

Research on Productive Protection of Dai Ethnic Group of Traditional Crafts in Xishuangbanna

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Abstract

This research delves into the productive protection of traditional crafts among the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, focusing on handwoven brocade, handmade papermaking, and slow wheel pottery. Through field investigations and literature reviews, the study examines the current status, challenges, and protective measures of Dai traditional crafts, aiming to propose effective strategies for their sustainable development. The mixed research method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights into the cultural significance, market demands, and economic benefits of these crafts. Findings underscore the importance of productive protection in preserving the cultural heritage and promoting the socio-economic well-being of the Dai ethnic group in the face of modernization and globalization.

Keywords: Productive Protection, Traditional Crafts, Dai Ethnic Group, Xishuangbanna, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Professor Wang Mingke vividly used the following analogy in his book "Edge of China: Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity": "When we draw a circle on a piece of paper, it is the 'edges' that make it look more like a circle (Wang, 2006). A circle without edges cannot truly be considered a circle, and this analogy serves to emphasize the importance of the edges. It is precisely this anti-centrism perspective that has sparked the author's strong interest in the art of ethnic minorities living in the border regions of China. Driven by a profound curiosity, the author gradually began to seek understanding and engage with the Dai ethnic people residing in the border area of Xishuangbanna.

In 2012, China issued the "Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Culture on Strengthening Productive Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," which clearly states: "Productive protection of intangible cultural heritage refers to the protection method that, in the process of productive practices, takes the preservation of the authenticity, integrity, and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage as the core. It is based on the effective inheritance of the skills related to intangible cultural heritage and, through means such as production, circulation,

and sales, transforms intangible cultural heritage and its resources into cultural products." During this period, China continuously put forward relevant incentive policies to support productive protection. It was not until November 2023 that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China announced 100 bases, indicating the country's determination to implement productive protection for intangible cultural heritage.

China are artistic forms that various ethnic groups have developed, formed, and cultivated over a long period of production and life. They constitute an integral part of the daily life and folk culture of ordinary people. In the context of a self-sufficient natural economy, these crafts have followed the developmental patterns of Chinese cultural evolution, demonstrating regional distinctiveness and stable cultural inheritance. With distinct characteristics and a stable cultural legacy, they deeply reflect the ideas, emotions, and visual aesthetic experiences of ethnic minorities. These crafts comprehensively mirror the customs, spiritual outlook, and value orientations of each ethnic group. It can be said that each ethnic group perfectly embodies the most intrinsic essence, perceptions of life, and spiritual connection to nature in its traditional arts.

The selection of Dai ethnic handwoven brocade, handmade papermaking, and slow wheel pottery as representatives for the study of Dai ethnic handicrafts in Xishuangbanna is driven by several key reasons:

Firstly, these three crafts are all recognized as national intangible cultural heritage in China. Dai traditional handwoven brocade, with its long history and meticulous craftsmanship, holds high artistic and cultural value. It serves as a testament to the history of the Dai people, carrying their culture and embodying the unique spiritual essence and creativity of the Dai people. In 2008, Dai traditional handwoven brocade was included in the second batch of the national intangible cultural heritage protection list. Yu Ershuai, a national inheritor of Dai handwoven brocade, resides in Manluandian Village in Xishuangbanna.

Secondly, slow wheel pottery has a history of over 4000 years in China. This ancient pottery-making technique primarily uses clay and sandstone as raw materials. The craftsmanship involves processes such as pounding clay, sieving soil, mixing sand, permeating water, forming clay strips, shaping, drying, and firing. The entire process relies solely on the artisan's intuition and experience without any drawings or templates. Yu Meng, a national inheritor of Dai slow wheel pottery, lives in Manzhao Village in Xishuangbanna.

Thirdly, papermaking is one of China's ancient Four Great Inventions, with profound significance for global technological progress and cultural development. Dai traditional handmade bark papermaking evolved from traditional Chinese papermaking techniques. The process includes soaking, steaming, beating pulp, pouring paper, and drying. This traditional papermaking technique of the Dai people closely resembles the methods documented in the ancient agricultural book "Qimin Yaoshu" by Jia Sixie. In Manzhao Village, Menghai County, nearly every household is involved in papermaking, contributing to the successful inheritance of Dai handmade papermaking.

Lastly, the choice of these three crafts allows for a diverse field investigation. Connecting, interacting, and cross-verifying multiple locations enhance the narrative and construction capabilities of the article. By comparing the strengths and weaknesses of productive protection measures in different Dai ethnic crafts, the study aims to actively explore a feasible path for productive protection that aligns with the current situation of minority ethnic crafts. Field investigations at multiple locations break through the limitations of a single village society, expanding the research scope to focus on a larger regional context. This approach contributes more extensive, rich, and meaningful data to the fields of ethnology and

anthropology. Importantly, the three different Dai ethnic crafts—handwoven brocade, handmade papermaking, and slow wheel pottery—reflect distinct characteristics in terms of productive protection.



