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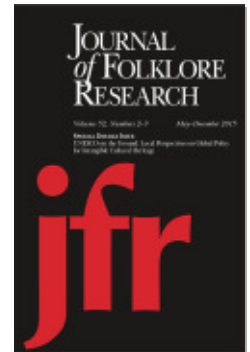
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Shifting Actors and Power Relations: Contentious Local Responses to the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary China

ABSTRACT: This essay addresses the contentious local responses to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection in a local context. The following ethnographic case study concerns the living tradition of worshipping the ancient sage-kings Yao and Shun in several villages in Hongtong County, Shanxi Province, China. Named as an item of national ICH in 2008, the official title of this local tradition is Hongtong Zouqin Xisu, “the custom of visiting sacred relatives in Hongtong.” I explore the ways local people have responded to the safeguarding of ICH, with a focus on shifting actors and power relations within interconnected communities.

Location: Hongtong County, Shanxi Province, China

Hongtong is a county in the prefecture-level city of Linfen, in the southwestern part of Shanxi Province, located in the northern part of China (figure 1).¹ Hongtong is the most populated county in the city of Linfen. It occupies an area of 1,563 square kilometers, and in 2010 its population was 733,421 people.² It has nine *zhen* (towns) and seven *xiang* (townships), including 463 *cunmin weiyuanhui* (villagers’ committees) that govern 902 *zirancun* (natural villages) (Zhang et al. 2005, 19–30). Hongtong is well known for the status it held as an immigration transfer center during the Hongwu (1368–98) and Yongle (1403–24) periods of the Ming dynasty, when the state organized mass migrations to other provinces to offset population loss due to continuous warfare. These forced migrations were a traumatic event for many people at that time, who remembered the homelands they



FIGURE 1

Location of Linfen in Shanxi, People's Republic of China. Public domain image. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_Shanxi_Linfen.svg.

were forced to abandon and passed this information to their descendants. Today, a popular folk song sung throughout China contains the lines, “Where is my old hometown? The big pagoda tree in Hongtong, Shanxi. What is the name of my ancestral place? The stork nest under the pagoda tree” (Zhang and Lin 1988, 1).³ The pagoda tree and the stork nest in Hongtong became important symbols of “roots” for many Chinese descendants from Hongtong living all over the world.

ICH Element: Hongtong Zouqin Xisu

Hongtong Zouqin Xisu, “the custom of visiting sacred relatives in Hongtong,” was listed in the national ICH list released by the State Council of China on June 7, 2008. The original full title of the tradition was “*jie gugu ying niangniang*” *zouqin huodong*, which literally means “receiving ‘aunties’ and welcoming ‘grandmas,’ visiting relatives



FIGURE 2

The statues of Ehuang and Nüying at their temple in Yangxie, Hongtong, Shanxi, May 27, 2013. Photograph by author.

activity.” “Aunties” and “grandmas” refer to Ehuang and Nüying, the two daughters of the prehistoric sage-king Yao, who were married off by Yao to his successor Shun more than four thousand years ago (see figure 2).

Yao and Shun are believed to have lived about 4,700 years ago, and their time has been established as the starting period of Chinese cultural history (Sima Qian 1959, 15–43). According to local oral tradition, Yangxie (pronounced as Yanghai), was formerly known as Zhoufu Village. Long ago, a goat gave birth to a kid with only one horn, whose name was *xie* (pronounced as *hai*). The horn of this sacred goat was said to have the power to distinguish between good and evil. After hearing the news, King Yao and his wife came to the village. When they arrived at the place where the unicorn had been born, King Yao’s wife, who was pregnant, gave birth to a daughter. The baby was brilliantly beautiful, and she could speak after only three days and was able to walk several days later. On seeing these magic events, King Yao was extremely surprised; deeming the village to be a sacred place, he renamed it Yangxie, which literally means “goat-unicorn”

in Chinese, and he called his newborn daughter Nüying, or “Maiden Bloom.” Then the whole family came to live in Yangxie.

