



Title	Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism
Author(s)	Wang, Chujun; Wang, Yali; Edelheim, Johan Richard et al.
Citation	Tourist Studies https://doi.org/10.1177/14687976241251514
Issue Date	2024-05-27
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/93062
Rights	Wang, C., Wang, Y., Edelheim, J. R., & Zhou, J.. Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism. Tourist Studies, 0(0). © The Author(s) 2024. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687976241251514
Type	journal article
File Information	Wang et al, 2024 - Tourism commercialisation and the- frontstage-backstage metaphor - preprint version.pdf



Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism

Chujun Wang

Hiroshima University, Japan

Yali Wang

Hunan University of Arts and Science, China

Johan Richard Edelheim

Hokkaido University, Japan

Jianhong Zhou

Hokkaido University, Japan

Abstract

Resolving tensions between tourism commercialisation and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) safeguarding is an important objective. Using the frontstage-backstage metaphor as an analytical lens, we investigate how tourism promotes ICH safeguarding and how detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation can be handled in Miao silverware tourism in Fenghuang, China. Results show that tourism commercialisation is beneficial because it provides new possibilities and promotes the transformation of ICH. However, fake ICH products are detrimental, prioritising commercial value over ICH value. ICH inheritors create two separate commercial spaces to handle the segmented tourism market. The frontstage-backstage metaphor helps to investigate the transformational process of ICH in tourism and socio-psychological dilemmas of cultural practitioners in dealing with the multiplying realities of ICH.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, tourism commercialisation, frontstage-backstage, value, ICH value, China

Corresponding author:

Chujun Wang, Hiroshima University, Higashihiroshimashi Kagamiyama 1-7-1, Higashihiroshima 739-8511, Japan. Email: wangchujun@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

Introduction

Heritage tourism can be a means for cultural practitioners and communities to use culture to generate economic profits and continue traditions in contemporary societies. Dealing with tensions between tourism commercialisation and heritage preservation is not only an important topic in heritage tourism studies but also a challenging task in tourism practice (Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Su, 2018b; Xu et al., 2013). Commercialisation issues regarding tangible heritage are often perceived as straightforward. Conserving tangible heritage, such as monuments and architecture, typically relies on scientific criteria and principles to assess the reliability and completeness of material attributes. This evaluation includes considerations of authenticity and integrity, as outlined in the Venice Charter issued by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1964. Detrimental impacts of tourism commercialisation can more easily be distinguished when the authenticity and integrity of tangible heritage are undermined.

Tourism commercialisation is more complicated with intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH). UNESCO (2003: 4) defines ICH 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’. In other words, the notion of ICH is built upon the subjectivities of cultural practitioners and communities. ICH is ‘constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, [and] their interaction with nature and their history’ (UNESCO, 2003: 4). Correspondingly, conventional principles for heritage conservation become fluid and subjective. For example, authenticity for ICH indicates the ability of practitioners to convey and recreate the dynamic and developing values of ICH (Su, 2018a). In addition to turning heritage into resources for economic gain, tourism commercialisation has increasingly been accepted as a strategy for safeguarding ICH (Bortolotto and Ubertazzi, 2018; Broude, 2018; Luo, 2021) and for creating ICH (Su, 2019). At the same time, though, commercialisation can have damaging effects on local communities when commercial agents misappropriate established ICH (traditionally crafted silverware in our case). So how can practitioners benefit from commercialisation in heritage preservation while avoiding its detrimental impacts?

Using the empirical context of Miao silverware tourism in Fenghuang, China, the present study addresses the above question by using Goffman’s (1959) ‘frontstage-backstage’ framework that, when applied to tourism, explicitly deals with the way commercialism appropriates cultural products and impacts public perceptions of their value. In the following sections, we review how frontstage-backstage is applied in heritage tourism. We then demonstrate that values can serve as criteria to distinguish between beneficial and detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation. Subsequently, research methods and an introduction to our case are presented. Our findings illustrate how tourism contributes to the transformation of ICH and how craftsmen respond to the multiplying realities of ICH in tourism. Finally, we discuss and conclude our argument with implications for practice and research.

Frontstage-backstage and heritage tourism

The theory of ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’ was initially developed to conceptualise individuals’ strategies of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Introducing the theory to tourism studies, MacCannell (1976) argued that tourist sites are always organised into frontstages and backstages—differentiating hosts’ actual daily life (backstage) from cultural representations displayed for tourists (frontstage). He furthermore proposed the concept of ‘staged authenticity’—referring to representations of a private backstage on the public frontstage.

In the heritage tourism literature, the prevalent theme of staged authenticity has been extensively explored (Walby and Piché, 2015; Schäfer, 2015). Research has investigated specific strategies for staging different types of heritage authenticity and the negotiations that occur between multiple stakeholders in the co-production process (Fu et al., 2015; Walby and Piché, 2015; Wang et al., 2021). Tourists’ roles as both consumers and producers of historical narratives at staged sites have also been highlighted (Chronis, 2012). Staged settings provide tangible means to afford tourists’ embodied performances, facilitating connections with the past and the formation of collective memory (Chronis, 2006; Timm Knudsen, 2011). Also, critical analyses reveal that the staging of heritage often prioritises tourist entertainment over historical accuracy (Walter, 2017).

While staged authenticity illustrates the commercial involvement in appropriating and

commercialising heritage, the frontstage-backstage metaphor is more broadly applied to the spatial organisation of heritage sites (Gong, 2011; Yang, 2006; Zhang and Yang, 2015). The frontstage area is designated for tourism development, where local residents actively participate in tourism activities to showcase their culture. Conversely, the backstage area is safeguarded from tourism commercialisation to preserve the authenticity of heritage. However, such a developmental pattern has faced criticism for causing geographical segregation and differentiation among local communities. According to Xie and Hu's (2019) case study, in the frontstage area, residents benefit directly from tourism development but prioritise high-paying jobs over showcasing local heritage. In contrast, residents in the backstage area remain economically disadvantaged and do not value local heritage due to its association with poverty and backwardness.