Figure 1: Dai Ethnic Brocade Weaving. Source: Author.



Figure 2: Dai Ethnic Handmade Papermaking. Source: Author.



Figure 3: Yu Meng Pottery Scene by a National Inheritor of Dai Slow Wheel Pottery Craft, Source: Author.

In the backdrop of rapid global economic growth and ever-increasing cultural exchanges, the functional significance of traditional Dai ethnic handicraft products has gradually diminished, leading to a simultaneous decline in market demand. Furthermore, the aging population of skilled artisans, and in some cases, their passing away, coupled with a lack of interest among the younger generation to learn these crafts, pose significant challenges and issues for the future development of traditional handicrafts in the Xishuangbanna region. The traditional handicrafts of the Dai ethnic group precisely embody the ethnic culture, daily life, and beliefs of the Dai people.

The traditional handicrafts of the Dai ethnic group precisely embody the ethnic culture, daily life, and beliefs of the Dai people. This paper takes the traditional crafts of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna as the research subject, with a primary focus on the field investigation of the Manluandian Village in Jinghong City. Additionally, it briefly touches on the Man'e Village in Mengla Town of Mengla County and the Dai Ethnic Garden in Jinghong. Multiple locations were visited to investigate the Dai traditional handwoven brocade craft. Furthermore, the paper examines the Dai traditional handcrafted papermaking technique through a study conducted in Manzhao Village in Menghai County. The slow wheel pottery-making craft of the Dai ethnic group was investigated in Mangge Village and Mandou Village. By analyzing specific examples from these three crafts, the paper attempts to explore a viable path or provide a reference theoretical foundation for the "productive protection" of traditional crafts in the Xishuangbanna region. The ultimate aim is to facilitate the better preservation and development of these traditions.

The research objectives for study are given below

1. To investigate the current status of Dai traditional handicrafts in the Xishuangbanna region and conduct a comprehensive analysis, including examining issues such as functional decline, decreased market demand, and obstacles to inheritance. Additionally, this objective aims to delve into the underlying reasons and influencing factors that contribute to these challenges.
2. To analyze the existing productive protection measures for intangible cultural heritage and compare their effectiveness and variations in different Dai handicrafts. Furthermore, this objective aims to identify feasible pathways and effective protective measures for promoting the inheritance and development of Dai traditional handicrafts.
3. To enhance Dai traditional handicraft products' artistic value, cultural significance, and overall appeal through design innovation. This objective seeks to facilitate the seamless integration of traditional handicrafts with modern market demands, ultimately providing effective pathways and strategies for the productive protection and sustainable development of these crafts.

Literature Review

The concept of "productive conservation" was first introduced in the introduction to the book "Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage" (Wenzhang, 2006). He believes that "handicraft must be protected in production practice". Zhou Heping, Minister of Culture of China, conceptually defined the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage at the opening ceremony of the Forum on Safeguarding the Productive Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a series of activities of the "National Intangible Cultural Heritage Traditional Skills Exhibition" held around the fifteenth day of the first month of 2009, that is, "through

production, circulation, sales, and other means, "The intangible cultural heritage and its resources will be transformed into productive forces and products, generate economic benefits, and promote the development of related industries, so that the intangible cultural heritage will be actively protected in production practice, and realize the positive interaction between the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the coordinated development of economy and society"(Zhou, 2006)

The "Law of the People's Republic of China on Intangible Cultural Heritage" was promulgated and implemented on June 1, 2011. The methods for the "productive protection" inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage were incorporated into this law. In November 2011, the Ministry of Culture named and announced the first batch of 36 national-level intangible cultural heritage productive protection demonstration bases, establishing typical examples of productive protection for intangible cultural heritage. In early February 2012, the Ministry of Culture issued the "Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Productive Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," requiring regions to fully understand the significance of carrying out productive protection of intangible cultural heritage, grasp the guidelines and principles of productive protection correctly, scientifically advance the in-depth implementation of productive protection work for intangible cultural heritage, and establish and improve mechanisms for productive protection of intangible cultural heritage (Ministry of Culture. Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Productive Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2012)

The concept and practice of productive protection for intangible cultural heritage have become increasingly recognized and understood by people. During the "Exhibition of Achievements in Productive Protection of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage" held during the Lantern Festival in January 2012, nearly 2,000 physical achievements from various regions in the country in the field of productive protection of intangible cultural heritage were showcased. The exhibition also invited around 170 national-level inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to demonstrate their skills.

