cultivating plum trees in their yards in the process taking spontaneous measures to protect the local environment. This demonstrates their commitment to maintaining a good ecological environment for wild plum genetic resources. Through the sustainable use of plum resources, the development of the plum industry in Eryuan County has created a win-win model that combines traditional culture with biodiversity conservation.

The Meizi-consuming culture of the Bai people qualifies to be ICH because it involves the transmission of knowledge. In essence, this practice has been passed down through generations within the Bai community (Fan et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023). This cultural practice includes techniques for cultivating plum trees, processing plum products, and utilizing various species and varieties of plums. The transmission of this knowledge from older generations to younger ones contributes to the continuity of cultural traditions and the preservation of traditional agricultural practices. It also contains element of ICH because it is a cultural expression, in essence it is an integral part of the Bai people's identity and cultural diversity. It reflects their unique relationship with plum resources, including their preferences for consuming plums and the development of various local products derived from plums. This practice highlight how ICH can be sustainably management for the economic benefit of not only the Bai people, but also the larger population. This practice has particularly been beneficial to the economic development of Eryuan County. The plum industry's traditional based practices exercised by the Bai people has emerge as one of economic foundation of the region (Fan, Cheng, Zhang...et al., 2022).

Ownership of Bai ICH

Confusion regarding the ownership ICH has been accused of sometimes undermining efforts geared towards preserving and sustaining ICH. The situation is the same even when it comes specifically to Bai's ICH. From, Tianyi and Bujdosó (2020) argument, the ICH of the Bai ethnic group faces two type ownership related challenges. The first challenge has to do with a lack of awareness of intellectual property protection. The researcher basically implies that inheritors of Bai ICH do not fully understand the value and significance of their cultural practices as intellectual property. Such lack of awareness can lead to difficulties in safeguarding and preserving their heritage. Therefore, there is need for education and awareness programs to empower inheritors to assert their ownership rights and protect their cultural heritage.

The second challenge has to do with the lack of protection and support from relevant government policies. The researcher suggests that there are gaps or inadequacies in present policies and regulations that address the safeguarding and promotion of ICH. The absence of comprehensive legal frameworks or supportive initiatives can hinder the efforts of communities and individuals in protecting and preserving their cultural practices. It indicates the need for stronger governmental support and policies that recognize and prioritize the safeguarding of ICH (Tianyi & Bujdosó, 2020).

Important to note is that the issue of ownership in regards to general ICH, not just the ICH of the Bai people, is rarely discussed in a direct way in the literature, particularly in scholarly works. However, there

are indirect discussion or mention that highlights its important. For instance, the issue of commodification and valorization of ICH make its critical to understand ownership in regards to ICH (). Valorization refers to the process of capitalizing on the economic potential and market value of a particular language or cultural practice (Lupo, 2023). Yang, Xue, and Song (2022) indicate that Bai ICH has been subject of valorization in the sense that the Bai related language and cultural practices have been transformed into profitable tourism commodities (Yang, Xue, & Song, 2022).

When an ICH is transformed into a profit marking commodity the issue of ownership is magnified. This is arguably because the owners are likely to be the main beneficiary of incomes and profits the commodity provides (Buskirk, 2021). Yang et al., (2022) does in fact indicate that the valorization and commodification of Bai ICH has been beneficial to the Bai people. The process of valorizing their ICH contributes to the empowerment of the Bai people by fostering a stronger identification with their cultural heritage and reinforcing their ethnic identity. This indeed suggest that commodification and valorization does in deed motivate the Bai people to exercise a high sense of ownership of the ICH. The ownership does not need to be legally recognized but just having sense of identity and pride can induce the Bai people to preserve and sustain the culture. In fact, Yang et al., (2022) noted that individual from the Bai community can leverage social media platform to use Bai semiotic resources as source of revenue. This individual can utilize their ICH such as language and cultural practices to benefit economically from the resources. The commodification of ICH is also beneficial to the overall tourism industry and its operators. As indicated by Jiang, Mohabir, Ma, Wu, and Chen (2020)., an element that provide economic benefits create a strong sense of ownership and hence motivate the stakeholders to preserve and sustain it.