The frontstage-backstage model for heritage planning does little to address tensions between tourism commercialisation and ICH preservation. One key limitation is that the model relies on a real-fake dichotomy—assuming that heritage preservation is achievable by segregating it from tourism. Given that ICH is the living culture of local communities, the challenge is no longer about how to protect heritage from tourism but how to make tourism contribute to the continuity of ICH. Moreover, recognising the fluid and evolving nature of ICH, there is a widespread acknowledgment that heritage practitioners and local communities should be the ones to recognise, identify and define their ICH (Logan, 2012). Increasingly, scholars highlight the central role of practitioners and local communities in the management, preservation, and tourism development of ICH (Kim et al., 2019; Su, 2019). Rather than physically separating heritage sites into two distinct areas, it is crucial to focus on how communities participate in and respond to the staging of heritage (Xie and Hu, 2019).

Frontstage-backstage can, thus, be viewed as a flexible strategy applied by different stakeholders in negotiating and (re)forming tourist destinations. When places in daily life, such as workplaces, are turned into tourist destinations, tensions arise between original uses and touristic needs (Everett, 2012). Tourism providers and consumers consequently co-produce hybrid spaces, as well as new behaviour patterns and new identities that people adopt in these spaces (Everett, 2012). The hybrid spaces are similar to what Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013) term 'pseudo-backstage', a frontstage that is staged as an 'actual' backstage. It is essentially elaborated and organised according to the tourist gaze, while also looking like a real daily life setting and transmitting intimacy and privacy (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013). Such a social setting helps tourism providers deal with proliferating realities and identities concerning heritage and their daily lives. But how are different realities in the context of heritage tourism formed and in what way are they implicated in the tension between commercialisation and heritage preservation? In the next section, we argue that the resolution of such a tension can be facilitated with the use of values underlying heritage.

Values and ICH tourism

Heritage and heritage tourism are always imbued with values. Avrami and Mason (2019) summarise two distinct perspectives on values of heritage: heritage values and societal values. The former indicates essential values of heritage—including historic, aesthetic and scientific values—that form the basis of the heritage conservation sector. The latter means instrumental values of heritage—for example, economic and political values—that focus on uses and functions of heritage and are intertwined with social agendas external to heritage conservation. Heritage values show how certain groups appreciate and evaluate qualities or characteristics of heritage (De La Torre and Mason,

2002), whereas societal values indicate reasons for which people use heritage. In heritage tourism studies, efforts have been concentrated on examining how values are integrated into the development of heritage tourism (Francis-Lindsay, 2009; Pardo Abad, 2016; Su et al., 2020). Heritage tourism can be a means of reinforcing and communicating heritage values on the one hand, and integrating and supporting societal values on the other hand (Kim et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020).

As we have mentioned previously, ICH values are dynamic and firmly based on the subjectivities of ICH practitioners and communities (Su, 2018a). Heritage values of ICH are no longer inherent entities that can be measured, but are more related to the process of valuing (Smith and Campbell, 2018). In this case, values are neither ontological properties (in other words, being and status) nor epistemological perceptions (in other words, knowledge and truth). Instead, values are goodness (Hartman, 2019)—shaping people’s desires, guiding their actions, and therefore influencing their epistemologies as well as future actions (Allen and Varga, 2007; see more in Edelheim et al., 2022). With this as a background, ICH values underpin communities’ cultural practices in daily lives, enabling them to form, sustain and recreate their identities (Smith and Akagawa, 2009).

In ICH tourism, values can be critical criteria for understanding tourism commercialisation and heritage preservation. Commercialisation is underpinned by commercial value—managing and organising ICH in a way to generate economic profits. ICH safeguarding focuses on the continuity of ICH’s functions as well as its connection with the community (Poulios, 2014). In other words, ICH safeguarding is driven by ICH value, encouraging cultural practitioners and communities to maintain and recreate their traditions in response to transforming natural and social environments. Tourism commercialisation becomes detrimental when commercial value is prioritised over ICH value. Cultural misappropriation occurs when stakeholders, including individual cultural members, tourism companies, and governments, obtain unjust economic profits through ICH without the permission of communities (Ubertazzi, 2023). In this case, living cultures, as well as those affected, are subordinated to commercial value. This leads to potential damage—be it economic or spiritual—to a culture or its members (Nute, 2019).

An introduction to the case: The Miao, Fenghuang, and Miao silverware craftsmanship

Ancestors of the Miao people lived in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River basin 5,000 years ago. After being defeated in conflicts with the Huangdi tribe—the ancestors of the Han people—the Miao were continuously forced to migrate southward and westward (Shi, 1995). In order to bring Miao people and their land under control, central governments historically imposed a series of political orders on Miao land. For example, the *Tusi* system of native chieftainship appointed local officials as agents to govern Miao land indirectly (Zhang, 2010). With the influence of such policies, the Miao were socio-culturally divided into the so-called ‘cooked’ Miao and the ‘raw’ Miao. The former refers to Miao people who live closer to Han people and who are more willing to accept Han culture and governance, whereas the latter refers to those who live in remote areas and are unruled from the Han perspective (Schein, 2000).

Fenghuang is located on the border of Hunan and Guizhou provinces; it is home to multiple ethnic groups, with a significant presence of the Miao community. In 1397, the Ming government built a wall through Fenghuang, which not only functioned as a military fortification but also intensified the socio-cultural segregation between Miao communities (Wang and Wu, 2012). Nowadays, Fenghuang can be geographically and culturally divided into the respective traditional

Miao and sinicised Miao areas (see Figure 1). The traditional Miao area is concentrated geographically in the La'ershan tableland, while the sinicised Miao area is situated in valleys and hilly regions that have historically been more accessible to central regimes. In the sinicised area, Miao people ceased practising Miao traditions and accepted Han culture due to ethnic discrimination against them. Conversely, in the traditional Miao area, most people still have a strong sense of Miao identity, and traditional Miao culture continues to be an integral part of their daily life. Such segregation has been the basis for the formation of the frontstage-backstage during tourism development in Fenghuang.