When King Yao became old, he saw that his own sons were unworthy of being emperor, so he asked his ministers to propose a suitable successor. That is when he heard of Shun’s feats.⁴ But King Yao did not simply want to believe the tales about Shun, so he decided to test him. He gave a district to Shun to govern and married his two daughters Ehuang and Nüying to him. Yao believed that if Shun could govern the household well, he also should be able to govern the kingdom. In the end, King Yao was very impressed by all of Shun’s achievements, and he chose Shun to be his successor. After Shun died on his expedition to the south, Ehuang and Nüying drowned themselves in the Xiang River and became goddesses.

Every year on the third day of the third lunar month, known as *San Yue San*, villagers in Yangxie, where the Temple of King Yao was located, carry Ehuang and Nüying’s *jialou*, or “storied palanquin,” to Lishan, where King Shun’s temple was located, to receive their two “aunties” and bring them back to visit the home of their parents in Yangxie. A large temple fair is held in Lishan on the third day of the third lunar month. On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth lunar month, which is believed to be King Yao’s birthday, a temple fair is held in the Temple of Yao in Yangxie. Villagers from Lishan escort their two “grandmas” back home to Lishan.

Marked by the boundary of the Fen River, people on the east side of the river call Ehuang and Nüying “aunties” as if they were the offspring of King Yao; people on the west side refer to Ehuang and Nüying as “grandmas” as if they were the offspring of King Shun. In particular, Yangxie residents call Ehuang and Nüying “aunties,” while people from Lishan, Wan’an, Xiqiaozhuang, and most other villages call them “grandmas.” In this way, the Fen River functions not only as a geographical marker but also as a cultural marker that differentiates generational statuses in the “sacred” family. This differentiation was explained to me by the influential local figure Li Xuezhi in Lishan in my first interview with him on April 18 (the second day of the third lunar month), 2007. Because of the prehistoric royal marriage, Yangxie people and Lishan people call each other *qinqi* (relatives), and their relationships are interpreted as *shengqin* or *shenqin*, “sacred relatives.” Li furthermore explained that people from Yangxie and Lishan were banned from marrying each other because it would be regarded as incest.

During each of these festivals, the procession usually passes through more than twenty villages, and in each one local residents burn incense, provide free tea and snacks to participants, kowtow toward Ehuang and Nüying's jialou, and ask for blessings. In large villages people also play drums and gongs, competing with the players from Yangxie or Lishan performing in the processions. In some villages free lunch and afternoon meals are provided for participants in the processions. The residents of Lishan and Wan'an also accommodate Yangxie people for one night on the third day of the third lunar month, and Yangxie participants host their Lishan and Wan'an "relatives" for one night during the celebrations of King Yao's birthday.

Local villagers explained to me that they have held these activities for more than four thousand years, even though the Shun Temple in Lishan was destroyed during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), the Yao Temple in Yangxie was dismantled during the War of Liberation (1947–49), and the local tradition was banned during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) under Mao Zedong's rule. For many years, the Chinese Communist state had tried to eradicate cultural expressions of the old pre-Communist China, stigmatizing them as superstitious or "feudalistic," while it built a new, socialist culture (Chau 2006). Despite the harsh political conditions, however, the local celebrations continued without interruption. When the tradition was officially banned during the Cultural Revolution, several villagers from Yangxie practiced it secretly, and some were even sent to prison because of their continued participation. After Mao Zedong died in 1976, economic reforms began, accompanied by significant ideological relaxation. This local tradition was officially revived in the 1980s and 1990s. The current Yao Temple in Yangxie was rebuilt in 1989, the Shun Temple in Lishan was rebuilt in 1995, and the local temple fairs were revived in the 1990s.