Educational Approaches

This in-depth review did not find literature specifically discussing the educational approaches use to teach ownership and sustainability of specifically Bai's ICH. That indicate a literature gap exist that should be solved using primary as opposed to review research. However, there was some literature that discussed in general the educational approaches used in China for ICH.

China has used various educational approach to teach, transmit and preserve intangible cultural heritage. One of the most common approach is integrating ICH into national curriculum and hence teaching it in the formal education system (Yan, 2020). Various elements of ICH have been incorporated in school subjects such as arts, music, and history. Such subjects are taught from the very elementary stages to advanced institution of higher learning. In fact, Stakeholders, including government authorities, in the country have proposed the establishment of special school to teach ICH (Minghui & Nan, 2019; Li & Xie, 2023).

Documentation and research is another educational approaches used. Similar to the integration in national curriculum, documentation and research mostly happens in learning institutions, especially institution of higher learning. In theory, the method enable the preservation of knowledge, promotes scholarly engagement, and provides a foundation for educational materials and resources (Li & Xie, 2023). Informal educational approaches, such community participations and the establishment of cultural heritage centers and museums, are also used in the country (Guo & Wang, 2020). Even though literature does not directly mention, the two educational approaches have been used in the Bai ICH as illustrated by the fact that the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture was nominated by the Chinese authority to be a guardian of cultural ecology on a national levels (CGTN, 2023). The action could serve to educate people of Bai ICH.

These approaches highlight the fact that developing a strong sense of ownership and hence preserving and sustaining ICH requires a high level of awareness and education. In fact, Tianyi and Bujdosó (2020) indicated that there is a need for providing appropriate education and hence developing the awareness level of inheritors of Bai ICH. Such program can empower the Bai people to assert their ownership right more effectively and hence benefit from the cultural, social and economic benefits ICH offers. Educational institutions are expected to be on the forefront in providing knowledge needed to promote ownership and sustainability of ICH. In fact, the UN call for integration of culture into education (UNESCO, 2023b).

Unfortunately, while investigating the status and issues related to the local cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in southwest China, particularly the Bai people residing in Dali, assess established that modern school education do not play an effective role in the transmitting the ICH of minority group (Xiufang, 2015). This is distressing considering UNESCO argues that quality education is one that promote cultural awareness, inclusivity, and diversity (UNESCO, 2023b). For this reason, it is important to integrate culture into educational content and approaches. Nevertheless, a gap still exist in the education system that makes it difficult for the modern school system to transmit and preserve cultural practices. According to of modern education Xiufang, (2015) even while striving to integrate cultural education into education, modern school cannot replace all aspects of village cultural heritage. This is particularly true when it comes to transmitting of ICH of minority group such as the Bai ethnic group.

Fortunately, the UNESCO's normative framework, which integrates culture and education, recognize not only the role of formal education but also of non-formal educational, such as the education provided by museum and other cultural institutions. A combination between formal and informal education can be an appropriate approach for teaching ICH, even of minority groups. Furthermore, Xiufang, (2015) suggest for national education system needs to consider the local cultural practices and modes of inheritance when designing the educational approaches. Respecting and incorporating them into educational operations can reduce setbacks for disadvantaged students. It can also enrich the education system.

Conclusion

This study has reviewed scholarly and non-scholarly but credible literature on relating to the ownership and sustainability of the Bai's ICH. It has also analyzed of the educational approaches that has or can be adopted to increase awareness and the resulting sense of ownership and sustainability of the ICH. The review established that the Bai people have strong and diverse ICH that needs to protect and preserve. Protecting is important because this group is part of the formally recognized China's ethnic minority. Therefore, it can be quite easy for their culture to be fully assimilated by dominant national Chinese culture and hence gets eroded. In addition to the action being taken by the local community and China's authorities, its critical to adopt appropriate educational practice to increase sense of awareness and hence encourage the preservation and sustainability of the culture. The review indicate that formal educational system is still wanting, but they can improve, and further supplemented by informal institution of educations such as museums, as well as the ordinary approach of transmitting ICH from one generation to another.

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