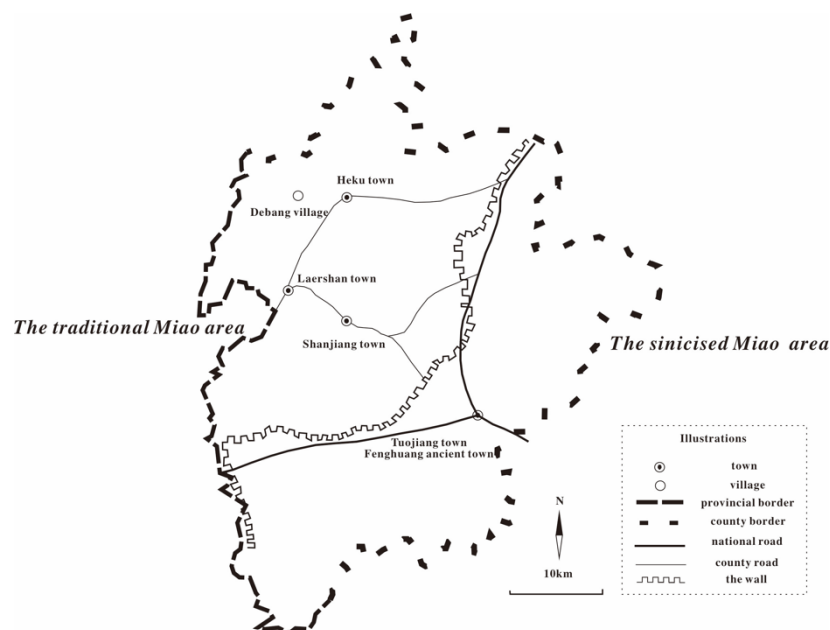


Figure 1 Mapping Fenghuang (Source: Authors)

Fenghuang ancient town has been the political, economic and cultural centre in the sinicised Miao area since the Ming Dynasty. It has the most convenient transportation systems as well as culturally diversified historical remains. The ancient town became a tourist destination in the 1990s and gained national popularity in the 2000s. Both local residents and people from non-Miao areas take advantage of Miao traditions in tourism services—for example, selling Miao silverware, lending Miao costumes, and organising Miao performances. Such touristic activities have raised concerns about cultural misappropriation and over-commercialisation (Wang, 2020).

In contrast, although towns and villages in the traditional Miao area have also seen increased development as tourist attractions, they are less popular for mass tourism. Compared to Fenghuang ancient town, the traditional Miao area plays the role of backstage where Miao traditions continue to exist as a living culture. However, rather than living in isolation, Miao people nowadays are more willing to seek opportunities beyond the traditional Miao area. Silverware tourism in Fenghuang ancient town has been a venture for them.

Silverware craftsmanship is a crucial part of traditional Miao culture. Due to their history of long-distance migrations, Miao people used to turn their wealth into silverware ornaments that they could easily take along with them at any time (Zhou, 2019). In contemporary times, silverware ornaments symbolise not only wealth but also Miao identity. In the traditional Miao area, Miao

women still wear silverware ornaments daily, and it remains a social convention to prepare a set of silverware ornaments for their daughters.

Miao silverware has become a popular tourist souvenir in Fenghuang ancient town since its craftsmanship was registered as a national ICH in 2006 (Zhou, 2019). The Chinese government became a contracting party to the ICH convention in 2004 and soon initiated its ICH programmes in 2005 (State Council of China, 2005). Two significant governmental ICH programmes are implemented at national, provincial, municipal and county levels. The ICH list registers representative ICH practices in China. Additionally, another domestic list focuses on cultural practitioners, supporting representative ICH inheritors in continuing their cultural practices. In Fenghuang, 21 inheritors are officially registered: 14 county-level, 5 municipal-level, and 2 national-level (Yang et al., 2022). Many of these inheritors participate in silverware tourism, however, which has led to the creation of more commercial forms of silverware.

Research methods

Our data collection and analysis methods follow the protocols proposed by Richards and Munsters (2010) related to cultural/heritage tourism research. Ethical principles were always maintained when interacting with participants by acting in an overt manner, always introducing ourselves and our research aims ahead of interviews and informal conversations. Participant observations were done in a covert manner, essentially acting like the tourists around us, taking pictures and videos, making field notes, and moving around the locations. All interviewees were assigned numbers, and data was anonymised and stored on secure devices.

The qualitative data for this article was collected by the first two authors at two locations: Debang village and Fenghuang ancient town. Debang village is renowned as being ‘the village of silver craftsmen’ in the traditional Miao area and is home to 10 of the 21 inheritors in Fenghuang. Fenghuang ancient town is the biggest tourist destination in the region and holds the most commercial activities concerning Miao silverware.

Participant observations yielded 478 photos, 62 videos, and 14 pages of field notes. In Debang village, we focused on how Miao silverware is produced and sold traditionally. Attention was paid to craft tools, styles and patterns of silverware, environments of family workshops, and the local marketplace. In Fenghuang ancient town, we focused on tourism commercialisation of Miao silverware, observing distinct types of commercial operations. Attention was paid to spatial layout, categories of silverware products, and commodity descriptions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with people of different occupations concerning silverware tourism (as shown in Table 1). Purposive sampling was employed to select participants aligned with the research aims (Campbell et al., 2020). As the main focus was on Miao craftsmen, six craftsmen were selected and interviewed for 1–1.5 hours each. Three of them are active craftsmen in Debang village (Participants 1–3), while the other three are ICH inheritors who operate their businesses in the ancient town (Participants 4–6). Five silver jewellery shop owners (Participants 7–11), two wholesale shop owners (Participants 12–13), and four Miao owners of informal stalls (Participants 14–17) were selected and interviewed for 20–30 minutes because their opinions about Miao silverware and tourism commercialisation were important as a contrast to those of the craftsmen. Background information was collected through interviews with two Miao experts (Participants 18–19), one government official in Debang village (Participant 20), and two officials from the ICH bureau of Fenghuang (Participants 21–22).