In local tradition, *shè* 社 is the key folk group that sponsors local festivals and celebrations; it is created by devotees of a temple to connect people to serve the deities of the temple. As a "microgeographic unit," a *shè* could be identical to a natural village, or several small villages could combine to form a *shè*, or a single large village could include several groups of *shè* (Johnson 2009, 184). Each *shè* serves a particular god in a particular temple, and different *shè* sometimes rotate to serve the same god in the same temple. In the Lishan area, six villages combined to form three *shè*, and the large Wan'an village

includes two shè. Yangxie village used to include one shè, but the old shè has been divided into the Southern shè and the Northern shè to align with the division of the natural village that took place in 1963. In addition, Xiqiaozhuang village has formed one shè since the Temple of Ehuang and Nüying was built there in 1936 (Yan 2012). In Lishan, Yangxie, and Wan'an, different shè alternate to run annual ritual processions and temple affairs every year. The temple reconstruction associations were formed in the 1990s and 2000s during the public revival of local tradition. Their main purpose is to oversee the reconstruction of local temples and the management of incense donation money collected in the temples. Currently, there are three temple reconstruction associations in the temples of Ehuang and Nüying in Hongtong. In Lishan, a temple reconstruction association was officially approved in 1992. In Wan'an one was formed in 2003. In Yangxie one was founded in 2005. These temple reconstruction associations are based on the organization of shè and function as the general shè, overseeing the organization of annual ritual processions, temple fairs, and other temple affairs in general.

Current Status with Regard to UNESCO: No Status

Hongtong Zouqin Xisu is not currently inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List. However, it was inscribed on the Provincial List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Shanxi Province in 2006, and in 2008 it was included in the second list of items of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage. These lists themselves were inspired by UNESCO's 2003 ICH Convention. Although Hongtong Zouqin Xisu is not on the Representative List, its continued performance and current situation has been deeply influenced by the global Convention.

Hongtong Zouqin Xisu was studied by Chinese folklorist Chen Yongchao (2000) when he conducted his dissertation fieldwork in Hongtong in 2000. In 2006 Zhou Xibin, the Communist Party Secretary in Ganting Town, saw the term *intangible cultural heritage* on the ticket of *Naxi Guyue*, "Naxi Ancient Music," when he visited one of his friends during the Spring Festival.⁵ After finding out more about ICH and the lists, he decided that the local tradition in Yangxie (a part of Ganting Town) deserved to be listed both on the national and UNESCO ICH lists. Therefore, he mobilized local people to apply for its inclusion on the national list, and Wang Chunliang, the Director

of the Cultural Center in Hongtong County, became one of his core partners. In 2006, Zhou invited a variety of journalists and cultural celebrities to participate in the local tradition and reflect on it in essays collected and published in a volume he edited (Zhou 2006). With strong promotion by the local government, the local tradition was inscribed on the Provincial List of ICH in Shanxi Province in 2006.⁶

Application for ICH on the national level was a long process. Zhou Xibin managed to contact Liu Kuili, the former president of the Chinese Folklore Society, in addition to other folklorists, to help local people complete the application materials. Chen Yongchao, who by this time was a professor at Beijing University, volunteered to help, and he took his students (me among them) to record the tradition during local festivals and temple fairs in 2007. Collaborating with folklorists, the Hongtong Center for the Safeguarding of ICH, founded by the Hongtong Cultural Center in 2006, represented the local government in the submission of the ICH application to the Ministry of Culture, which oversees the safeguarding of ICH in China. The application was submitted on September 15, 2007 (Wang 2009).

Although the application was approved by the national evaluation committee, Hongtong Zouqin Xisu disappeared from the tentative list of national ICH in 2008. No one knew for sure what had happened, but according to rumor the application was rejected by a senior official in the Ministry of Culture who came from Shanxi and did not want to promote too many traditions from his home province. After receiving the bad news, Hongtong officials went to Beijing and collaborated with folklorists to argue vociferously for its inclusion on the basis that it is a long, nearly uninterrupted tradition. Finally, on June 7, 2008, Hongtong Zouqin Xisu was inscribed on the second national ICH name list.