In April 2014, the Ministry of Culture released the second batch of national-level intangible cultural heritage productive protection demonstration bases, totaling 57, indicating an upward trend compared to the first batch. Since then, no new productive protection demonstration bases have been established until November 2023, when the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China (established in 2018 through the integration of the Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Administration) publicly disclosed the "Recommendation List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Productive Protection Demonstration Bases for 2023-2025". This document has announced 100 bases, demonstrating the nation's resolve to carry out productive protection for intangible cultural heritage.

As soon as "the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage" was put forward, it attracted a wide discussion among scholars. Wang Wenzhang and Cao Juan's article "A Brief Talk on the Productive Protection of Traditional Handicrafts" expounds on the concept and advantages of productive protection, emphasizing that intangible cultural heritage needs to learn valuable experience from predecessors and learn to innovate in the process of productive protection inheritance, show national characteristics in the current new products (Wenzhang, 2010). In 2009, Lu Pintian, in his article "Revitalizing the Protection of Handmade and Intangible Cultural Heritage Production Methods", argued that standardized large-scale industrial production methods have broken the natural unity of space and time in the human labor process (Lu, 2009)

As more and more researchers begin to focus on the concept of "productive protection," the scope of discussions around this concept is also becoming increasingly broad.

Xu Ganli believes that "For handicrafts that have deviated from their traditional functions and are primarily targeted at the new urban middle class for production, it is necessary to rediscover the spirit of craftsmanship, enhance skill levels, increase the cultural added value of products, thereby gaining favor from culturally conscious elites. Subsequently, these handicrafts can be considered as collectibles or high-end decorative items, eventually being incorporated into modern art. Although this was not the original intention of productive protection, it may become a reality or trend." Xu (2017) Li Jun, approaching from the perspectives of inheritance and dissemination, argues that "the productive protection and development of derivative products of intangible cultural heritage should utilize various communication methods. This includes traditional modes of communication such as personal dissemination, tangible dissemination, and media advertising, as well as modern communication methods like contextual dissemination, digital communication, and integrated marketing communication" (Li, 2019)

Yang Xin introduces the concept of "cultural identity" into the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through Tujia brocade weaving. He regards cultural identity as the core mechanism of productive protection for ICH. Additionally, he proposes the need for the country to establish basic standards for ICH. The rationale behind establishing these standards is to fix the core cultural symbols of ICH through certain forms. It is crucial to note that standardization here does not imply that all ICH crafts are standardized like an assembly line; rather, there are different interpretations. From a cultural perspective, Yang Xin suggests that ICH consists of core culture and random culture. "In the inheritance and development of ICH, it consistently adheres to an unchanging cultural core, namely, core cultural symbols. These symbols define the cultural quality of ICH, represent the core of cultural identity, and maintain stable intergenerational transmission, distinguishing specific ICH elements from others. The 'change' in ICH is realized through random cultural symbols. Random cultural symbols highlight the adaptability of ICH, enabling it to meet diverse needs in an ever-evolving society" (Yang, 2022).

Liang Guangyan, in his article "From the Object of Space to the Space of Objects" published in the "National Art Research" journal, discusses the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage within the framework of spatial concepts. He argues that: "Many problems in the practice of the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage can be attributed to people's conception that the production of intangible cultural heritage is limited to the objectified and materialized production of techniques.....The productive protection of intangible cultural heritage is not the materialization or objectification of a singular characteristic skill, but rather the production of the overall space of intangible cultural heritage. It involves the reproduction of the interconnected elements such as distinctive skills, relational skills, and societal skills within the holistic space of intangible cultural heritage" (Liang, 2023)

In the article "Productive Protection and Development of Engraving Printing of Yangzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage", Li Xia and Wan Yanhua discussed the current situation, main problems and causes of engraving printing of Yangzhou intangible cultural Heritage, and established a new path and strategy for the productive protection of engraving printing and its coordinated development with cultural enterprises, provide a useful reference for the inheritance and protection of Yangzhou intangible cultural heritage and the development of cultural undertakings (Xia, 2012). We should support the home-based production mode and

guide the integration of traditional skills, production, and circulation, and local culture in a "living" way (Shan, 2013). Ding Zhicai, in his article "The Productive Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ethnic Minorities from the Perspective of Ethnic Cultural Industry: Taking the Weaving Technique of Zhuang Nationality as an Example", believes that the industrialization development of Zhuang brocade and hydrangea reflects the industrialization process of the entire intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, and tries to form a sound development of both "protection" and "development". Due to the high requirements of case studies on field investigation, most of these articles are in the form of dissertations, and most of them are discussions on the specific application of intangible cultural heritage industrialization.