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Participant Number	Age	Sex: (F for Female, M for male;)	Location	Occupation
1, 2	40s	M, M	Debang village	Craftsman
3	80s	M	Debang village	Craftsman
4	50s	M	Ancient town	Craftsman (inheritor)
5, 6	30s	M, M	Ancient town	Craftsman (inheritor)
7, 8	40s	M	Ancient town	Jewellery shop owner
9, 10	50s	M, F	Ancient town	Jewellery shop owner
11	30s	F	Ancient town	Jewellery shop owner
12, 13	40s, 50s	F, F	Ancient town	Wholesaler
14, 15	50s	F	Ancient town	Stall owner
16, 17	60s, 70s	F, F	Ancient town	Stall owner
18, 19	50s	M	Debang village	Miao expert
20	40s	M	Debang village	Government official
21, 22	30s, 40s	F, F	Ancient town	Official from the ICH bureau

In total, 22 interviews were conducted—varying in duration due to participants’ availability, insights about the field, interests in the researched topic, and willingness to contribute to the study. The interviews took on a semi-structured format, resembling casual conversations with expansive open-ended inquiries. Our questions interrogated participants’ perspectives on Miao silverware craftsmanship and its commercialisation. The interviews began by eliciting personal stories through questions such as ‘What motivated you to start your silverware business in the ancient town?’ Abstract questions followed, like ‘Please could you share your insights on tourism, ICH, and silverware craftsmanship?’ Additionally, probing questions, such as ‘Could you elaborate further on that?’, were used to delve deeper into the discussion. Lastly, practical questions, such as ‘What are your difficulties in continuing in the silverware business’, were used to understand problems with tourism commercialisation from the perspective of different stakeholders.

Interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed. The first two authors began by separately listening to the audio files and selecting important parts of each participant’s recording based on the research aims. These excerpts were then shared and discussed within the broader research team. This process was iteratively performed twice to ensure thorough consideration of the data. The selected audio data was then transcribed and analysed thematically with a focus on the motivations, patterns and effects of silverware commercialisation. To minimise bias, the first two authors separately undertook the data analysis and then cross-checked their respective findings; the analysis was later discussed and fine-tuned with the latter two authors. Only the selected interview extracts were translated by the first author into English.

Findings

The production, distribution and consumption of Miao silverware vary between Debang village and Fenghuang ancient town. In Debang village, silverware is crafted at family workshops for local Miao consumption. Fenghuang ancient town shows tourism commercialisation of Miao silverware, hosting a variety of different commercial forms, including silver jewellery shops, wholesale shops, stalls, ICH shops, and simulated ICH shops. These commercial forms deal with different kinds of silverware products, including handmade silverware (ICH silverware), machine-made silverware, and nickel replicas. Comparing the two locations, we show how tourism contributes to the transformation of ICH and creates tensions for ICH safeguarding at the same time. We also present how Miao craftsmen, who are often caught between the competing pressures of tourism commercialisation and ICH safeguarding, deal with these tensions.

The following three subsections present different realities concerning Miao silverware craftsmanship, including one traditional and one touristic, and reveal how the frontstage-backstage metaphor can be used to understand Miao craftsmen's strategies for negotiating these different realities. We start by showing how Miao silverware is crafted and consumed traditionally in Debang village. Thereafter, shedding light on Fenghuang ancient town, we describe what constitutes fake ICH products and identify the damaging impacts of tourism commercialisation. Finally, we show how ICH inheritors in the ancient town respond to the challenges they face in the tourism market.

Backstage: Miao silverware craftsmanship in the traditional Miao area

In traditional Miao communities, Miao silverware craftsmanship is deeply rooted in its socio-cultural functions and meanings. In Debang village, Miao silverware is produced and consumed locally, mainly for social occasions such as weddings. Participant 1 is a prominent silverware craftsman in Debang village. We went to the village several times and various people coincidentally introduced us to him. Participant 1 said:

At a wedding ceremony, [female] guests from the bride's family have to wear traditional Miao costumes with a set of silverware ornaments. Hosts from the groom's family also have to be dressed up. This is our custom. If you don't have a set of silverware, you will feel embarrassed...So buying silverware is necessary for families here. Otherwise, craftsmen like me would have already been obsolete.

Participant 20, a government official in the village, also told us that 'some women from the outside had not known the custom. But they also asked for a set of silverware ornaments after having lived here'. From these statements, we deduce that Miao silverware is a symbolic material through which the identity of Miao can be clarified, confirmed and communicated. In this sense, silverware is a symbol as well as a normative means for integration and socialisation.

At the same time, silverware ornaments are merchandise, and trades of silverware are firmly based on social relationships within Miao communities. As Participant 1 told us:

People who buy my silverware are all neighbours...Silverware for weddings is often ordered and sold in a set...A set of silverware costs [a lot], about 40,000 or

50,000 yuan [5,110 or 6,388 euros]. People [are cautious and] only buy my silverware because we are acquaintances.

This statement shows that transactions take place within Miao communities. Noticeably, Participant 1 did not use terms like ‘customers’ or ‘products’. Buyers and craftsmen choose each other based on social relationships, not market price or service. In other words, a social reputation as an honest craftsman—which may take generational efforts to create and maintain—is necessary for doing silverware business. It also means that the production of silverware is organised on a family basis. According to Participant 18, a local Miao elite, Miao silverware craftsmanship has been handed down from generation to generation within their families. When asked why he became a silverware craftsman, Participant 1 pointed at his father and answered: ‘because he is [and] I did not have many choices’. As such, in the traditional Miao area, silverware craftsmanship is not an occupation that people can choose voluntarily, but a social identity that should be inherited from previous generations. To sum up, in the traditional Miao area, people buy and produce Miao silverware because they are Miao and live in a Miao community—making silverware a symbol of sustaining Miao identity. Commercialisation, in this context, follows social and cultural norms in traditional Miao communities.