At this point Zhou Xibin, the initiator of the whole project, was eager to further promote the local tradition by nominating it for UNESCO's ICH Representative List. However, he was soon appointed deputy head of Hongtong County, and he subsequently left his town-level position. This dream of Hongtong Zouqin Xisu being inscribed on the UNESCO list became the ultimate goal for a few local intellectuals in Yangxie who had actively participated in the ICH application; whenever outside scholars visit to conduct research there, they convey this dream to them in hopes of support. When I conducted my fieldwork in Yangxie in 2012 and 2013, two asked me to assist them to

achieve this goal, but no one has yet put forth the effort and Hongtong Zouqin Xisu has yet to be nominated for the UNESCO list.

On-the-Ground Perspectives: A New Element in Local Conflicts

During my fieldwork in Hongtong, I interviewed many local people. When asked if they knew what ICH (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan* 非物质文化遗产 in Chinese) and UNESCO were, most could not answer my questions. Only a few local officials and intellectuals knew of ICH and they explained that this foreign term had entered local discourse in 2005 when people were mobilized to assist in the ICH application. Yan Zhenghong, who is a retired Communist Party secretary, a temple executor, and the archivist at the Old Temple of King Yao in Yangxie, interpreted ICH as “invisible history and legends” in distinction to “material objects.” When describing Hongtong Zouqin Xisu, Yan emphasized that contemporary people practiced it in reality, not in imagination, because it had been handed down for many generations. Yan regarded the local ICH as the region’s cultural treasure, which could stimulate local people to stay together “harmoniously.” Wang Wenhua, an old shè head in Yangxie, regarded ICH as the local tradition handed down for more than four thousand years, and “long history” (*niantouduo*) became a key phrase in local interpretations of ICH.⁷ However, for most ordinary people, ICH was a foreign term remote from their knowledge and discourse. They similarly had no knowledge of UNESCO and its relationship to ICH.

The discourse of ICH has intensified the preexisting gap between local officials and ordinary people in local contexts, and this gap is sometimes expressed ironically during public celebrations. In 2008, for example, Liu Kuili and Chen Yongchao led some graduate students to conduct follow-up fieldwork in Yangxie and sponsored a performance of local opera at the temple fair. The temple fair office invited the two folklorists to give a short talk on stage before the performance. Wang Chunliang, the director of the Hongtong Cultural Center and the director of the local ICH Protection Center, suddenly jumped on stage. He was quite drunk and began talking at great length. At one point, he said: “What is ICH? Do you know it? Not only do you not know what ICH is, but even your grandpa and grandma do not know.” An elderly woman sitting in the audience responded: “Your grandma is sitting here.” This woman was no relation to him, but she was ex-

pressing, with irony, the audience's dismissal of this cultural official's arrogant speech. For her, what ICH was did not matter; her concern was with the live performance of local opera. She wanted to stop the "silly" speech and proceed with the performance.