In the paper "Research on the Productive Protection of Traditional Embroidery - A Case Study of Three Embroidery Brands," Zeng Yiqiao from the China Academy of Art proposes that there is a fundamental distinction between the productive protection of traditional embroidery and industrialization. In the context of productive protection for traditional embroidery, emphasis should be placed on "handmade production," the "authenticity of embroidery techniques," and the "preservation of core skills" (Zeng, 2016). In her master's thesis, Li Ruonan conducted an in-depth field investigation on the productive protection of the handcrafted skill of flower silk inlay in the Beijing area. She conducted a case study and proposed strategies and paths suitable for the productive protection of flower silk inlay in Beijing. Ultimately, her work provided support for the creation of an independent brand for the flower silk inlay craftsmanship (Li, 2018). Huang Xiaodong conducted a meticulous field investigation on the national-level intangible cultural heritage project in Shanxi Province, "Meiheju Laochen Vinegar Brewing Technique," and found that industrial tourism plays a significant role in the productive protection of traditional skill-based intangible cultural heritage (Huang, 2020). In the article "Practical Exploration of Productive Protection of Guizhou Miao Batik," Li Longhu believes that through market-oriented transformation and "productive protection," Guizhou Miao batik has not only made a positive contribution to improving the income levels of inheritors and promoting regional economic development but has also played a significant role in addressing the rural "left-behind" issue and elevating the social status of women (Li, 2021).

Methodology

In this study, a mixed research method combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches will be employed to comprehensively explore the productive protection of traditional crafts of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna. This mixed research method enables data collection from different perspectives and facilitates a more comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the research findings. Qualitative research methods will delve into the cultural significance, historical inheritance, and protective practices of traditional Dai crafts, while quantitative research methods will provide sample data support to analyze the development trends, market demands, and economic benefits of the handicraft industry, thereby yielding comprehensive research outcomes.

This article primarily focuses on the traditional crafts of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, conducting in-depth field investigations supplemented by relevant literature to review the development history and current status of different inheritance models, summarizing their characteristics. Additionally, theoretical research on the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage of the Dai traditional crafts in Xishuangbanna, along with exploration of practical and feasible pathways, will be conducted.

An extensive literature review was conducted, focusing on the theme of the paper. The main emphasis was on collecting relevant ethnographic data, papers, works, and other research outcomes related to the study of traditional handicrafts in Xishuangbanna.

Researcher investigated a field work observation in the villages of Mange, Mandou, Manluandian, and Manzhao in Xishuangbanna. Researcher observe and interview the residents, adopting an academic perspective to reevaluate commonplace phenomena. The researcher observed daily life through an academic, objective, and comprehensive lens, obtaining first-hand information. The researcher extensively collected primary data through photography, recorded interviews, and handwritten notes. Approaching the study from the local people's perspective, the Researcher aimed to comprehensively understand the entirety and depth of the research. Additionally, maintained a daily field diary to document the activities and events throughout the day.

This research employs flexible approach using both semi-structured and open-ended interview question. Different interview methods were tailored to individuals of varying cultural backgrounds, genders, and ages in the Xishuangbanna region, ultimately comprehensively collecting useful and relevant data.

The study employed a multi-level sampling method to ensure the inclusion of artisans and community members with diverse ages, genders, and skill levels. This approach aimed to obtain a more comprehensive perspective and better reflect the diversity within the villages. A structured questionnaire will be designed and administered to a random sample of practitioners engaged in Dai traditional crafts. The questionnaire will cover their awareness of productive protection measures, their implementation, satisfaction with government policies, and expectations for the future development of traditional crafts.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the significance of productive protection for the traditional crafts of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the research has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by these crafts in the contemporary context. By analyzing the current status and protective measures, the study offers actionable recommendations for enhancing the sustainability and vitality of Dai traditional crafts. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue supporting and promoting productive protection initiatives to ensure the preservation and prosperity of the rich cultural heritage embodied in these traditional crafts.

Contribution

This research makes a significant contribution both theoretically and contextually to the existing knowledge on the productive protection of traditional crafts. Theoretically, it enriches the academic discourse on intangible cultural heritage by introducing a comprehensive framework that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the status and protection measures of traditional crafts. This dual-method approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in preserving cultural heritage, highlighting the interplay between cultural significance, economic viability, and social sustainability. Contextually, the study offers valuable insights specific to the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by this community. By focusing on handwoven brocade, handmade papermaking, and slow wheel pottery, the research not only documents the current practices and issues but also suggests practical strategies for sustainable development. These insights are crucial for policymakers,

cultural preservationists, and local communities, as they provide a blueprint for balancing cultural preservation with economic development in the face of globalization and modernization. The findings of this research are particularly relevant in informing future policies and initiatives aimed at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, thus playing a vital role in ensuring the continuity and vitality of traditional crafts in Xishuangbanna and beyond.

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