Frontstage: Tourism commercialisation in the sinicised Miao area

Tourism commercialisation does not follow social and cultural norms in Miao communities because it is not Miao people but tourists who consume silverware. Both Participants 18 and 19 told us that the Miao people have three criteria for silverware: big, real and heavy. In Debang village, silverware is always produced and sold in sets, as shown in Figure 2 (a). In contrast, tourists prefer small pieces, for example, bracelets as shown in Figure 2 (b). In addition, according to tourist preferences, different types of silverware products are provided, including machine-made silverware, nickel replicas, and handmade silverware. Some of these products are not typical Miao silverware produced and consumed in a traditional way. They can lead to detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation under certain conditions. We distinguish between silver jewellery and fake ICH silverware in the remainder of this subsection.



Figure 2 (a) Traditional Miao silverware (b) Bracelets in a wholesale shop (Source: Authors)

(1) Silver jewellery

Silver jewellery shops, wholesale shops, and silverware stalls in the ancient town sell their products with few references to Miao silverware craftsmanship. Before the official emphasis on ICH, Miao silverware had only been considered a type of jewellery. No matter whether handmade or machine-made, a piece of silverware is considered valuable as long as it is made out of real silver. Silver jewellery shops were the initial type of silverware commercialisation in the ancient town. Specialising in machine-made silverware, most of these shops are owned by non-Miao merchants who are unfamiliar with silver craftsmanship. When we were taking a photo of an advertisement board in a silver jewellery shop, the owner laughed saying: ‘you do not have to take pictures. I copied [the texts] from the internet. Just Baidu (Chinese equivalent to Google) it’. The following is an excerpt from the commodity description:

Silver ions have a strong bactericidal effect and are very beneficial to human bodies. [Silverware] not only has economic value and is beautiful, but it can also be used as a poison-testing tool. Ancient people said that wearing silverware ensures perpetual health and wealth.

Although stereotypical introductions of Miao people and culture are also showcased, advertisement texts intend to enhance silverware’s worthiness as a tourism product by emphasising the potential health benefits of silver.

Stall owners do not advertise their merchandise in reference to silverware craftsmanship either. Many of them are older people from the traditional Miao area who live with their families in the neighbourhood of the ancient town. They do not rent shops but locate their stalls along the roadsides at night. Additionally, they do not have enough capital to prepare a stock of real silverware, and all the stall owners sell nickel replicas at low prices. For them, Miao silverware sold in the ancient town and those in the traditional Miao area are different. Participant 14 is a Miao stall owner wearing traditional costumes and silverware ornaments daily. We asked her where we could buy silverware ornaments like hers. She shook her head saying: ‘you need to go to Shanjiang (a town in the traditional Miao area). [My merchandise] is for tourists here’.

Silver jewellery shops, stalls, and wholesale shops do not deal with authentic ICH silverware, nor do they advertise their products based on Miao silverware craftsmanship. Machine-made silverware and nickel replicas in this context are not related to ICH and therefore do not result in cultural misappropriation.

(2) Fake ICH silverware

When machine-made silverware is advertised as ICH products, it becomes fake ICH silverware and causes adverse effects on Miao craftsmen’s businesses. Some craftsmen have businesses in both Debang village and Fenghuang ancient town. They do not operate their shops in the ancient town but cooperate with silverware companies, resulting in simulated ICH shops. *Ji* is the only municipal-level inheritor and also the most influential inheritor in Debang village. *Ji’s Silverware*—the biggest silverware shop in the ancient town, which opened in 2018—is named after *Ji*. However, he is not responsible for the management of the shop. Instead, *Ji’s* family is provided with a special counter

to sell their handmade silverware. Reciprocally, the shop makes use of *Ji*'s fame as an ICH inheritor to authenticate machine-made silverware. For example, advertising texts intend to attach ICH values to the shop by drawing upon *Ji*'s personal story:

Showing gratitude to *Ji* for his efforts of inheriting and promoting Miao silverware craftsmanship..., [we] establish *Ji*'s Miao Silverware Craftsmanship Education Centre—also known as *Ji*'s Silverware Craftsmanship Station—at this auspicious site of Nanhuali [a commercial site in Fenghuang ancient town].

The names 'Ji's Miao Silverware Craftsmanship Education Centre' and 'Ji's Silverware Craftsmanship Station' give the impression that the shop was established for *Ji* with the aim of preserving Miao silverware craftsmanship. Thus, the text implies that silverware in the shop represents traditional Miao silverware craftsmanship.

Machine-made silverware in simulated ICH shops is not produced in the ICH way but is marketed as ICH products, falsely claiming to represent Miao's silverware culture. Machine-made silverware only costs 13 yuan/gram (1.67 euros) at silver jewellery shops, whereas simulated ICH shops sell similar pieces at more than 30 yuan/gram (3.86 euros). The name of ICH is abused as a gimmick for financial gain, leading to cultural misappropriation. Consequently, a bad reputation for silverware shops in Fenghuang has been formed, as a lot of complaints on the internet highlight the low quality of silverware products in the ancient town, particularly those purchased from simulated ICH shops. Such a bad reputation causes problems for Miao craftsmen in selling ICH silverware and maintaining their silverware businesses. The next subsection reveals how Miao craftsmen face this challenge and deal with different realities in ICH tourism.

In-between: Transforming ICH and negotiating different realities

(1) Transforming ICH

Tourism constitutes a new reality for Miao craftsmen and their silverware craftsmanship. While embracing and adapting to the new reality, craftsmen are transforming their ICH. Participant 4 is among the first craftsmen from Debang village who expanded their silverware businesses outside of the traditional Miao area. He opened his silverware shop in the ancient town in 2016 and was registered as a county-level inheritor in 2018. Participant 4 displayed a different attitude towards Miao silverware craftsmanship. Rather than framing his craftsmanship as a social identity inherited from previous generations, Participant 4 emphasised his personal interests:

I learned it from my father-in-law who has been a silverware craftsman for his whole life... A silver ingot can be turned into silverware pieces of various designs. I see silverware craftsmanship as my hobby.