What I have concluded from my fieldwork is that knowledge of ICH and UNESCO is not significant in the daily lives of most ordinary people. Those who were mobilized to assist in the ICH application expected to receive a large amount of money from the central government to do whatever they wished within their local communities. However, many express that they have yet to receive any funds, even after the success of the ICH application on the national level. When I interviewed Wang Chunliang about the financial situation on August 2012, he explained that the Ministry of Culture sent money to the Culture Office at the provincial level, but this office could not figure out how to distribute the money it had received for a number of different ICH projects in the region. In the end, it decided to evenly distribute the high interest from the ICH funds (allocated by the state from 2009 to 2012) among all national ICH elements in Shanxi. Accordingly, approximately 430,000 yuan (about 70,000 US dollars) was assigned to the Hongtong Zouqin Xisu project in November 2012 and received by the Hongtong Center for the Safeguarding of ICH. This was problematic because the tradition is shared by different communities in Hongtong, and people from Yangxie, Lishan, and Wan'an have all played important roles in continuing the tradition. These communities are located in different towns, and none of them had enough power to establish the protection center, which was crucial for the ICH safeguarding project. Moreover, the ICH application had fueled local conflicts between the communities, and it was hard for them to reach any agreement. The Hongtong Center for the Safeguarding of ICH was thus authorized by the local government as the representative institution to protect Hongtong Zouqin Xisu. After receiving the money, however, the Center did not distribute it to local temple reconstruction associations for rebuilding temples, which was what most local people had hoped for; instead, Director Wang Chunliang planned to build a living museum for Hongtong Zouqin Xisu. Wang's decision has disappointed local people, who are still trying to get the money back for temple affairs. The issue has yet to be settled.

The local conflicts among Yangxie, Lishan, and Wan'an did not originate during the ICH application but they were exacerbated in the process. On the second day of the third lunar month, the villagers of

Yangxie carry the “storied palanquin” of two “aunties” in a procession accompanied by traditional music of drums and gongs. As they make their way toward Lishan, they pass through several other villages. After arriving at Lishan, they stay for one night. On the next day, the third day of the third lunar month, after receiving the two “aunties” from their temple in Lishan, Yangxie villagers return home again passing through several villages and staying one night in Wan’an. Traditionally, the events are primarily held in Yangxie and Lishan, while Wan’an is just “a way station for resting horses and eating meals” (*xiema liangdian*). However, Wan’an residents believe that another temporary palace of Shun is located there because one of his wives used to live in Wan’an in order to take care of Shun’s parents. Residents do not consider Wan’an as only a resting place for the procession, but think it should have at least the same status as Lishan in the local tradition.

Villagers from Yangxie and Lishan have their own interpretations of why Wan’an is a stopping place: according to them, a long time ago, due to natural disaster, villagers from Yangxie became very exhausted after welcoming their “aunties” from Lishan. They encountered a rich man in Wan’an who invited them to have dinner and stay in his house for the night. The next year he made a fortune, which he attributed to having been blessed by the two goddesses. As a result, more people from Wan’an began to participate in the local tradition. This explanation has been widely accepted in the area. Although residents of Wan’an have enough economic power to build a magnificent temple, they do not have enough political and cultural power to argue for their status. In 2007, when Yangxie and Lishan collaborated to apply for the national ICH listing, Wan’an was totally excluded.

This exclusion is one episode in a longstanding feud between villagers in Wan’an with villagers in Yangxie. Yan Zhenghong provided some history on this feud. In 1991 Yan led Yangxie temple executors, in coordination with temple executors from other places, to change the festival date from the twenty-eighth day of the fourth lunar month to ten days earlier. The participating villages then suffered an ice storm, which many local people interpreted as miraculous retribution from the deities for changing the date. Residents of Wan’an had not wanted to change the date; they also claimed that they had not received the official notification nor had the name of their village been listed in the notification. Additionally, Yan had been in charge of coordinating many receptions for official and unofficial visitors when the local

tradition was publicly revived in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1993, a film team came to make a documentary about the local tradition. They shot lots of footage in Yangxie and Lishan, but they did not even go to Wan'an. People from Wan'an did not believe that this avoidance of their community was the choice of the film team; rather they thought that it was due to Yan's arrangements.

In order to solve the long-existing conflicts, local ritual specialists, shè executors, and temple reconstruction association leaders met on September 9, 2007; the meeting was chaired by Yang Biyun, a local woman in charge of the Yangxie and Lishan temple reconstruction associations. Most participants expressed that they should distinguish the goddesses' affairs from human beings' affairs, and they proceeded to hold a ritual to address the conflict. All the important ritual specialists in the area attended the meeting, and some of them performed the ritual, which enabled them to speak for the two goddesses. They said that it was the two goddesses' sacred order that Wan'an was merely *xiema liangdian*, a place for resting horses and eating meals. Wan'an temple heads had to obey the order.