In Debang village, Participant 1 told us that he does not need to create new designs because there is only demand for traditional silverware designs in the village. In contrast, facing tourists from all over the country, Participant 4 is positive about changes to his silverware:

I create new designs, but my innovations are based on other people's tastes. If I create silverware completely based on my personal imagination, it would be

problematic when I cannot sell them...customised products should be different [from others in the market]. If the products can be seen everywhere customers will find them less valuable.

In Participant 4's case, the production of silverware has little to do with social conventions of the Miao. He understands the worthiness of his products based on customers' perceptions. Also, for him, connecting to and communicating with the outside world is important for continuing traditional craftsmanship. At one point, as we were discussing the potential benefits of selling products online, Participant 4 became excited and exclaimed:

Publicise us through online stores and modernised technology! Then, inheritors can make a living and [craftsmanship] can be inherited.

As such, ICH inheritors in the ancient town like Participant 4 are able to go beyond traditional Miao communities and take advantage of their craftsmanship by making a living in a non-Miao society. In this sense, tourism commercialisation provides a new path for silverware craftsmen to adapt themselves to the outside world while continuing their craftsmanship and maintaining their Miao identity.

(2) Creating frontstage-backstage

For craftsmen, machine-made silverware is not essentially detrimental, but fake ICH silverware does harm to the silverware market. Craftsmen regard machine-made and handmade silverware as different types of products. As Participant 4 commented:

Machine-made silverware is cheap. Merchandise can be directly replenished [from wholesale shops]. Handmade pieces are expensive because they need craftsmanship and are time-consuming. [Buying which product] depends on people's preferences.

However, fake ICH silverware makes it difficult to distinguish ICH silverware from machine-made silverware. Consequently, craftsmen struggle to sell their handmade pieces at reasonable prices. During the interview, Participant 4 said that their greatest challenge is advertising silverware craftsmanship and enabling craftsmen to sell their work:

Tourism has a good effect [in promoting my work]. But it depends on tourists. Some people do not trust me. No matter how much I advertise [my craftsmanship], they do not believe in me. Also, [handmade pieces] are too expensive. They cannot accept the price.

Facing this challenging situation, Participant 4 made a compromise: 'I [have to] provide both types. You lose the market if you do not have machine-made ones'. He created a frontstage-backstage for his business to sell both types of silverware. Participant 4's shop is composed of two areas. As shown in Figure 3, certificates of ICH and for Debang village are displayed at the main

entrance—indicating that the shop sells ICH products.



Figure 3. The main entrance of Participant 4's shop (Source: Authors)

From this main entrance, tourists enter a big space displaying machine-made products and a silver-melting workbench. This is the frontstage where Participant 4 showcases silverware craftsmanship and provides do-it-yourself experiences. Machine-made silverware is sold at 10 yuan/gram (1.28 euros), which is even slightly lower than the price in some silver jewellery shops. Tourists typically buy silverware in the frontstage room without deep communication with Participant 4. Only those who question the machine-made products and show interest in handmade silverware will be introduced to the backstage room. Next to the counter in the main room, there is a small entrance leading to an additional room where Participant 4's handmade pieces are displayed and another workbench for engraving is located. For handmade pieces, Participant 4 charges 35 yuan/gram (4.47 euros), and he takes orders from tourists who appreciate silverware craftsmanship.

In this case, frontstage-backstage not only functions as a filter for Participant 4 to select tourists but also helps him to deal with customers with different expectations, desires and needs relating to silverware. More importantly, it is also a strategy that allows Participant 4 to make a living in a complicated commercial environment while continuing his silverware craftsmanship.

Discussion and conclusion

Tourism commercialisation has been a critical issue for ICH tourism research. Focusing on the case of Miao silverware tourism in Fenghuang, China, we have used frontstage-backstage as an analytical lens to examine how tourism has created a new reality for Miao craftsmen and their silverware craftsmanship, and how craftsmen respond to the tensions between tourism commercialisation and ICH safeguarding.

Multiplying realities and transforming ICH

Frontstage-backstage metaphorises the socio-cultural differences between the traditional and sinicised Miao areas, manifesting two realities that are faced by Miao craftsmen. In the backstage area, the production and consumption of silverware are rooted in social and cultural norms of Miao communities. In the frontstage area, Miao craftsmen present themselves and stage their silverware

craftsmanship in front of a wide range of tourists with various preferences. Adapting to tourism commercialisation, Miao craftsmen provide diverse designs and types of silverware products.

While both Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013) and Everett (2012) use the concept of frontstage-backstage at a micro-level, we focus on multiplying realities of heritage at a meso-level. Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013) regard the 'pseudo-backstage' as a vital part of tourist-host interaction that contributes to the success of heritage tourism. In our case, the frontstage-backstage metaphor represents the transforming social and cultural environments that ICH and its practitioners are facing. Different from MacCannell's (1976) notion of 'staged authenticity', the metaphor in this study does not indicate the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity. To put it more appropriately, the metaphor is not associated with the notion of authenticity. Backstage represents the traditional version of ICH and its related socio-cultural environments that Miao craftsmen feel more intimacy with, whereas frontstage manifests unfamiliar circumstances, including tourism, that provide new possibilities and are open to diversified 'audiences' from the outside.

Multiplying realities show avenues for developing and evolving ICH. Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013) highlight that the construction of the 'pseudo-backstage' (re)produces the hosts' common-sense world. Similarly, in our case, commercialising and staging silverware for tourists transforms craftsmen's beliefs and behaviours concerning ICH. This point corresponds to Su's (2019) finding in Lijiang. He pointed out that cultural practitioners attach importance to both the less commodified ICH in the community and the more commodified ICH in the tourism market. In this case, what constitutes ICH is recreated or expanded in tourism. Tourism commercialisation is beneficial for ICH safeguarding, not because it freezes the most original style of ICH, but because it promotes the transformational process of ICH. The frontstage-backstage metaphor is useful for understanding this process in tourism. Backstage preserves a traditional version of ICH and frontstage stages a touristified version of ICH. By comparing frontstage and backstage, it can be clarified how ICH is transformed in a tourism context. However, not everything that happens in tourism can be viewed as a new part of ICH. The next subsection illustrates how detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation can be distinguished and handled.