In short, through the meeting described above, local communities made use of sacred rituals and supernatural powers to solve conflicts that were exaggerated by the ICH recognition. Although Wan'an tried to promote its cultural status within the local tradition, reconstructing its own discourse, people still had to respect the existing social interaction between different communities. Local belief systems were invoked in order to "define" the tradition. In other words, ICH became a subject of conflict and dispute that was eventually resolved by the belief in the very tenets that made up the ICH. The disputes may have been exacerbated by outside issues, but the solution was ultimately local.

Discussion: Shifting Actors and Power Relations

In the process of heritage making, global, regional, national, and local actors interact and compete with each other, which can cause a series of transformations that disempower old owners and users. This dynamic is clearly shown in the edited volume *World Heritage Angkor and Beyond: Circumstances and Implications of UNESCO Listings in Cambodia* (Hauser-Schäublin 2012), in which an interdisciplinary group of scholars illustrate the hierarchical relationships and problematic tensions among local peoples, new heritage owners, and international

tourism businesses as well as their corresponding practices and goals in Angkor in Cambodia. The contributors to this volume demonstrate how the local population is put at the bottom of this complex of power relationships and how the situation deepens already existing inequalities.

My case study reveals a similar process: attempts at safeguarding ICH in Hongtong County have caused a series of transformations that disempower local communities and people. The town-level local government played a crucial role in promoting local tradition as an element of national ICH, and local people were mobilized to fight for the goal. They expected to receive a large amount of money from the state after the heritage status was approved. However, so far they have received nothing, despite the fact that it cost them a great deal to achieve the ICH status: the local temple reconstruction association in Yangxie supported the ICH application and paid partial costs of 420,000 yuan (about 68,404 US dollars).⁸ What is worse, in the process of ICH application and protection, the power struggles between the local government and the temple reconstruction associations that oversaw reconstruction and other temple affairs have been exacerbated in public. As mentioned above, the Hongtong Center for the Safeguarding of ICH represented itself to the local people as an institute to protect local heritage, and it obtained absolute power to manage the money sent from the state. The Yangxie temple reconstruction association did not have any power to get the money and manage it at its discretion. At the end of 2012, the temple heads went to talk with Wang Chunliang, and Wang responded: "We managed protection, we also managed transmission of tradition, and it was none of your business" (*Baohu shi women, chuancheng ye shi women, bu ai ni men de shi*). Shao Caiwang, the head of the Yangxie temple reconstruction association, told me this story when I interviewed him on May 1, 2013; he and other temple heads tried to ask for help from Zhou Xibin to solve the problem. Shao Caiwang died suddenly in the Temple of Yao in Yangxie on February 19, 2015, during the Chinese Lunar New Year. As the new head has not been decided yet, negotiations about the money situation are still in progress.

It is ironic that the local tradition was "protected" and transmitted primarily by the newly established Hongtong Center for the Safeguarding of ICH instead of by members of the communities who have long practiced it. Of course, the conundrum here is that the Center

has not historically contributed to the tradition, but it is now charged with safeguarding it; in contrast, the shè and temple reconstruction associations that have maintained the tradition have no voice in the safeguarding process. In 2006, the Center coordinated a research team to conduct fieldwork and collect data along the procession of local parades and finish the drafts of ICH application materials for the national list (Wang 2009). The Yangxie temple reconstruction association paid all costs and hosted the Center staff when they came to Yangxie during the following years. Moreover, the temple reconstruction association is a key folk institution that is pivotal in producing and reproducing temple fairs and festivals; its members are volunteers from local communities who are devoted to continuing local tradition. Different local state agents interacted with the temple reconstruction association during the ICH project, and the latter paid the bills in the process. However, the heritage-making process has not empowered this folk institution to protect local tradition with and for local people; it has instead disempowered temple reconstruction associations and put local communities at the bottom of the power relationship, exaggerating already existing inequalities. The ICH project thus became a means for the local ICH center to exploit the local population and harvest the profits from the state. The process of local disempowerment described above helped to shape some fundamental precepts of the “heritage regime” (Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2012).