Distinguishing and handling detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation

Fake ICH silverware leads to detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation. Machine-made silverware and nickel replicas become fake ICH silverware when they are marketed under the banner of ICH. Cultural misappropriation occurs because it becomes difficult to distinguish machine-made silverware and nickel replicas from handmade pieces, negatively influencing craftsmen's ICH silverware businesses. Similar findings can be found in the existing literature, revealing how fake ICH products in tourism markets undermine the preservation of ICH by creating competition for cultural practitioners and ICH inheritors (Maags, 2021; Zhu and Maags, 2020).

ICH value can be used to clarify beneficial and detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation. Fake ICH silverware is caused by cultural misappropriation that prioritises commercial value over ICH value. Commercial value considers increasing economic profits the priority, whereas ICH value drives people, be they Miao people or non-Miao people, to behave for the benefit of Miao craftsmen and Miao communities. Smith and Campbell (2018) argue that ICH value is not inherent in entities but created by the process of valuing. Different stakeholders use ICH for different purposes and interests (Zhu, 2018). Why and how they value ICH determines their actions of transforming and recreating ICH for future generations.

In response to the detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation, ICH inheritors behave according to ICH value. Instead of completely accepting and producing fake ICH silverware, they insist on crafting and selling handmade silverware. They maintain two separate commercial systems to satisfy different tourist expectations and select potential customers for ICH silverware. We used the frontstage-backstage metaphor to describe this situation as it shows the segmented touristic reality concerning tourist-host interaction. In the frontstage space, ICH inheritors stage Miao silverware craftsmanship according to the tourist gaze, providing the most preferred mass product, in this case, machine-made silverware. In the backstage space, they practice and develop silverware craftsmanship with selected tourists. The metaphor signifies the ICH inheritors' strategy to negotiate beneficial and detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation. More importantly, it also manifests the socio-psychological dilemma of ICH inheritors in staging ICH and presenting themselves in front of the outside world.

Behaviours according to ICH value can lead to adverse consequences. Some ICH inheritors are also intensifying the detrimental aspects of tourism commercialisation because, in the frontstage space, they are making use of the ICH brand and selling machine-made silverware under this label without acknowledging that these products are not hand-crafted. This creation of fake ICH products, which is often unintentional, causes pressure on craftsmen who are not identified as ICH inheritors and cannot brand their silverware with ICH. In addition, the frontstage-backstage arrangement of silverware tourism impedes effective communication between Miao craftsmen and tourists. Communication has been proposed by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee as one of the five strategic objectives in guiding sustainable heritage tourism (Ghanem and Saad, 2015). It is intended to 'increase public awareness, involvement and support for World Heritage through communication' (World Heritage Committee, 2002). However, inheritors' strategy of selling machine-made silverware in the frontstage space prevents tourists from knowing the realities of Miao silverware craftsmanship. Therefore, a vicious circle has been formed. On the one hand, mass tourists are not familiar with Miao silverware craftsmanship, so they are not willing to pay high prices for ICH pieces. On the other hand, Miao craftsmen trying to make a living through tourism sell cheap machine-made silverware, and consequently, mass tourists have no way of knowing the value of silverware craftsmanship anymore.

ICH, as well as tourism connected to it, is complicated not only because it is intangible and fluid, but also because it is associated with living culture and living people. Being (ontology) and truth (epistemology) have helped to determine what constitutes authentic heritage and how to preserve the authenticity of heritage. However, to ensure the continuity of ICH, goodness (axiology) is more important for understanding and determining the directions of transforming ICH. This study constitutes an attempt to examine ICH value empirically. We suggest that it may be productive for future research to focus on conceptual investigations of axiology and ICH tourism.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express sincere gratitude to our participants in Fenghuang, particularly Liming Ma and Jianfu Tang, for their valuable contributions to this study. We thank the two anonymous reviewers and the handling editors for helping us in shaping this paper into its final form.

References

Allen PM and Varga L (2007) Complexity: The co-evolution of epistemology, axiology and ontology.

Wang, C, Wang, Y, **Edelheim, J**, & Zhou, J 2024. Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 0(0).

Nonlinear Dynamics, Psychology, and Life Sciences 11(1): 19-50.

Avrami E and Mason R (2019) Mapping the issue of values. In: Avrami Erica, Macdonald S, Mason R, et al. (eds) *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Bortolotto C and Ubertazzi B (2018) Editorial: Foodways as intangible cultural heritage. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 25(4): 409-418.

Broude T (2018) Mapping the potential interactions between UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage regime and world trade law. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 25(4): 419-448-419-448.

Campbell S, Greenwood M, Prior S, et al. (2020) Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25(8): 652-661.

Chronis A (2006) Heritage of the senses: Collective remembering as an embodied praxis. *Tourist Studies* 6(3): 267-296.

Chronis A (2012) Tourists as Story-Builders: Narrative Construction at a Heritage Museum. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 29(5): 444-459.

Daugstad K and Kirchengast C (2013) Authenticity and the pseudo-backstage of agri-tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 43: 170-191.

De La Torre M and Mason R (2002) Introduction. *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

Edelheim J, Joppe M and Flaherty J (2022) *Teaching Tourism: Innovative, Values-based Learning Experiences for Transformative Practices* Edward Elgar Publishing.

Everett S (2012) Production places or consumption spaces? The place-making agency of food tourism in Ireland and Scotland. *Tourism Geographies* 14(4): 535-554.

Francis-Lindsay J (2009) The Intrinsic Value of Cultural Heritage and its Relationship to Sustainable Tourism Development: The Contrasting Experiences of Jamaica and Japan. *Caribbean Quarterly* 55(2): 151-168.

Fu Y, Kim S and Zhou T (2015) Staging the 'authenticity' of intangible heritage from the production perspective: the case of craftsmanship museum cluster in Hangzhou, China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 13: 285-300.