In the “Comparative Assessment” to the volume *Heritage Regimes and the State*, Chiara De Cesari (2012) points out the “ambiguous” and “conflicted” relationship between many local civil society organizations dedicated to heritage preservation and the local UNESCO or ICH office, which may be viewed as allied to local authorities. De Cesari states that UNESCO frequently ends up reinforcing the power and reach of the nation-state and its bureaucracy, which is contradictory to its own principle of involving local communities and “grassroots” in heritage making—particularly in the 2003 ICH Convention. Contrary to UNESCO’s goal of establishing a common heritage for humanity, the process of heritage making frequently gives rise to numerous tensions and conflicts (De Cesari 2012). My research is critical because it is a study of local and regional and national conflicts regarding a “pre-UNESCO” stage of ICH discourse. The conflicts I am observing between the people on the ground are conflicts that are caused by UNESCO despite the fact that this ICH has not even been nominated

for the UNESCO list. In other words, even though the ICH in question has not been nominated for the UNESCO list, the UNESCO Convention itself set off a chain of events and national lists that ultimately had a profound effect on the communities involved.

In the process of protecting ICH on the ground, the alliance between discourse, practice, and power has not come to an end but has reappeared in a new mask. My question is not simply about who owns tradition and heritage, or how it is conceived locally. From a practical dimension, I am interested in how tradition and heritage can be transmitted and promoted respectfully with the active participation of local communities. With regard to the question of respect, Michael F. Brown (2003, 10) suggests that we should not ask “who owns native culture?” but “how can we promote respectful treatment of native cultures and indigenous forms of self-expression” within our everyday lives? All of us, native and nonnative alike, have a stake in decisions about the control and transmission of tradition and heritage, for those decisions will determine the future health of our natural and cultural world.

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Notes

1. Linfen is located in the southwestern part of Shanxi, on the lower reaches of the Fen River, bounded by Changzhi and Jincheng to the east, the Yellow River to the west, Jinzhong and Lüliang to the north, and Yuncheng to the south.

2. These numbers are drawn from the Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China, conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China (<http://old.lfxww.com/xinwen/bsxw/2011/7/88584.shtml>).

3. *Wen wo laojia zai he chu, shanxi hongtong da huaishu. Zuxian guju jiao shenme, dahuai shu xia laoguanwo.*

4. Shun was a legendary leader of ancient China, regarded by Sima Qian, a Chinese historian of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), as one of the Five Emperors. Yao and Shun's stories were canonized by Sima Qian in the first chapter of his *Shiji*. Both Yao and Shun have been represented in Chinese history as morally perfect sage-kings. Yao's benevolence and diligence and Shun's filial piety and modesty were highly extolled by Confucian philosophers in later centuries and served as a model for Chinese kings and emperors.

5. *Naxi guyue* is the traditional music of the Naxi ethnic group in southwestern China. It is a kind of ritual music intertwined with local religions, and has been represented as a “living fossil” of traditional Chinese music (Rees 2000, 4–5).

6. I interviewed Zhou Xibin on August 5, 2012, concerning the detailed process of the ICH application.

7. I interviewed Wang Wenhua on April 16, 2013, and Yan Zhenghong on April 20, 2013.

8. The total costs for ICH application are unknown. From 2006 to 2008, the local government invested a lot of money to host cultural celebrities, scholars, journalists, and other visitors coming to experience the local tradition in Hongtong. The ICH application centered on Yangxie, and the temple association in Yangxie paid almost all the costs for research, application materials, and accommodation fees.

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