Ghanem MM and Saad SK (2015) Enhancing sustainable heritage tourism in Egypt: Challenges and framework of action. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 10(4): 357-377.

Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Gong L (2011) An old town in recession: A case study of the cultural circle of the old Lijiang city. *Journal of Guizhou University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Science)*.(3): 159-163.

Halewood C and Hannam K (2001) Viking heritage tourism: Authenticity and commodification. *Annals of Tourism Research* 28(3): 565-580.

Hartman RS (2019) *Five lectures on formal axiology*. Izzard Ink.

Kim S, Whitford M and Arcodia C (2019) Development of intangible cultural heritage as a sustainable tourism resource: the intangible cultural heritage practitioners' perspectives. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 14(5-6): 422-435.

Logan W (2012) Cultural diversity, cultural heritage and human rights: Towards heritage management as human rights-based cultural practice. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18(3): 231-244.

Luo Y (2021) Safeguarding intangible heritage through edutainment in China's creative urban

Wang, C, Wang, Y, **Edelheim, J**, & Zhou, J 2024. Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 0(0).

- environments. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27(2): 170-185.
- Maags C (2021) Common, Luxury, and Fake Commodities: Intangible Cultural Heritage Markets in China. *China Perspectives*. DOI: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.12184.(2021/3): 7-17.
- MacCannell D (1976) *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press.
- Nute K (2019) Toward a test of cultural misappropriation. *International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* 17(2): 67.
- Pardo Abad CJ (2016) The post-industrial landscapes of Riotinto and Almadén, Spain: scenic value, heritage and sustainable tourism. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 12(4): 331-346.
- Poulios I (2014) Discussing strategy in heritage conservation: Living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable development* 4(1): 16-34.
- Richards G and Munsters W (2010) *Cultural Tourism Research Methods*. Oxfordshire: CAB International.
- Schäfer S (2015) From Geisha girls to the Atomic Bomb Dome: Dark tourism and the formation of Hiroshima memory. *Tourist Studies* 16(4): 351-366.
- Schein L (2000) *Minority rules: The Miao and the feminine in China's cultural politics*. London: Duke University Press.
- Shi C (1995) Five migrations in the history of Miao people. *Journal Guizhou Ethnic Studies* 61(1): 120-128.
- Smith L and Akagawa N (2009) *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Smith L and Campbell G (2018) The tautology of “intangible values” and the misrecognition of intangible cultural heritage. *Heritage & Society* 10(1): 26-44.
- State Council of China (2005) Opinions of the general office of the State Council on strengthening the protective work of China's intangible cultural heritage. https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2005/content_63227.htm.
- Su J (2018a) Conceptualising the subjective authenticity of intangible cultural heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24(9): 919-937.
- Su J (2019) Understanding the changing Intangible Cultural Heritage in tourism commodification: The music players' perspective from Lijiang, China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 17(3): 247-268.
- Su MM, Dong Y, Wall G, et al. (2020) A value-based analysis of the tourism use of agricultural heritage systems: Duotian Agrosystem, Jiangsu Province, China. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 28(12): 2136-2155.
- Su X (2018b) Reconstructing tradition: Heritage authentication and tourism-related commodification of the ancient city of Pingyao. *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 10(3): 670-670.
- Timm Knudsen B (2011) Thanatourism: Witnessing difficult pasts. *Tourist Studies* 11(1): 55-72.
- Ubertazzi B (2023) Intellectual property, and ethics. In: Bortolotto C and Skounti A (eds) *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge.
- UNESCO (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. *UNESCO*.
- Walby K and Piché J (2015) Staged authenticity in penal history sites across Canada. *Tourist Studies* 15(3): 231-247.
- Walter P (2017) Culinary tourism as living history: staging, tourist performance and perceptions of authenticity in a Thai cooking school. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 12(4): 365-379.

- Wang, C, Wang, Y, **Edelheim, J**, & Zhou, J 2024. Tourism commercialisation and the frontstage-backstage metaphor in intangible cultural heritage tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 0(0).
- Wang C, Wang Y and Xiang X (2021) Research on Space Production of Real-scene Performing Art: A Case Study on 'The Peach Colony'. *Scientia Geographica Sinica* 41(2): 310-318.
- Wang X (2020) *Sustainment and changes of ethnicity under the background of modernization: Research on the Miao's culture changes in Fenghuang*. Yunnan University, Kunming.
- Wang Y and Wu Y (2012) Research on the Great Wall culture from the perspective of ethnocultural geography *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*.(10): 22-27.
- World Heritage Committee (2002) Budapest Declaration On World Heritage. *UNESCO World Heritage Convention*.
- Xie B and Hu X (2019) The misuse of the theory of "stage authenticity" in the ethnic tourism culture protection: Rethinking on the development model of "front stage, curtain and backstage". *Social Sciences in Yunnan*.(4): 96-104+186.
- Xu K, Yan T and Zhu X (2013) Commodification of Chinese heritage villages. *Annals of Tourism Research* 40(1): 415-419.
- Yang C, Hou L and Wu X (2022) *National Intangible Cultural Heritage in Fenghuang County, Xiangxi, China: Miao Silverware Forging Skills*. Fenghuang County's Bureau of Culture and Tourism.
- Yang Z (2006) The front stage, curtain and back stage: An exploration of ethnic culture conservation and tourism development. *Ethno-National Studies* 48(2): 39-46+108.
- Zhang J and Yang D (2015) Application of "front and back stages " theory on conservation of traditional villages and towns in China. *South Architecture*.(3): 65-70.
- Zhang Z (2010) The Chinese writing of Miao nationality's identity in western Guizhou and ethnic identity in modern China. *Journal of Southwest University of Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)* 3: 1-11.
- Zhou L (2019) *Evolution of Miao Nationality silver ornaments cultural function in tourism context: Taking Debang village in Fenghuang county as an example*. Jishou University.
- Zhu Y (2018) Uses of the past: Negotiating heritage in Xi'an. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24(2): 181-192.
- Zhu Y and Maags C (2020) *Heritage Politics in China: The Power of the Past*. London: Routledge.